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**Unity out of Adversity: Non-Profit Organizations'
Collaborative Strategies to Serve Immigrants in Bay Area
Suburbs**

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In recent years, the geography of poverty has significantly shifted from an urban to a suburban setting, and the populations living in the poorer suburbs are increasingly racially diverse, including many who are first generation immigrants. However, within suburban communities, non-profit organizations (NPOs) combatting poverty are working from an infrastructure that is less robust than that of large cities. The weaker NPO infrastructure in suburbs is particularly troubling given that NPOs are now largely responsible for the delivery of social services, including immigration legal aid for a growing foreign-born population. The combination of these trends raises the questions: *How does funding and staff capacity differ across urban and suburban legal aid NPOs? How do differences in social service infrastructure influence the strategies legal aid NPOs use to accomplish their mission?* I examine this question through interviews with staff at legal aid NPOs and multi-service NPOs in the socio-economically and racially diverse city of Oakland and in Eastern Contra Costa County – a county where poverty rates have increased, particularly in the east suburbs, and where the immigrant population has significantly grown. I find that while a smaller scale of social service infrastructure coincides with lower resources in the suburbs, the under-resourced atmosphere leads to more cohesiveness among a broader set of organizations and institutions. This cohesiveness serves two goals: first, it provides a set of reliable, trusted institutions that low-income immigrants can feel comfortable accessing, despite their legal status. Second, it provides a base from which to organize for community development by and for an increasingly diverse population.

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INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the 1990s, the geography of poverty in the United States has significantly shifted from an urban to a suburban setting, and the populations living in the poorer suburbs are increasingly racially diverse, including many residents who are first generation immigrants (Kneebone and Berube 2013; Suro, Wilson, and Singer 2011; Murphy 2007). Non-profit organizations (NPOs) deliver the majority of direct social services to individuals (Marwell 2004). NPOs play a particularly important role for immigrants who may face legal barriers when attempting to access public benefits (i.e. cash welfare, Section 8 housing, and financial aid for public education) (Fix 2009; Yoshikawa 2011). For undocumented immigrants, legal aid NPOs provide arguably one of the most important anti-poverty services by working to reduce legal barriers to employment and/or the risk of deportation or family separation. Despite their important role, suburban legal aid NPOs operate within an infrastructure that is not as well developed to combat poverty when compared to long-established NPOs in larger cities (Reckhow and Weir 2012). The rise in suburban poverty levels combined with a limited NPO infrastructure raises the questions: *How do funding and capacity differ across urban and suburban legal aid NPOs? How do differences in social service infrastructure influence the strategies legal aid NPOs use to accomplish their mission?*

I examine these questions through interviews with staff at legal aid and other NPOs in the Bay Area of California, particularly in the socio-economically and racially diverse city of Oakland and in eastern Contra Costa County – a region where poverty rates have increased, particularly in the suburbs, and where the immigrant population has significantly grown. I find that while there are similarities across legal aid NPOs in both areas, suburban providers face staffing challenges while urban providers describe no staff shortage. Partially as a result of limited resources and smaller networks, suburban legal aid NPOs rely extensively on broad collaboration with other suburban multi-service NPOs, churches, schools, and government officials to accomplish their mission. Urban

legal aid NPOs, on the other hand, deal with more specialized legal cases, work extensively on cross-referrals with other urban legal aid NPOs, and have limited governmental ties. One unexpected finding of this research is that gaps in social service infrastructure experienced in the suburbs may lead to greater collaboration between a broader set of organizations and institutions, resulting in more cohesive service provision for immigrants when compared with urban NPOs. The broad collaboration of NPOs in the suburbs has implications for low-income immigrant populations with varying legal statuses as well, as the presence of collaborative NPOs facilitates immigrants' ability to locate safe spaces in which to seek resources. Suburban NPOs can use this as a strength as they work to build capacity in their region along with other actors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Why NPOs Matter

Since the 1970s, the federal government has moved towards privatization and devolution with regard to community development and social services, also known as the *privatization of the welfare state* (Marwell 2004; Allard 2008). This public to private shift has meant that the non-profit sector has become ever more responsible for providing services to low-income populations. Consequently, the factors driving non-profit growth become more place-dependent. If the non-profit sector is able to garner private funders for its work and build capacities in areas of need, then it can successfully perform its mission. If non-profit sector staff have less success in finding appropriate funders or are less able to build capacity, then places with limited resources have limited support for low-income populations (Allard 2008). Indeed, NPOs located in suburbs generally have more trouble procuring funds because they are not seen as traditional places of poverty (Murphy 2010). At the same time, NPOs play a key role in providing social and material support for first generation immigrants – many of whom are now migrating to suburbs (Singer, Hardwick, and Brettell 2008).

The Role of NPOs for Immigrants

Unlike government agencies, NPOs do not require proof of legal status to provide services, and client information does not have to be shared with government agencies. This makes them particularly important resource providers for immigrants, particularly undocumented individuals (Okamoto, Feldman, and Gast 2014). Beyond providing services, non-profits serve as “resource brokers for the poor” (Small 2009) by providing referrals to other organizations, social capital in the form of personal ties or even friendships with other clients or staff at organizations, or information about schools or jobs that create opportunities for upward mobility. Because immigrants have limited access to public benefits, and they may have other barriers limiting their mobility and financial stability (e.g. limited English skills or temporary or undocumented legal status), non-profits play a crucial role in their material and social well-being (Okamoto, Feldman and Gast 2014).

Demographers and sociologists have shown that the number of non-profit institutions in suburbs is not proportional to the low-income population that resides there, especially when compared to urban spheres (Allard 2008; Kneebone and Berube 2013). Moreover, the spatial mismatch between service providers and low-income immigrant populations is much higher in the suburbs than in urban centers (De Graauw, Gleeson, and Bloemraad 2013; Joassart-Marcelli 2013; Panchok-Berry, Rivas, and Murphy 2013). Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad (2008) indicate how several place factors, such as the size of a city, the size of different immigrant populations, and the jurisdictions of different places influence the political weight and visibility of immigrant organizations. The political weight and visibility of immigrant organizations are important, but they do not fully explain what contributes to organizations’ access to resources and how they develop them in a financially austere context. Examining the strategies that NPOs use to navigate limited resources and how this varies by geographical/spatial context is crucial for sociologists, urban planners, and geographers who seek to understand the socio-political implications of differential

funding structures and collaborations in a region. These strategies are particularly timely to study in an era of growing regional inequality (Schafran 2012).

In this paper, I focus specifically on legal aid providers, an important segment of NPOs that work with immigrant populations and especially Latino/a immigrants – the largest immigrant population in the United States (Krogstad and Passel 2014). Legal aid NPOs provide a wide variety of services including assistance with processing family reunification petitions and U-visas for victims of crime in the United States, and in some cases deportation defense, among a larger set of critical services. In recent times, they have had to respond to a surge in demand for services due to both the passage of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), passed in June 2012, and the unaccompanied minors surge in 2014. Staff at legal aid NPOs help process applications for people who qualify for DACA and provide consultation around this federal law; they also represent unaccompanied minors and help them apply for asylum status.¹ With the upcoming Supreme Court decision on Deferred Action for Parents of Americans, or DAPA, lawyers may have to increase their workload to grant deferred status for over 3.6 million individuals – including 367,000 individuals in California alone (Migration Policy Institute 2015).

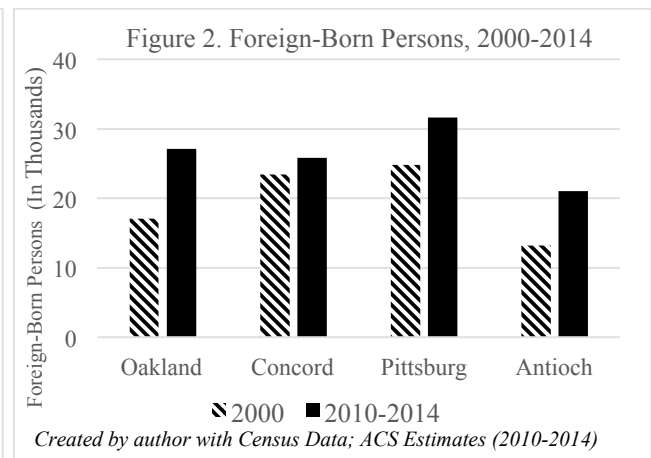
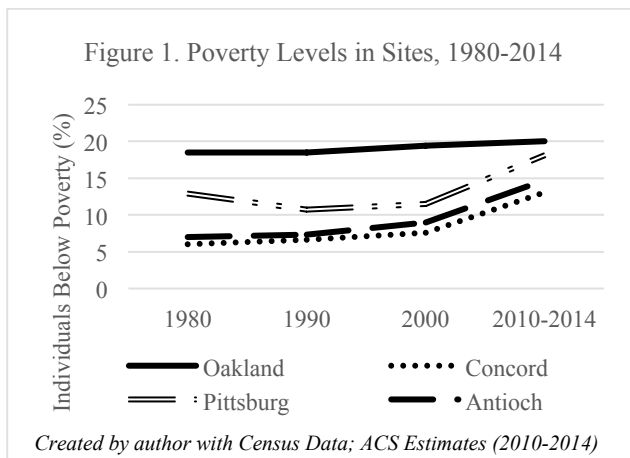
While there has been quantitative research on the limited funding infrastructure for NPOs and legal aid NPOs in particular (Albiston and Nielsen 2014), there is little research on the qualitative strategies that NPOs use to stay afloat and successfully perform their mission. As I discuss below, there are significant differences in the strategies legal aid NPOs use to perform their mission. These strategies respond to the diverse socio-political contexts within which these organizations are working. While urban legal aid NPOs have developed specialized services and collaborate with other urban legal aid NPOs to fill in any gaps resulting from this specialization, suburban legal aid NPOs

¹ According to Bachmeier and Van Hook (2015), 144,000 people are immediately eligible for the DACA program in California. Relatedly, there were over 5,000 unaccompanied minor court cases in the San Francisco Immigration Court in 2014 and 2015 combined (Barrio and Galvao 2015).

have forged a broader set of collaborations with suburban non-legal aid NPOs and government actors to accomplish their mission.

SETTING AND SITE SELECTION

Northern California’s Bay Area, which is reputed to be a generally progressive, pro-immigrant region, has recently experienced dramatic demographic changes in the form of rising levels of poverty and a growing immigrant population in the suburbs.² The substantial and growing numbers of immigrants in suburbs provide an optimal comparison case to a primary urban center because both places have a significant immigrant population and have reached similar poverty levels. The convergence in poverty levels and growth in foreign-born populations is illustrated in the figures below.



² Although a rise in poverty levels and ethnic diversity is simultaneously occurring in suburbs, it is key not to conflate racial/ethnic minorities with low-income individuals. Some low-income residents may be white in-movers, or long-term residents, and middle-class Blacks (Pattillo 1999), Latinos (Vallejo 2012), and Asians (Li 2009) are increasingly moving to the suburbs.

Descriptive Data on Cities and Suburbs

My research focuses on NPOs located in Oakland, California (in Alameda County), and three suburbs in eastern Contra Costa County – Concord, Pittsburg, and Antioch.³ (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3. Map of Study Sites



Oakland is an urban center. According to 2009-2013 ACS estimates, it is almost twice as dense as Pittsburg and Antioch, it is racially heterogeneous, and about 27% of the population is foreign born and 15% are non-U.S. citizens. According to the Guidestar Non-profit Database, Oakland hosts nearly 600 NPOs that provide human and/or health services, with 35 specifically serving immigrant populations. This translates into about 10 social service organizations per square mile, and about one organization per 180 low-income individuals in Oakland.

Because I am comparing Oakland to three main suburbs in eastern Contra Costa County, I combine data for Concord, Pittsburg, and Antioch. All three suburbs have significant percentages of foreign born population (an average of 25.8% compared to 27% in Oakland), and of those who are foreign-born, over half are non-U.S. citizens. According to the Guidestar Non-profit Database, the cities of Concord, Pittsburg, and Antioch together host about 150 NPOs that provide human and/or health services, with five specifically serving immigrant populations. This translates into about two

³ Concord is considered to be part of central Contra Costa by most academics and city planners, but for the purposes of this paper, I label it as part of eastern Contra Costa due to its close relationship and proximity to the far eastern suburbs of Pittsburg and Antioch.

social service organizations per square mile, and about one organization per 296 low-income individuals in eastern Contra Costa County. A majority of social service NPOs are located in Concord. Concord differs from Pittsburg and Antioch because it is slightly larger in size and has a longer history of poverty and immigration. In my larger project I analyze these differences, but in the interviews I conducted for this paper, the responses from staff in Concord, Pittsburg and Antioch were quite similar, with one exception that I discuss in the findings, so I have grouped them together as part of one suburban region.

Table 1: Summary Statistics

	Oakland	Concord/Pittsburg/Antioch
Population, 2014 estimate	413,775	304,592
Persons per square mile, 2010	7004	3760
<i>Immigrant Population</i>		
Foreign born persons, percent, 2009-2013	27.0%	25.8%
Foreign born persons, number, 2009-2013	111,719	76,196
Non-U.S. Citizens, percent 2009-2013 ACS	15.4%	13.7%
Non-U.S. Citizens, number 2009-2013 ACS	63,721	40,299
<i>Non-Profit Organizations</i>		
Human Service	424	127
Health Services	130	20
Immigrant/Latino Organizations	35	5
Ratio of NPOs to Low-Income Individuals	1:180	1:296

Source: U.S. 2010 Census, 2009-2013, 2014 ACS Estimates, and Guidestar 2015

METHODS

For this study, which is part of a larger comparative project on low-income immigrants' access to resources in suburban and urban areas, I interviewed eight non-profit directors, attorneys, and program coordinators at each of the seven NPOs that provide legal aid to low-income immigrant communities in Oakland and Eastern Contra Costa County.⁴ I also interviewed four program

⁴ I interviewed all the immigration legal aid NPOs in eastern Contra Costa County, and I interviewed all but one in Oakland – the Immigration Center for Women and Children, which is a more specialized legal service NPO.

coordinators from four other suburban multi-service NPOs that work with low-income Latino/a immigrants in Contra Costa County after they were referred to me by suburban legal aid providers who were working extensively with these organizations. Legal aid providers at the suburban NPOs offered services on a wide range of cases. Common legal cases included: handling U-visas (a visa for four years for victims and informants of domestic criminal activity),⁵ assisting clients to apply for naturalization, helping clients petition for family members to come to the U.S., assisting DACA eligible individuals to process their application for temporary residency, and representing unaccompanied minors in immigration court. Only two NPOs in Oakland provided deportation defense for the entire East Bay area. The non-legal aid suburban NPOs offered a variety of services including food assistance, English and computer classes, childcare, and activities on nutrition and exercise. Two legal aid NPOs were different branches of the same organization, The International Institute of the Bay Area (IIBA); an urban branch was located in the city center of Oakland, and a suburban branch was located in the suburb of Antioch. The organizations I interviewed and the services they offer are shown in Table 2 below.

⁵ <http://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/victims-human-trafficking-other-crimes/victims-criminal-activity-u-nonimmigrant-status/victims-criminal-activity-u-nonimmigrant-status>

Table 2: Organizational Information

Urban Legal Aid NPOS	Location	Services Offered
Centro Legal de la Raza	Oakland	Wide Range of Legal Services, Deportation Defense, and Advocacy
East Bay Community Law Center	Oakland	Legal Services for Low-income Individuals
International Institute of the Bay Area, IIBA	Oakland	Immigration Legal Services and Advocacy Deportation, Unaccompanied Minor, and
Social Justice Collaborative	Oakland	Immigration Services & Criminal Defense
Suburban Legal Aid NPOs Catholic Charities of the East Bay (CCEB)	Concord	Refugee Resettlement & Immigration Legal Services
International Institute of the Bay Area (IIBA)	Antioch Walnut Creek**	Immigration Legal Services and Advocacy Refugee Resettlement Programs & Immigration Legal Services
Naturalization Initiative* Suburban General NPO Referrals		
Monument Crisis	Concord	Food assistance, variety of classes, youth programs
Monument Impact	Concord	Youth programs, day labor center, community organizing
First 5	Concord	Parenting Classes, Programs for Children 1-5, Organizing
La Clinica de la Raza	Pittsburg	Health classes and health advocacy

*Source: Interview Data, *Naturalization Initiative is a pseudonym for the organization. **Walnut Creek is a wealthier suburb in Contra Costa County, but most of the clients it serves reside in Eastern Contra Costa County.*

My interview questions focused on the organization’s history, the demography of their clientele, and the processes of obtaining and retaining funding. I also asked questions about governmental ties and organizational partners to get a sense of their visibility and range of collaborative efforts. All but one of my interviews was tape-recorded, and each lasted from half-an-hour to an hour. I conducted all interviews at the organizations, and I provided respondents with a copy of my interview questions before I interviewed them, so they could adequately prepare. I analyzed the interview data using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti with several deductive themes (e.g. funding difficulty, organizational ties, and challenges) and themes that arose

inductively from the data (e.g., effect of funder on services, and cooperation with police departments). After writing an initial draft of my paper, I shared it with my interviewees with a request for feedback to ensure an accurate representation of their organizations and of what was happening on the ground. After receiving their comments, I revised the paper to reflect new developments and to create a more nuanced set of findings and arguments.

FINDINGS

While all staff interviewed at urban and suburban legal NPOs described severe challenges in finding funding for their work, three key differences arose between suburban and urban legal aid NPOs with regard to staff capacity, non-legal aid collaboration strategies, and governmental ties. Namely, suburban legal aid NPOs were under-staffed, enjoyed broad collaboration with non-legal aid NPOs, and had closer ties with local government officials than urban legal aid NPOs who engaged in more specialized service delivery and made frequent cross-referrals to other legal aid NPOs in Oakland.

Staff Capacity

Urban NPOs: Adequately Staffed but Stretched Thin

Regardless of the place that non-profit providers were working in, their funding was precarious and they expressed difficulty meeting the needs of the immigrant communities they served. Despite this commonality, urban NPOs had teams of at least ten staff and volunteers working on immigration cases and did not mention a staff shortage at their organizations, while suburban NPOs were severely understaffed and had only about two or three staff and no volunteers to provide legal aid and/or translation help. The following description offered by a staff attorney at the East Bay Community Law Center, an urban legal aid NPO, is emblematic of what legal aid providers in Oakland said about their staff capacity: “So, we’ll be five attorneys [working with immigration

cases], so that's a lot... Next semester, I think we'll have eight law students, or more, probably like eight to ten." When I asked urban NPO providers about their broader goals over the next five years, none of them mentioned increasing the number of staff or volunteers. Instead, they focused on strategies for maintaining the funding needed to continue providing their organization's current level of service. This is not to imply that the urban NPO providers believed they were meeting the demand for their services; rather, their concern was about securing precarious funding to maintain their operations and pay their staffs. All the legal aid providers mentioned a surge of state and city funding to process DACA and DAPA applications, but these grants were limited to one or two years – funding beyond that year was uncertain and cause for concern.

Suburban NPOs: Understaffed and Stretched Thin

In contrast to urban NPOs, suburban NPO providers discussed the difficulties of procuring the needed staff at the organization. When I asked about the number of staff working at a legal aid branch in Concord, John⁶ (the program director of the immigration program) stated, "I can pretty much safely say that it's not enough. I mean just having even a full time attorney and a full time BIA rep [Board of Immigration Appeals Representative]⁷ here is not enough." Similarly, Pedro, an attorney who works with the International Institute of the Bay Area's branch in Antioch, states: "I think that we try to handle as much as we can, but our capacity is nowhere near as much as some of our other offices." Pedro was the sole attorney at this office – the only legal aid NPO in Antioch – and was in charge of procuring funding to expand the capacity of this branch. Differences in funding clearly contributed to the low numbers of staff in suburban branches with less funding compared to those in Oakland.

⁶ The names of all NPO staff are pseudonyms, but the names of politicians and organizations are real, except for Naturalization Initiative, which is a pseudonym for one NPO that requested anonymity.

⁷ A Board of Immigration Appeals accredited representative is a non-attorney who has the capacity to represent clients before the Board of Immigration Appeals, the Department of Homeland Security, or both.

Another substantial reason for why volunteers and attorneys were hard to come by in the suburbs was due to the more isolated location of NPOs from universities or law schools, such as the University of California, Berkeley. John, who supervises immigration legal aid programs in Oakland, Richmond, and Concord, talked about how difficult it was to recruit staff in Concord: “It took us a while to find an attorney, even for the temporary position. It’s very different; it’s not like Oakland... We did not have problems filling those positions, to ask someone to come all the way out here... it is far away from people... we’re not attracting the talent coming from wherever they’re living.” In the same interview, John described how volunteers were easy to recruit in more urban areas like Oakland, which resulted in the following exchange with a Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) representative, Judy, and John, her supervisor in Concord:

John: I always feel bad because I always say to Judy we have two new interns working in Oakland, or we have two new interns working in Richmond.

Judy: What about Concord?

John: [We] need to start finding ways, transportation stipends or something because --

Judy: -- It’s very hard for them to come over here.

This difference in staffing levels creates stress for people working at this organization, and it also limits the amount of services they can provide. One suburban legal aid organization had to schedule appointments two weeks in advance (compared to a week in advance for urban branches), and another had to schedule consultations three months in advance due to limited staff. Pedro described the pressure he is under due to limited staffing at a suburban legal aid organization recently established in Antioch:

I’m program director for this office and staff attorney [...] because I’m the only one that can sign off on [immigration] applications [...] I definitely don’t have time to do grant and fund development, so that falls more on my supervisor [...], but it’s tough because their focus is not just funding for Antioch but the whole organization, um, so I think we’ve come to the realization that Antioch needs its specific funding as well, so I think that’s what we’re working on now.

Similarly, another organization in the suburb of Walnut Creek only had one attorney providing legal services. This attorney, however, could only work around 30 hours according to her contract;

the other 10 hours went to her legal assistant. She wished she had more staff capacity to do her work, but this was not possible without the proper funding, which was hard to come by. Two private foundations largely funded the organization, and one foundation's funding was not guaranteed for the following year, which created more stress for this NPO.

There are significant differences in capacity in the two settings; the four urban legal aid NPOs in this study had a combined total of forty eight staff and volunteers compared to only six staff and no volunteers devoted to legal services at the three suburban legal aid NPOs. The relatively small staffs of suburban legal aid NPOs limited the number of cases they could handle and extended the waiting time for scheduling appointments and receiving legal aid. As mentioned earlier, Oakland has nearly 64,000 non-U.S. citizens, and eastern Contra Costa has about 40,000. Thus, while the population in need is about 50% higher in Oakland, the staff capacity is 450% higher, which then impacts the quality of the service that they can deliver. Having more staff and volunteers is helpful in processing more cases, and it can also increase the number of connections individuals may have to different organizations and or government entities, which can further aid the organization in accomplishing their mission, as I elaborate upon in a further section of this paper.

Cross-Referrals and Collaboration

Specialization Models in Urban NPOs

Given an under-resourced environment, urban legal aid non-profits spoke of cross-referring to other organizations to ensure clients were able to receive specialized services as quickly as possible. Because many legal aid providers had been working in the area for many years, they had established an informal system of referrals that consequently led to different organizations informally specializing in particular legal services. Most organizations offered a wide range of general legal immigration aid, but some specialized more in helping women, others focused on unaccompanied minors, and a couple organizations represented individuals who were facing the threat of deportation.

When I asked an attorney at Centro Legal de la Raza in Oakland about whether they refer individuals to other attorneys or organizations, she replied, “Some organizations only do U-Visas, others only do affirmative petitions, some are part of our surge collaborative⁸, so we sort of divide amongst ourselves which cases we take.” Sylvia, another legal aid provider in Oakland, further elaborated upon this sentiment when I noted that staff from other legal aid NPOs mentioned the International Institute of the Bay Area as a reputable organization. She stated, “But, you know, in Oakland, we are not the only game in town...there are definitely other very good immigration legal service providers, and we are in collaboration with them as well. Each of the organizations has specific things that they’re doing, and we refer to each other.” Every urban non-profit legal aid provider described the cross-referral process as a way to divide labor and services to quickly and efficiently serve the immigrant population. Legal aid NPOs were also in communication with each other about the flow of different grants or particular cases that needed to be attended to in the community (e.g., unaccompanied minors or a surge of deportation cases). This more dynamic model of collaboration in the form of cross-referrals and knowledge sharing among legal aid NPOs contrasted with the strategies and framing adopted by suburban non-profit providers who approached collaboration as a survival mechanism in the face of isolation and hardship.

Collaboration as Survival in Suburban NPOs

In response to being underfunded and understaffed, providers from suburban legal aid NPOs built strong collaborative relationships with other NPOs as well as with churches and/or schools to assist with outreach efforts and linking clients to needed social services. These collaborations were particularly pronounced during moments of high demand, such as when DACA was implemented in 2012. Pedro, the Antioch attorney, explains, “I think that even though there’s not a lot of legal non-

⁸ The surge collaborative refers to the collaboration of legal aid agencies around the surge of unaccompanied minor cases in California during the summer of 2014.

profit organizations in the area, there are a lot of, more and more, each year, more non-profit organizations in general, community-based organizations, and that's good to see. We partner a lot with a lot of these organizations just to say that we're here; we do cross-referrals as well." The other community based organizations offer a wide range of services for low-income individuals, including many Spanish-speaking immigrants; services range from youth programs, food assistance, community organizing, and English and computer classes. The program coordinators of community-based organizations I interviewed all mentioned referring their members and clients to nearby legal aid NPOs for immigration assistance. At two prominent community-based organizations (CBOs), lawyers from legal aid NPOs would come in and do consultations in the CBO's space. The importance of general NPO partnerships was reiterated by John, another legal aid provider in the suburbs: "[D]efinitely there's a lot of partnerships because I think we're all in the same boat. We're small offices, and as I said before, people are moving here, so the need is just continuing to grow." Lastly, Bertha, a staff member at Monument Impact, a prominent, multi-service and advocacy organization, described how a surge in demand for legal services with the implementation of DACA led to increased collaboration among NPOs that lasts to this day: "Right when DACA [passed] – I saw the relationship strengthen with all of these non-profits, with us to them...we started getting together to see how we could work together to make sure we could get the right information to the community." In other words, NPOs came together as trusted sources of information for the immigrant community, especially in the face of legal scammers in the wake of immigration reform. Community-based organizations, along with churches, made sure to refer people to the three legal aid NPOs in the eastern Contra Costa County area for DACA applications and information about DAPA. Informational workshops, or *charlas*, were held at churches or at NPO offices to inform people about the DACA/DAPA executive order and application process.

In the suburbs, collaborations cut across the legal aid sector to more general non-profit organizations, churches, and as I describe in the following section, local government actors. When asked about who Pedro refers people to and which organizations IIBA collaborates with, he said, “There’s First 5, there’s SparkPoint ... there’s STAND for domestic violence... And, there’s pretty big churches that we partner with... so on top of community organizations, we’re able to partner with churches, which we consider very important partners to get the word out.” Most of the collaboration is the form of outreach; for example, Pedro was able to make announcements in churches about their legal services or was given the opportunity to distribute brochures with information about other organizations that offer services to low-income individuals. Pedro also worked extensively with government representatives in the more agricultural community of Oakley and had close connections to the city manager who was part of an initiative to welcome a growing immigrant community in the city.

Lastly, the immigration attorney at an NPO in Walnut Creek described establishing collaborative ties across different sectors as crucial to her work. The NPO had only begun to offer services two years ago, so the immigration attorney was just getting involved in the general NPO sector in the area. In particular, the attorney was working on outreach to Spanish-speaking clients because she spoke the language. When I asked her about her outreach efforts, she responded, “Yeah, so the first year, I just tried to meet as many people as I could, to just go to meetings to meet different people, talk about my services, and then [I started partnering]. Now, it’s been a year partnered with Monument Impact, a day labor center in Concord... so that’s been great. I’ve also gone to Pittsburg. We used to have a staff member at the Pittsburg Senior Center, but he’s no longer here, so I’m kind of looking for a new spot in Pittsburg, so he introduced me to many people there.” With up and coming NPOs, collaboration is crucial for outreach regarding their services.

Government Ties

Lukewarm Governmental Relations in Urban NPOs

Even though NPOs are not allowed to officially lobby or work with government officials, they do have the right to take a policy position, talk to public officials about public policy matters, and promote their organization's visibility in a larger political sphere (De Graauw 2016). Moreover, a good relationship with government agencies, like human service agencies or law enforcement agencies, can make certain legal cases, like U-visas for victims of crime, easier to process. I wanted to get a sense of an organization's visibility and/or relationship with other government agencies, so I asked about government ties in my interviews with NPO staff. When I asked an immigration attorney at a legal aid NPO if any government official particularly supported their work, she initially had trouble understanding what I meant by this. I asked if, for example, any government official went to specific events or endorsed their organizations. She replied, "Hmm, I mean not necessarily so many specifics, in terms of like coming to specific things that we host, but I generally feel that [Congresswoman] Barbara Lee's office is pretty responsive in terms of immigrant issues. Responsive in sort of, has the right point of view about issues." Sylvia, an attorney at IIBA in Oakland, similarly stated, "[I]n Oakland and Fremont, I mean [government officials] know about us, but there is no active collaboration or communication [with them]. If something comes up, maybe, but I hardly ever..., for now. That may change...[there's] no particular reason or anything. It just hasn't happened." Centro Legal, a legal aid provider that focuses on advocacy, mentioned having the strong support of U.S. representative Barbara Lee and city council member Noel Gallo, but no other NPOs indicated a close connection or tie with a government official.

The relationship with government officials was expectedly more fraught for organizations like the Social Justice Collaborative in Oakland, which works on deportation and criminal defense cases

and directly contests orders decreed by law enforcement. When I asked the co-founder to describe any ties the organization has had with government officials, she responded:

Government? In terms of government, it's hard...Logistically, it's difficult if a person is unrepresented because they can't advocate [...] and it makes it difficult for this huge process to go forward when people are unrepresented, so I think that generally as a concept, people are happy that organizations like this exist in the government. But, that doesn't mean that [the government likes] what we're doing, or that [the government likes that] we're winning cases.

Non-profit organizations in urban areas with a more diverse set of actors working to advance varied interests have fewer opportunities for extensive collaboration with local officials on immigrant issues. As De Graauw (2016) explains, civic organizations in urban, progressive environments are all pressing to have their concerns addressed leading to a "hyper-pluralistic" political atmosphere and government officials who are spread thin by multiple interest groups advocating for different issues. It appeared that the close work with government officials is done only by specialized, advocacy organizations that exist within Oakland, such as Centro Legal. The other organizations were more focused on service delivery and did not explicitly have advocacy goals as part of their mission. In any case, legal aid NPOs in urban areas mentioned less direct interaction with government officials than legal aid organizations in the suburbs.

Stronger Government Ties in Suburban NPOs

When I posed a question on ties with government officials to suburban NPOs, interviewees were quick to point out their strong relationships with state and federal representatives, city managers, and city council members. In Antioch, government officials even attended the official building opening for the IIBA branch office and IIBA staff described the multiple ties they have with governmental officials and actors. For example, I asked Pedro about collaboration with government officials, and he replied:

One of the first people we met was [city hall member] Brian Montgomery in Oakley...Another person that comes to mind is Mary Rocha [a council member] for Antioch...she's been advocating for us, referring people to us, um, so she's been a strong

supporter of ours as well out here...different representatives – state and federal – will have their events where they want to promote learning or immigration, and they'll have us be at their table or come in and speak or do a workshop as well.

When asked a similar question, Judy, the BIA representative, and John, the BIA supervisor at a legal aid organization in Concord, responded:

Judy: We had a good relationship with the congressman George Miller as well as with [another local government official], [...] but they're no longer representing this area anymore, so I think we need to start building that connection with the new representatives.

John: And another group of entities that are very willing to work with us is law enforcement. So, the police, the sheriff, the district attorney's offices, and even public defenders' offices are willing to work. We have good relationships with most of them.

John and Judy also described their collaboration with schools and with DMV offices, which assisted with their community outreach. Walnut Creek's NPO had fewer ties with local politicians specifically, but was generally in touch with several county agencies, which proved to be key for organizing citizenship workshops. In sum, despite suburban NPOs' limited staff and resources, they actively seek and in many cases received the support of government officials to accomplish their mission.

Suburban Variation and Providing Safe Spaces for Low-income Immigrants

Immigrants with undocumented or temporary legal status face a wide-range of obstacles and negative consequences due to their legal status including marginalization and possible exploitation in the labor market (Gleeson 2012), limited public benefits (Fix 2009), and the potential of being separated from their families through deportation (Menjívar and Abrego 2012). Given these obstacles, it can be hard to know whom to trust or which organizations offer reliable information. Having legal aid NPOs cooperate with a broad range of institutions can increase the degree of trust that low-income immigrants, and particularly undocumented immigrants, have in institutions when seeking different forms of resources. In Concord, where several immigrant organizations are located, the police department has collaborated extensively with NPOs and schools to establish trust with the

low-income immigrant population. Two NPOs invite a representative from the Concord police department to come in once a week to talk to people who are victims of violence and may qualify for a U-visa. One non-legal aid NPO invites a bilingual representative from the Concord police department to meet with NPO clients twice a week to address concerns that clients have but are too hesitant to go the police department about (retrieving a car that has been towed, reporting crime, etc.). In fact, members of the police department regularly meet with parents of immigrant families in an elementary school in one low-income neighborhood, and parents are asked to share any concerns they may have about issues affecting their communities. Similarly, in Walnut Creek, an NPO staff member said the police department “bent over backwards” to help a victim of a crime apply for a U-visa.

There is some evidence, however, that the success of these NPO and police partnerships is uneven. While NPOs in Concord and Walnut Creek have very positive relations with the police department with regard to processing U-visas for victims of crime, the IIBA branch in Antioch had difficulty getting other local police departments to assist with U-visas. The Antioch police department refused to give a reason for denying U-visas to applicants; in Pittsburg, the police department used to set a limited timeline to sign-off on U-visa applications for victims of crime. At the time of this writing, the Pittsburg police department has become more cooperative in processing U-visas. In a follow-up discussion with Pedro from IIBA, he claims that this change is due in part to passage of the Immigrant Victims of Crime Equity Act, or SB674, in California in January 2016. This law standardizes the protocol for law enforcement agencies to process certifications for U-visas within 90 days of their request, among a variety of other measures.⁹ Despite the change in the Pittsburg police department’s cooperativeness, the Antioch police department continues to deny U-visas to some applicants, with no justification. IIBA has been in touch with members of the police

⁹ For more information, please refer to: http://www.ilrc.org/files/documents/sb_674_fact_sheet.pdf.

departments in Antioch, however, and is hoping to eventually have a conversation with the chief of police to understand the reasons for non-compliance.¹⁰ Thus, while collaboration is not perfect and varies between suburbs, NPOs and legal aid providers actively work with a broader set of organizations and institutions to serve their clientele and the immigrant population at large, creating a relatively cohesive set of institutions that serves the low-income immigrant population. This is not to say that more specialized services lead to less safe spaces for immigrants in urban areas, but simply that there could be a silver-lining to the under-resourced context in the suburbs. To be clear, urban and suburban legal NPOs both face high demand for their work, and they are only one sector out of many that work with low-income immigrants.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Space and place influence the staff capacity of different NPOs and shape their collaborative models and ties with government officials. The structure of NPOs is such that most NPOs – no matter where they are located – are under pressure to find funding from disparate sources and serve populations in need. While financial precariousness is shared by all organizations, differences in place become salient when providers speak about procuring staff for services and collaborating with other NPOs, community institutions, and even governmental actors to accomplish their mission.

NPOs in suburban locations are particularly strapped for human resources. All of them describe being understaffed and discuss their difficulty in procuring more staff and recruiting volunteers to help with legal cases. Urban NPOs, on the other hand, describe staff and volunteer capacity as a non-issue, even though they continue to face high demand for services. The under-resourced and under-staffed context has led suburban NPOs to adopt creative strategies to meet the needs of the communities they serve. These include extensive collaboration with and referrals to

¹⁰ Neither the informants nor the author understand the reason for this variation in police department compliance.

other NPOs that provide services ranging from legal aid to food assistance to finding ways to combat domestic violence. The collaborative ties among suburban NPOs particularly strengthened following the heels of massive immigration reform implemented in 2012. These providers worked to ensure that immigrants did not fall prey to false *notarios*, legal scammers who provide faulty legal advice and/or overcharge for legal services.

Urban NPOs, on the other hand, having operated for decades, were less reliant on other NPOs, schools and government entities to provide service and engage in outreach. Rather, urban NPOs, while capable of offering legal aid on a wide range of cases, ultimately focused on one or two types of legal cases, which led to an implicit understanding among legal aid NPOs about which organizations were best equipped to handle a client's case. Their ties with other community organizations and institutions were present, but they were not integral to the survival of the organization.

There are several limitations to my study, which makes it difficult to establish direct causal claims between urban/suburban settings and cohesion. First, it is difficult to determine whether the collaboration strategies described by suburban NPOs are occurring because they are in a suburban location with a smaller number of organizations, or because they are newer branches of organizations that are starting to develop in the suburbs due to increased demand for services, or for different reasons altogether (e.g. a different culture of collaboration in cities versus suburbs). While it is difficult to disentangle the effects of scale and age on an NPO's strategies, the immigrant non-legal aid NPOs that I describe in Concord have existed for over four decades, and legal aid providers in Concord have forged effective ties with them, as well as with churches and the police department. Thus, while being newer may drive organizations to make collaboration an important part of their mission, older organizations in the suburbs are continuing to foster extensive forms of collaboration

among a broad set of institutions as well. In Oakland, an extensive collaboration among older *and* newer NPOs was not evident from interviews with legal aid staff.

Another caveat to this study is that it represents a certain moment and time in Oakland and its suburbs in what is a very fluid political environment. After conducting my initial set of interviews with legal aid providers, I followed up with interview respondents to get their feedback on my findings and receive updates on whether and how the situation had changed. In Oakland, legal aid NPOs had recently received funding from an anonymous donor to The San Francisco Foundation to form a DACA/DAPA collaborative that will engage in outreach and legal services for DACA and (potentially) DAPA applications, albeit a majority of funding would go towards legal services. This collaborative includes non-legal aid NPOs and institutions that already engage in outreach to low-income immigrants, including hospitals, healthcare NPOs, and immigrant advocacy organizations. The International Institute of the Bay Area also received a grant from the California Department of Human Services in 2016. The organization has used this new source of funding in part to engage in further outreach through schools and healthcare providers. Regardless, urban NPOs still had limited government ties, potentially a sign of their minimized visibility in local politics and/or limited cooperation with other government agencies. Moreover, urban legal aid NPOs had a different motivation for doing broader outreach; they had the *funds* to do outreach rather than being pressed, due to a limited staff, to engage with a broader NPO network, as was the case in the suburbs.

It is important to note that, the Bay Area represents a best-case scenario for many non-profit organizations because of its large number of foundations and private funders and progressive politics. The scenario for legal aid NPOs in other metropolitan regions and suburbs may be much more dire than the circumstances described in this study. While I cannot speak to the circumstances legal aid NPOs face in other regions of the country, this study demonstrates the need to expand this research beyond the Bay Area, especially to NPOs working with immigrants who are awaiting the Supreme

Court's decision on the implementation of DAPA that will allow undocumented parents of American citizens to gain temporary legal status.

From an academic and policy standpoint, understanding the motivation and mechanisms for collaboration and the extent of collaboration in different locations is essential to understanding how community capacity building works in different settings. Beyond effectively serving communities in need and creating trusted spaces and institutions for low-income immigrants, having a strong NPO network can help form the base for community advocacy that allows members to shape the neighborhoods they live in and their town's local ordinance decisions. A strong organizing network with trusted organizations for immigrants in urban centers, such as Oakland and San Francisco, has already been documented in immigration literature (Cho et al. 2013; De Graauw 2016), but successful organizing and organizational collaboration often goes less noticed in the suburbs. Successful organizing in Contra Costa County has already been demonstrated in recent efforts to improve public transportation in Concord and to promote safer parks in five cities in Contra Costa County, and it can help pave the way for more advocacy efforts that are needed in the area (Schafran, Sosa-Lopez, and Gin 2013; Interviews with staff at general NPOs). While organizing can be difficult in the suburbs due to obstacles like limited resources, less centralized spaces to meet in, and more moderate politics than those found in progressive cities, having a smaller local government may make access to governmental officials easier, which can help in sparking dialogue and eventually creating change. In Oakland, multiple advocacy organizations already exist to promote housing rights, immigrant rights, and healthcare for all, which lessens the need for legal aid NPOs to take on these struggles. In the suburbs, the network of advocacy organizations is much smaller. Consequently, legal aid providers become closely connected to other NPOs and understand that they are all "in the same boat." By working together, they help build the capacity of community members to organize, regardless of their English fluency, education, or legal status.

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