

# Local Insights From DACA for Implementing Future Programs for Unauthorized Immigrants

Audrey Singer, Nicole Prchal Svajlenka, and Jill H. Wilson

## Summary

The June 2012 executive action announced by the Obama administration to provide temporary protection from deportation for unauthorized immigrants who arrived as children has required a host of civil society and government actors to implement.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) offers work authorization in addition to two-year protection from deportation for unauthorized immigrants under age 31 who arrived in the United States before their 16th birthday and before June 16, 2007. The relevance of this program is significant in light of the November 2014 announcement of the expansion of the program to three years for unauthorized immigrants of any age who arrived before their 16th birthday and before 2010. In addition, a new deferred executive action program, known as DAPA, for unauthorized immigrants who are parents of U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents was also introduced. The DACA expansion and implementation of DAPA have been suspended by a federal court.

This study examines the implementation of DACA to understand application activity among young immigrants who are eligible for the program. It uses data from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services agency (USCIS) and draws on interviews with immigrant service providers, advocates, and local governments in eight metropolitan areas (Boston, Chicago, Charlotte, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Phoenix, and San Francisco). It finds:

***Although DACA is a federal program, it requires civil society intermediaries and state and local governments for implementation.***

Nothing in the executive action gave an explicit role or funding to intermediaries, but they ramped up services quickly. In the initial months of the program, hundreds of thousands of people applied, and civic and immigrant support organizations, state and local governments, and foreign governments responded to requests for information and assistance, documentation to prove identity and continuous residence in the U.S., and legal advice. The federal government provided information about the program and reviewed and adjudicated applications, but it must rely on this range of intermediaries to ensure the program's success.

***Local contexts shape the DACA experience.***

The organizations that assist immigrants operate in a context shaped by the history of immigration, the resulting immigrant-integration infrastructure, and state and local policies ranging from those supporting the integration of immigrants to those seeking to deter unauthorized immigration through local enforcement or denial of services. The varying contexts in this study's eight metro areas affect the funding and services that support the DACA-eligible population and ultimately influence immigrants' decisions about applying. In places with a longer history of receiving immigrants, individuals may decide that the cost and risk of applying are not worth it if they are already able to work and live without constant fear of deportation. In locations with stricter enforcement mechanisms, the eligible population has a greater motivation to apply.

“The experience of implementing the DACA program offers valuable lessons for similar programs going forward, including DAPA and any future program offering temporary or permanent lawful status.”

***Perceptions of the DACA-eligible population shifted as key stakeholders learned on the job.***

DACA grew out of years of advocacy for the DREAM Act, which was focused on those who were pursuing postsecondary education (or military service), and DREAMer organizations took the lead on DACA implementation in many places. Also, many organizations that work with Mexican and Central American immigrants were particularly plugged into advocacy around the DREAM movement. Thus, focus was trained on young adults, especially those of college age, and those from Mexico, Central America, and other parts of Latin America. But the DACA-eligible group is from a more diverse set of countries and includes those younger than the college-age immigrants associated with DREAMers. By the end of the first year, service providers and advocates expanded their focus to more actively reach those who needed to obtain the educational credential (high school equivalency) to qualify, those from non-Spanish-speaking origins, those living outside of urban centers, and those who did not see themselves as potential applicants yet who qualified.

***The decision to apply is influenced by individual, family, and immigrant origin-community dynamics.***

The DACA application decision is laced with opportunity, risk, and obstacles. It is both an individual one and one shaped by family and origin-community dynamics. Three factors stand out as having the greatest impact on DACA outcomes: age, educational attainment, and country of birth. In addition, gender, status at arrival, and the application fee were important factors that influence outcomes.

Insights from the implementation and administration of the DACA program are useful as cities, suburbs, towns, and rural areas turn their attention toward new policies that address the legal status of unauthorized adults. We offer several ideas to strengthen the DACA process and prepare for DAPA:

- ▶ Reinforce that DACA is an ongoing program, and that renewals are important.
- ▶ Engage the hard-to-reach population.
- ▶ Prepare for requests for documents and provide support for applicants.
- ▶ Reach employers and employees with information about work authorization.
- ▶ Maintain strong communication channels between USCIS and practitioners, advocates, and applicants.
- ▶ Build on DACA to make connections to educational, language, and employment supports.

DACA and DAPA are ultimately integration programs. They remove the fear of deportation and family separation and facilitate access to jobs, helping local communities and economies. But since they are temporary and can be ended at any time, Congress must use the experience to design a program that offers permanent legal status to immigrants who are already on their way to being productive members of the communities in which they live. The experience of implementing DACA offers valuable lessons for such future initiatives.

## **Introduction**

There is widespread agreement among policymakers and the public that the nation's immigration system is outdated and dysfunctional. The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, now nearly 30 years old, legalized approximately 3 million residents and was the last large-scale legalization program for unauthorized immigrants living in the United States. Twenty-five years ago the Immigration Act of 1990 overhauled U.S. immigration admissions policy, creating the current system that annually admits approximately 1 million permanent residents and hundreds of thousands on temporary visas. From 1990 to 2013 the number of foreign-born persons

living in the United States more than doubled, from 20 million to more than 41 million.<sup>1</sup> The number of immigrants who are estimated to be unauthorized in the United States is currently more than 11 million, up from 3.5 million when IRCA was passed.<sup>2</sup>

Despite attempts at immigration reform from 2005 to 2013, Congress has been paralyzed by partisan disagreement on how to proceed. Meanwhile, the executive branch has increased enforcement efforts: The Obama administration has deported more immigrants—over 2 million—than any other administration.<sup>3</sup> The effects of this increased enforcement on immigrant families, as well as the large number of unauthorized immigrants who were brought to the U.S. by their parents rather than by their own choice, put pressure on the administration to shield those who do not pose a risk to public safety.

In June 2012, the Obama administration announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, known as DACA. A form of prosecutorial discretion, this program offers two-year work authorization and protection from deportation for unauthorized immigrants under the age of 31 at the time of the announcement who arrived in the United States before their 16th birthday and before June 16, 2007. An executive action to expand the program to three years for unauthorized immigrants of any age who arrived before their 16th birthday and before 2010 was announced by President Obama in November 2014. Another program for unauthorized immigrants who are parents of U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents, Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents, also known as DAPA,<sup>4</sup> was also announced at that time. Implementation of both the DACA expansion and DAPA is currently suspended due to ongoing battles in federal court.

This study examines the implementation of DACA to understand application activity among the young immigrants who are eligible for the program. It uses data from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services agency (USCIS) and draws on interviews with immigrant service providers, advocates, and local governments in eight metropolitan areas to answer the questions, who has applied so far, who has not, and why? What are the environments that help or hinder motivations to apply for DACA? How does the administration of the program affect outcomes?

The report also looks ahead and offers recommendations for future immigration policy affecting the legal status of unauthorized immigrants. Understanding implementation and outcomes of the DACA program is important for anticipating and understanding how the DAPA program—and any future policy changes—will unfold differently across metropolitan areas.

While DACA status is temporary, the benefits to individuals, families, and communities can be long lasting. Foremost for individuals is the protection from deportation. Beyond that, DACA beneficiaries are poised to pursue educational opportunities and jobs not within reach before. For many of these young adults, states and localities have already invested in their education, and DACA is an important tool for expanding economic and civic contributions from these individuals. Ultimately, these executive-action initiatives will benefit places, not just individuals and families.<sup>5</sup>

## Background

DACA's roots date back to the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, or DREAM Act, first introduced in Congress in 2001.<sup>6</sup> The bill proposed legal permanent residency for youth without legal status who were brought to this country as minors and who had completed at least two years of postsecondary education. The DREAM movement gained momentum in the mid-2000s led by youth activists, known as DREAMers, who organized local student groups to push for access to higher education for youth without legal status. Over time the movement became national and garnered support from immigration advocates, educators, and elected officials. In 2010, a bipartisan bill was narrowly defeated. In 2013, a comprehensive immigration reform bill in the Senate, S. 744, included a DREAM Act type of provision, but it ultimately collapsed as the House stalled on reforming immigration.<sup>7</sup> The DREAM activists—comprising primarily those who would be the direct beneficiaries of the legislation—set their sights on President Obama to make good on his promises to “fix the broken immigration system.” The activists were an integral part of the push for President Obama to use executive action, and the effort culminated in his 2012 announcement of DACA.<sup>8</sup>

In the face of continued congressional inaction toward comprehensive changes to immigration policy, President Obama announced a series of executive actions in November 2014 to make changes

to the way immigration policy functions. These actions included measures to better secure the border, streamline legal immigration, and modernize the U.S. visa system. Most relevant for this study—and the most politically controversial—were DAPA and the expansion of DACA to include individuals who arrived between June 16, 2007 and January 1, 2010 or who were 31 years old or older at the original DACA announcement.

Twenty-six states filed suit against the administration's actions, and 53 cities—some within the states that sued—responded with an amicus brief supporting the changes.<sup>9</sup> On February 16, 2015, just two days before implementation of the DACA expansion, a U.S. District Court judge issued an injunction blocking both actions from being implemented during the litigation. The Obama administration responded with a request for an emergency stay, which would have allowed implementation to move forward while the case proceeds through the courts, but the stay was denied. This shifting political and policy terrain has implications for DACA applications, and for the findings of this study, by creating an atmosphere of uncertainty about how long the program may last beyond the end of the Obama administration in 2016.

Under the existing DACA program, individuals who meet certain guidelines submit an application to request consideration for deferred action, along with documentation proving their eligibility (see box, “The DACA application process”). Applicants must undergo a security and criminal background check and pay an application fee of \$465.<sup>10</sup> DACA itself is not a legal status, nor is it conferred categorically; applications are reviewed on a case-by-case basis. The two-year deferral period (three years under the expanded DACA) is renewable. There is no deadline for requesting DACA.

The application process can be complicated, and while it can be completed individually, requestors often seek the assistance of attorneys, community-based organizations, and other service providers offering clinics and workshops.

As of December 2014 (the most recent available data published by USCIS), USCIS had accepted 727,164 applications and rejected 43,174. (If an application is incomplete—for example, not signed or missing components or fees—it is rejected by USCIS and returned to the requestor for the additional materials. If an application is reviewed by USCIS and the requestor is deemed ineligible for DACA, it is denied.)<sup>11</sup> Among those initial applications accepted, 88 percent were approved, 5 percent were denied, and the remainder (7 percent) are pending. In addition, 234,991 renewal applications have been accepted; among these, 63 percent have been approved and 37 percent are pending (only 71 renewal applications had been denied as of December 2014).

Based on the requirements for DACA, we identify three categories of eligibility for the program:

► **Immediately eligible**

Those who can gather evidence to demonstrate continuous presence in the United States and who meet age, educational, and other requirements of the program.

► **Future-eligible**

DACA applicants must be at least 15 years old,<sup>12</sup> and so this group comprises those who will age into the program and meet all of its other requirements.

► **Eligible with additional education**

Those who need to enroll in a qualifying educational program but meet all other requirements.

At the announcement of DACA, several organizations produced estimates of the size of each of these three groups.<sup>13</sup> There is general consensus that as of June 2012 approximately 1.2 million were immediately eligible, 473,000 were future-eligible, and 426,000 would be eligible if they enrolled in a qualifying education program or pursued their GED.<sup>14</sup> The estimates are available from various sources for a range of geographic areas, including selected counties, states, and the nation.<sup>15</sup>

These estimates are helpful to service providers and advocacy organizations for planning purposes, but they do not translate directly into actual “application rates” because of the shifting time periods of eligibility among the future-eligible and the changes in status among the eligible with additional education. Moreover, estimates should be approached cautiously because they do not account for important factors like failure to qualify due to criminal history or discontinuous presence in the United States.<sup>16</sup>

The estimates are useful, however, for gauging whether predictions about eligibility align with the numbers actually applying. For example, while estimates predict the Mexican-born to make up 65 percent of DACA-eligible persons nationwide, they actually account for 77 percent of applicants.

## THE DACA APPLICATION PROCESS

In order to request or apply for DACA, applicants have to demonstrate a set of characteristics similar to those proposed for recent legalization programs—continuous presence in the United States and a clean criminal history—but also document they reached the United States before their 16th birthday and meet one of several education requirements. DACA is often compared to the DREAM Act, but DACA's education requirement is lower—only a high school diploma (or equivalent) or enrollment in school. In addition to traditional high school and GED programs, adult education, literacy, English, and career-training programs meet the criteria for school enrollment.\*

**Figure 1. Eligibility requirements for DACA**

You may request DACA if you:			
Meet all of the following:			
Were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012;			
Came to the United States before reaching your 16th birthday;			
Have continuously resided in the United States since June 15, 2007, up to the present time;			
Were physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012, and at the time of making your request for consideration of deferred action with USCIS;			
Had no lawful status on June 15, 2012;			
And have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or three or more other misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety.			
Meet one of these four options:			
Are currently in school	Have graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school	Have obtained a general education development (GED) certificate	Are an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States;
And are either:			
At least 15 years or older		Currently in removal proceedings or have a final removal or voluntary departure order	

Source: USCIS.

Applicants must submit documentation to prove the following:

- (1) identity and age (acceptable documents include passport, birth certificate, or consular ID card—all from the country of birth or a consulate).
- (2) arrival in the United State prior to age 16 (travel records or school records).
- (3) life in the United States (rent or utility records, school enrollment, bank transactions).
- (4) proof of current student status, past student record (certificate of completion from high school or high school equivalency), or military records).

To obtain many of these records, applicants rely on municipal and state governments as well as the government of their country of birth.

Under the existing program, once a DACA request is approved, it is valid for two years. In order to maintain work authorization and not accrue unlawful presence, recipients must apply for renewal 120 to 150 days before expiration. Renewal applicants must submit the same forms along with a \$465 filing fee, and undergo another background check.

\*USCIS, "[Frequently Asked Questions](#)" (Washington: USCIS: October 23, 2014).

Conversely, the Asian-born were estimated to comprise 10 percent of the eligible, but they account for only 4 percent of applicants. There is geographic variation around the United States as well. Texas, North Carolina, and Arizona were home to more DACA applicants than expected, while New York and Florida had fewer than estimated.

This report uses interviews with service providers, advocates, and other practitioners in eight metropolitan areas to understand and interpret the gap between those estimated to apply and those who have applied for the DACA program.

## Data and methods

### Sources of data on the DACA population

Three types of data help in assessing the DACA population. The first is estimates about the potentially eligible population. These data answer the question: How many people are *eligible* for DACA? What are their characteristics? The statistics rely on assumptions about the eligibility characteristics of the immigrant population and use existing government survey data to calculate estimates. Service providers and advocates rely on such estimates to gauge how close they are to “hitting the mark” on application numbers. Moreover, funders interpreted the estimates as reachable goals and used them to inform investment decisions. It is important to note that the U.S. government has not published any estimates of the potentially eligible population.

The second type is data on applicants. These data answer the question: How many people have *applied* for DACA? What are their characteristics? These are statistics generated from DACA applications, and USCIS routinely publishes summary statistics on the status of applications, including number submitted, accepted, rejected, and pending, as well as states of residence and top countries of birth of applicants. Some researchers, including Brookings, filed Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests through the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to obtain more detailed individual-level data on state of residence, birth year, gender, country of birth, and year of arrival. These data are limited in the characteristics that are reported, and, most notably, education levels of applicants are not published.

A third type of data is independent surveys and interviews with those who have received DACA and those who support them.<sup>17</sup> These surveys rely on samples of the DACA-eligible population and are aimed at addressing how receiving work authorization and protection from deportation impacts an individual, his or her family, and community. For example, one national survey of DACA recipients reported that 59 percent had obtained a new job, 49 percent had opened their first bank account, and 45 percent had increased their earnings, showing DACA's direct economic benefit.<sup>18</sup>

Together, these data provide feedback and inform providers and other stakeholders of the volume, pace, and attributes of those applying and help to characterize those who are not applying. The first two types of data revealed a sizeable gap between the number of people estimated to be eligible for DACA and those who had applied.

The information on this heretofore largely unknown population is scarce, but provides important benchmarks for those on the frontlines and those trying to guide the efforts of both local and national organizations that are implementing this federal program.

### Data and methods used in this analysis

Given these available data, we use both quantitative and qualitative approaches for this research. Our quantitative data come from several governmental sources. The first source is administrative data published by USCIS on individuals who have requested DACA (described above). The second source is DACA applications data obtained through FOIA requests to DHS. We received two datasets through these requests. The first contains data for 465,509 applicants through March 22, 2013 (64 percent of all DACA applicants through December 31, 2014), and the second contains data for 578,860 applicants through October 29, 2013 (80 percent of all DACA applicants through December 31, 2014). A third source is the U.S. Census Bureau's 2013 one-year American Community Survey (ACS). Some of our quantitative data analyses are included in this report; additional analyses can be found on the Brookings website at <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/tags/DACA>.

Our qualitative approach involved in-depth and on-the-ground investigations of the DACA landscape in eight metropolitan areas: Boston, Charlotte, N.C., Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Phoenix, New



York, and San Francisco. These metro areas are immigrant gateways with estimated large numbers of DACA-eligible. We selected places in regions of the country with different immigration histories, growth rates, political climates, and labor markets. While we largely focused on the cities in these metropolitan areas—i.e., the places where the majority of DACA efforts have been focused—we also gathered information about suburbs and outlying areas. We conducted interviews over the course of a year (between April 2014 and March 2015), during which time the policy landscape shifted, first as service providers focused on renewals in the summer of 2014, and then after DAPA and the expanded DACA were announced in November 2014.

In order to reach a variety of interviewees, our strategy included researching an area's legal service providers, DACA and DREAMer organizations, municipal agencies, community-based organizations, and others. We then conducted interviews and focus groups with a selected group of organizers and providers to gain knowledge of the DACA context. Often we worked with a DACA collaborative or individuals with whom we had an established relationship to guide us to people and organizations, but we also looked beyond to other organizations, private service providers, and government agencies and personnel. We met with approximately 200 individuals representing 125 organizations, agencies, and businesses for in-depth or focus group interviews. In the interviews we gathered a range of information including program demand and services; profiles of applicants served; staffing, credentials, and funding; communication and outreach strategies; screening for alternative legal statuses; evidence used in applications; partnerships, networks, and means of sharing knowledge and resources with other groups; interactions with USCIS; preparations for DACA renewal and upcoming DAPA and DACA expansion; and awareness of programs for educational credentials, workforce readiness, and training.<sup>19</sup>

## Findings

### **Although DACA is a federal program, it requires local coordination by civil society intermediaries and state and local governments for implementation.**

#### ***Civic and support organization response***

Most individuals who would end up serving the DACA-eligible population in some fashion were not aware of the contours of the program prior to its announcement. Advocates, legal service providers, philanthropies, grass-roots nonprofits, and other practitioners whose mission includes serving immigrants scrambled to learn about DACA and make preparations to inform and assist those who were eligible.

Although there was nothing in the executive action that gave an explicit role to intermediaries, these “first responders” ramped up their services quickly. Community-based organizations serve as liaisons between government agencies and individuals, disseminating information from agencies and representing the interests and needs of applicants. Churches and other religious institutions serve as a point of contact and a trusted voice for the immigrant community, making these institutions natural partners for community-based organizations, foreign consulates, and private attorneys seeking to provide information and assistance related to DACA. In general, local organizations operated at multiple levels: outreach and communication about the program, clinics to draw interested people for further information and assistance, and individualized assistance. They provided outreach through their networks, but also through ethnic media, websites, social media, flyers, and meetings in key locations.

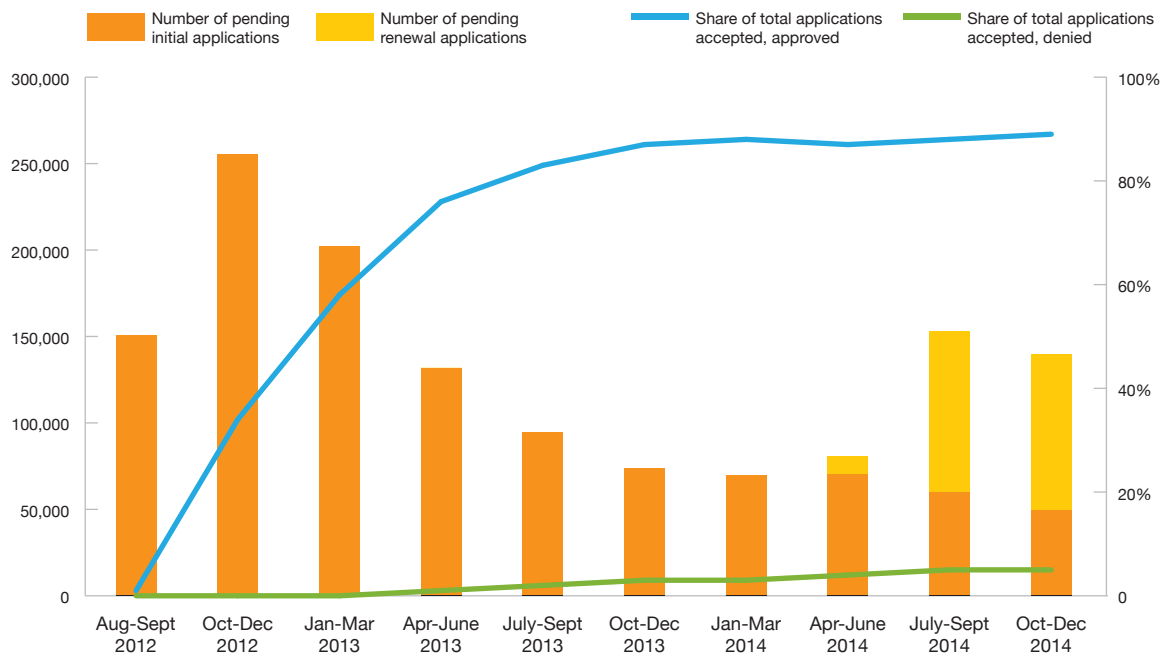
The mixture of organizations, institutions, and individuals that interact with the DACA-eligible population varies by location. For example, there are national legal aid organizations such as the Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc. (CLINIC) and the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) that support a diverse set of legal professionals in providing direct services to help implement DACA locally. The National Immigration Law Center (NILC), the American Immigration Council (AIC), and others offer legal advocacy, policy analysis, technical assistance, and guidance to the DACA-eligible and those who aid them. United We Dream (UWD), the largest immigrant-youth-led organization, with 55 affiliate regional organizations in 26 states providing advocacy, outreach, and assistance, and Own the Dream (OTD), an affiliated nationwide network of organizers and advocates, are helping to implement DACA. Countless regional and local community, faith, educational, DREAM, and legal organizations as

well as private legal providers offer assistance to immigrants in their regions, and many turned their focus toward DACA when it was announced.

Legal consultants, some scrupulous and others scammers, were also quick to offer services. Scammers, also known as *notarios*, are a pervasive problem in immigrant communities.<sup>20</sup> In the home countries of many Spanish speakers, *notarios* are highly trained professionals with credentials, whereas in the U.S. a notary is usually a state-commissioned official with narrow public duties. *Notarios* in U.S. immigrant communities have taken advantage of immigrants by making unrealistic promises and charging high fees to submit applications.<sup>21</sup> Both DACA and the recently announced DAPA provide fertile ground for scammers.

The efforts of all of these intermediaries made a difference. In the initial months of DACA, large numbers of people (immediately eligible) applied for the program; the peak came in the first full quarter of the program, with more than 250,000 applications submitted nationwide between October and December of 2012. The number of DACA requests declined throughout 2013, plateauing at the end of the first year of the program and continuing to decline through the end of 2014. Applications for renewals began during the second quarter of 2014 and hovered around 90,000 the last two quarters of the year (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. DACA applications and renewals by quarter, August 2012 to December 2014**



Note: Data are for applications received through December 31, 2014.  
 Source: Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Biometrics Capture System, CIS Consolidated Operational Repository (CISCOR), February 2015.

Some places with long-standing immigrant and refugee populations, such as New York City, Chicago, and San Francisco, have a well-developed service infrastructure that supports immigrants more generally, and organizations there were able to pivot quickly to provide outreach and services to the DACA-eligible population. Other places with relatively newer immigrant populations, such as Charlotte and Phoenix, have a more limited base of resources and organizations with which to implement a program that arrived with a short startup time. DREAMer organizations played a lead role in all of the metropolitan areas we visited in organizing and finding ways to reach the DACA-eligible through their networks.

Nonetheless, organizations in better-resourced places were stretched beyond the limits of their capacity, especially in the initial months of the rollout of DACA. Nonprofit and for-profit legal service



providers, community-based organizations, and advocacy groups faced new demands on resources and personnel to meet the needs for information, outreach, and assistance. Given the timing between announcement and implementation, the coordination of outreach and direct services was chaotic, imbalanced, and duplicative at first. This period also coincided with the moment when demand for services was at its highest.

Across the country, service providers took similar first steps for DACA outreach and application filing. In every metro area we visited, service providers and community-based organizations hosted information clinics and workshops, typically with little to no additional funding added to their budgets. Service providers acknowledge they underestimated the pent-up demand for these early workshops and were overwhelmed by the number of people seeking their assistance. Perhaps the best-known example occurred in Chicago, where organizers estimate that 13,000 people showed up to an information session at Navy Pier the first day USCIS began accepting DACA requests.<sup>22</sup> Those administering the workshops were hopeful the events would be a combination of information sessions and filing applications, but in practice the application process was more complicated and often required more documentation from applicants as well as follow-up visits. In conjunction with these information sessions, service providers also hosted smaller one-on-one clinics and open intake hours. Some service providers were able to accept legal responsibility for clients and filed G-28 forms indicating they were an attorney or Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA)-accredited representative officially serving as counsel to an applicant. Other service providers who provided pro bono services declined to submit these forms, citing lack of capacity to work with clients on other, non-DACA-related immigration matters.

Many organizations used intake forms to screen potential applicants for other legal options leading to permanent residency, such as a U visa or special immigrant juvenile (SIJ) status. A national survey of legal service providers estimates that 14 percent of potential applicants screened by immigrant-serving organizations that provide legal services were eligible for such alternative statuses, considered superior because they are permanent;<sup>23</sup> the service providers we spoke with estimated a range between 5 percent and 20 percent. However, not all people applying for DACA sought assistance, and service providers surmised that those filing applications independent of assistance were more likely to be college educated or younger siblings of those who had received assistance filing their applications.

Within metropolitan areas, there was sometimes tension between legal service providers and advocates because their missions and operating strategies did not always align. In some places community-based organizations deeply embedded in immigrant communities were conducting outreach and were the first stop for many DACA applicants, despite an existing network of legal service providers. Access to legal services was often resolved by the creation of a referral system or by organizations staffing their own attorneys or BIA-accredited representatives. In addition, partnerships emerged between neighborhood organizations, advocacy groups, and legal providers. The organizations, with deep roots in the community and a well-established rapport, were able to focus on outreach and preparation of documents for applicants, while the legal service providers assisted in submitting applications. The Mexican consular network also partnered with local organizations to provide onsite information and services.

The chaos dissipated over time, and practitioners and advocates within metropolitan areas were able to organize their efforts better. This period coincided largely with the decline in application levels. Given more breathing room, organizations were able to plan better, and in some places they developed an informal division of labor regarding efforts to assist particular kinds of cases. For instance, some organizations began to specialize in DACA cases that were considered tougher—applicants with criminal convictions, applicants who were living in the United States for long periods when they were not enrolled in school, and applicants with fewer traces of their lives in the United States—all of whom required more help with their applications. Service providers in some metropolitan areas joined forces in formally funded collaboratives.<sup>24</sup>

The number of people seeking advice and assistance increased again almost two years after the initial implementation of DACA, as advocates and service providers prepared for the start of the renewal period. The bulk of those who received DACA early on in the process now needed to submit renewals. As DACA recipients waited for USCIS to provide specific details on the renewal process and costs, service providers again were the conduit to relay detailed information.

Large-scale coordinated activity returned after the November 2014 announcements of executive

actions on immigration, which included new guidelines to expand DACA and the unveiling of the DAPA program, originally slated to begin in May 2015. The lead time, in conjunction with the expected similarities to the DACA application process, allowed advocates and service providers to organize and prepare for DAPA implementation much more so than after the DACA announcement. Moreover, it appears that in some of the metros we visited the announcement of DAPA was a catalyst that served to expedite collaboration and activate funders. The lived experience of DACA was a lesson about the importance of preparation and cooperation, especially when looking ahead to a program with a larger number of possible participants.

### ***State and local government response***

Meanwhile, as the DACA program got underway, state and local governments found themselves responding to requests for documents such as birth certificates, health records, and school enrollment and graduation records.<sup>25</sup> Places with more established immigrant populations often have municipal departments or offices that interface and engage with immigrants. The immigrant affairs offices in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, for example, offer DACA assistance by holding information sessions and public application workshops in partnership with community-based organizations, and by serving as liaison with other municipal agencies.

School districts were an important resource in documenting continuous presence, and some districts took steps to streamline the request process. The New York City Department of Education posted detailed guidance online on how and what type of records applicants should request; the Los Angeles Unified School District created an online request system for DACA applicants to access school records; and the Chicago Office of New Americans designed a “how to read Chicago Public Schools records” resource to help federal authorities interpret the often-confusing records.<sup>26</sup> In Boston, the Student Immigrant Movement (SIM) was able to get a flyer about DACA into the backpacks of Boston public school students, and one community group in Chicago organized a campaign to let parents of eighth-graders know that their children would soon age into DACA eligibility. Illinois’ pre-DACA DREAM Act, which requires high school counselors to be trained in issues facing undocumented students, now covers DACA issues.<sup>27</sup>

Although schools, the source of enrollment records, play an essential role in DACA, they do not uniformly embrace DACA as a matter that concerns them. Information and assistance around DACA were largely the result of individual teachers, counselors, and school administrators. Occasionally, we heard that some schools and districts made it difficult for former students to get records. There was significant variation across metros, and often within school districts. While we did interview some school officials, our key informants were mostly those providing direct outreach or services to the DACA-eligible population, and we relied on their perceptions and knowledge of the role schools play.

### ***Foreign government response***

Foreign governments assisted the DACA-eligible by providing documents to prove identity, and many worked with local organizations to reach out to individuals who were potentially eligible for the program. The Mexican consular network has been especially responsive. It plays an important role in serving nationals and partnering with other community stakeholders; it engenders a degree of trust and is viewed as a source of reliable information around DACA. By the close of 2014 the consulates had held more than 5,000 DACA information sessions, reaching close to half a million young Mexicans, according to information provided by the Embassy of Mexico.<sup>28</sup> Activities included issuing passports and birth certificates, providing information on DACA eligibility requirements and recommendations to pro bono attorneys, hosting counseling sessions in partnership with legal aid organizations and community-based organizations, and, on a case-by-case basis, providing funds to help cover legal aid or application fees. In Houston, which we visited after DAPA was announced, the consulate organized ongoing DAPA and DACA information sessions to reach those who went to the consulate for other business.

### ***Federal government response***

For its part, USCIS was faced with the prospect of adjudicating thousands of DACA requests in a timely manner. It was tasked with judging whether the evidence presented in applications met the criteria or

whether to ask for more evidence. USCIS's response served to provide information that service providers used to gauge which documents were acceptable to demonstrate continuous residence. The bulge of early applications consisted of more straightforward cases, and USCIS's relatively quick adjudications proved helpful to get the word out among immigrants and service providers that the program was working and which documents were the most useful.

In the eight metropolitan areas we visited, USCIS was responsive in relaying information and addressing regional concerns, especially through liaisons and representatives with whom organizations and advocates already had a relationship prior to DACA. However, there were many reports of long-pending cases where communication broke down between service providers and USCIS—specifically because there was no method for direct contact with adjudicators and those monitoring the process within the agency.<sup>29</sup> Practitioners felt that the lost time in getting trial-and-error feedback was detrimental to the communities' trust of DACA and USCIS. In light of this, providers connected to each other through online resources established by national organizations and email listservs; there, they could pose questions and share their experiences of what worked and what didn't for their clients. These networks were particularly helpful in organizing regularly scheduled and widely attended meetings to share strategies and address hot topics that would arise, such as renewal timelines, advance parole, and criminal charges. Service providers filing applications often developed informal protocols throughout their regions once they were proven successful. Examples of these include how often to document presence, which types of documents the different adjudication offices responded to best when typical documents like school records could not be obtained, how to use time-stamped digital material to document presence, and what combinations of misdemeanors were acceptable for applicants to have on their records. USCIS responded to concerns from service providers by updating the online guidance that clarified frequency of documentation for proving continuous residence.

When USCIS was not forthcoming with important information, advocacy groups pressed for more clarity. For example, service providers placed a FOIA request for the internal USCIS national standard operating procedures for DACA in hope of clarifying the application process, and once successful they shared it online.<sup>30</sup> Sustained pressure from service providers in New York City led USCIS to formally clarify the education requirements early on. There was also tension around the length of time it took for USCIS to release details about the renewal process, and for good reason: The information wasn't released until after the earliest date some DACA recipients should have applied for renewal under the USCIS recommended timeline (120-150 days ahead).

In summary, the costs of providing outreach and assistance to the DACA-eligible largely fell to service providers and advocates who work outside the federal government and rely on philanthropic funding or nominal fees to sustain their efforts. The work at the beginning was described as frenzied while organizations got their bearings. While USCIS did a commendable job adjudicating initial applications, slow response times to requests for clarification about the process were occasionally a problem. Despite the fact that this is a federal program, the government cannot ensure its success since it must rely on a range of civil society intermediaries, state and local governments, and foreign consulates in communities across the country.

### **Local contexts shape the DACA experience on the ground, affecting both approaches to and outcomes of the program.**

Some regions have long histories of immigration and have developed robust local immigrant integration infrastructure, while other places with newer experiences of immigration have not. The underlying arrangement of organizations affects how much support and outreach the DACA-eligible receive. In addition, these organizations operate in a context shaped by state and local politics. Local immigration-related policies range from those supporting the integration of immigrants to those seeking to deter unauthorized immigration through local enforcement or denial of services.

Together the eight metro areas we visited account for 47 percent of the nation's total foreign-born population of 41 million. Metropolitan New York and Los Angeles are the largest immigrant gateways with 5.7 million and 4.4 million respectively. Chicago (1.7 million), Houston (1.4 million), and San Francisco (1.3 million) rank fourth, fifth, and sixth. Boston ranks 10th with over 800,000 immigrants while Phoenix with 634,000 immigrants comes in at number 14. Charlotte is ranked 29th, with 225,000 immigrants (see Table 1).<sup>31</sup>

**Table 1. Foreign-born population and DACA applicants in study metro areas**

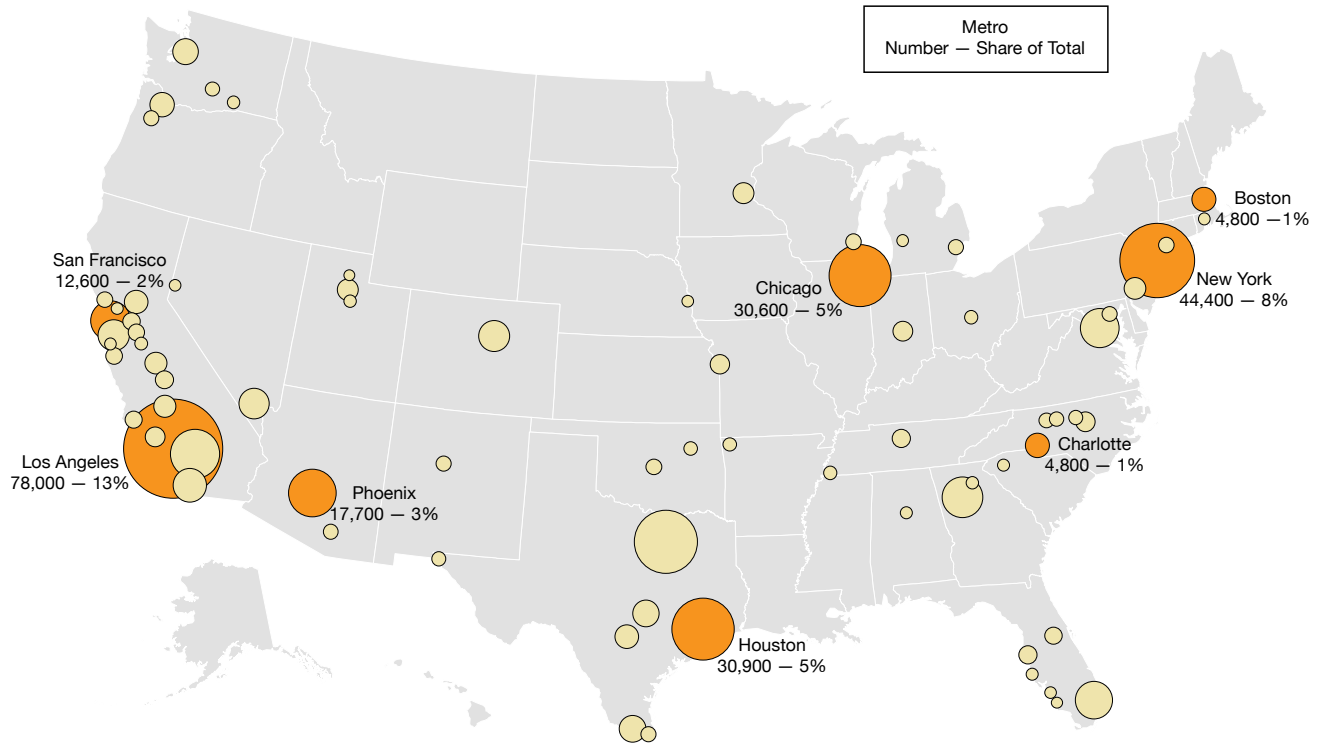
Metropolitan area	Foreign-born population*			DACA applications**		
	Number	Percent	% Mexican	Number	Share of U.S.	% Mexican
Boston	812,077	17%	1%	4,800	1%	-
Charlotte	225,673	10%	24%	4,800	1%	70%
Chicago	1,694,826	18%	39%	30,600	5%	86%
Houston	1,423,721	23%	44%	30,900	5%	79%
Los Angeles	4,391,702	33%	39%	78,000	13%	81%
New York	5,691,659	28%	6%	44,400	8%	27%
Phoenix	634,080	14%	54%	17,700	3%	97%
San Francisco	1,340,835	30%	18%	12,600	2%	76%
<b>United States</b>	<b>41,348,066</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>580,000</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>76%</b>

Source: \* American Community Survey 2013; \*\* USCIS data through September 2013 from *Characteristics of Individuals Requesting and Approved for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)*, 2014.

While 28 percent of the entire U.S. foreign-born population is from Mexico, there is wide variability of the Mexican immigrant population by metropolitan area. Among the eight study metros, Phoenix has the largest share of immigrants from Mexico, with 54 percent, while Boston's 1 percent is the lowest. Although only 6 percent of New York's foreign-born are from Mexico, in absolute numbers it has almost the same as Phoenix (340,000). Thirty-nine percent of Los Angeles's and Chicago's immigrants were born in Mexico, but that translates to 1.7 million in Los Angeles and approximately 660,000 in Chicago. In San Francisco, 18 percent of all immigrants are Mexican (241,000), in Charlotte, 24 percent (54,000). Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, and Phoenix have Mexican immigrant populations that are proportionally larger than the national average.

The share of the immigrant population that is Mexican within metropolitan areas is important because Mexicans comprise the vast majority of DACA applicants nationwide (76 percent). Each of the eight metro areas we visited was among the 21 metro areas with the highest number of DACA applications accepted by USCIS in the first 13 months of the program, the most recent data available.<sup>32</sup> Except for Boston and Charlotte, the locations included in the study ranked among the 10 largest metro areas for DACA applicants (See Map 1). Los Angeles registered the largest number of applicants—78,000 or 13 percent of all applicants. DACA requestors in the New York metropolitan area submitted 44,000 applications and Houston, Chicago, Phoenix, and San Francisco all had between 12,000 and 31,000 applicants. Altogether, the applications in these eight metro areas make up 39 percent of all DACA applications accepted by USCIS during the first year of the program nationwide.<sup>33</sup> The same four metros (Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, and Phoenix) with above-average levels of Mexican immigration have above-average levels of Mexican-born DACA applicants.

Map 1. DACA applications by metropolitan area



Notes: Rates and totals are subject to rounding per USCIS. Data are for applications through September 30, 2013.

Source: Brookings analysis of USCIS data. See USCIS [Characteristics of Individuals Requesting and Approved for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\)](#) for list of metro areas with over 1,000 DACA applicants through September 30, 2013.

To understand how local contexts shape the experience of DACA implementation, we visited metro areas with different immigration histories, identities, and environments. Boston, Chicago, New York, and San Francisco are major continuous immigrant gateways.<sup>34</sup> While over time their immigrant origin countries have changed, these metropolitan areas nonetheless experienced large and sustained foreign-born populations over the course of the 20th century and higher-than-average proportions of their residents who are foreign born. Today, these metro areas rank among the top 10 for the size of their immigrant populations. These places have well-developed immigrant networks and service infrastructure and generally have a welcoming stance toward immigrants. All four cities have immigrant affairs offices, and Chicago, New York, and San Francisco have formal DACA service provider collaboratives funded via foundations or the city.<sup>35</sup> Illinois, Massachusetts, and New York have state-level offices that are devoted to foreign-born residents and that also touch on DACA. In addition, these metro areas have dense urban cores with older suburbs that are somewhat connected to public transit; this helps with service delivery to those living in suburban areas.

Houston and Los Angeles had relatively low numbers of immigrants through the middle of the 20th century but saw significant growth in the decades following World War II, when they became major hubs of immigrant settlement.<sup>36</sup> These post-WWII immigrant gateways grew during the surge in automobile ownership, and their more suburban, lower-density form—combined with their shorter history of immigrant settlement—make collaboration and access to services across the metro area challenging. Los Angeles and Houston's proximity to the Southwest border contributes to the large number of Mexican and Central American immigrants living there, but both have welcomed thousands

of Southeast Asian refugees along with immigrants and refugees from all over the world, making them home to a diverse foreign-born community. Los Angeles boasts the second-largest foreign-born population of any metro area in the U.S., and its service infrastructure is more developed than that of Houston; it includes a long-standing, strong coalition of service providers, advocates, policy makers, and legal service providers. In 2013, the mayor re-established the dormant Office of Immigrant Affairs, in part to assist residents through DACA and future programs.

Metropolitan Houston is in a more politically conservative state and its residents have been ambivalent about the presence of immigrants in their midst—particularly those without legal status. Recently, a regional immigration collaborative was formed with funding from two local foundations to strategically organize around DAPA, and it just unveiled a centralized resource-rich website for both service providers and immigrants.<sup>37</sup> Prior to that, DACA-serving organizations were a loose network, but the prospect of meeting the needs of tens of thousands of DAPA applicants on the near horizon helped the organizations raise funds and motivation to work more closely together. The city established an office of immigrant affairs in 2001, and its current mayor has spoken out in favor of DACA and DAPA. In contrast, Texas' governor took the lead in suing the federal government over the administration's November 2014 executive actions to expand DACA and begin DAPA. Service providers in both Los Angeles and Houston have focused the majority of their efforts in the city itself, where they can concentrate support and outreach, but also have tried to reach out to immigrants who live outside of the core.

To understand the different experiences of immigrants in newer destinations, we visited Charlotte and Phoenix, both of which emerged as immigrant gateways after experiencing high growth in the last two decades.<sup>38</sup> In these places, the shorter history of immigrant settlement means that they have not had as much time to develop a robust network of immigrant service providers and programs. Charlotte and Phoenix are also suburban-like metropolises with geographically large central cities. Immigrants are spread out in various parts of the city and surrounding suburbs, adding to the challenge of outreach and service access. Moreover, the recent, rapid growth in the immigrant population in these places—particularly from Mexico and Central America—has resulted in some hostility from longer-term residents and local or state governments. The most well-known response is Arizona's 2010 law, S.B. 1070, one of the strictest state measures of its time, aimed at reducing the number of unauthorized immigrants in the state via “attrition through enforcement.” The U.S. Supreme Court struck down most of its tenets in 2012, but the message that Arizona was exasperated by the large numbers of unauthorized immigrants crossing its border with Mexico and settling in the state was nonetheless strong. North Carolina, meanwhile, is more divided on the issue, with business and immigration hard-liners often pitted against one another. After DACA was announced in 2012, North Carolina announced that DACA recipients would be barred from obtaining driver's licenses, but it reversed its decision in 2013, producing a new type of license printed with “legal presence no lawful status.” More recently, the state joined 25 others—including Arizona and Texas—in suing the Obama administration over DAPA and the expanded DACA.

In the newer metropolitan immigrant destinations we visited, tension exists between the political atmosphere of the central city and the state. The cities of Charlotte, Phoenix, and Houston have more liberal governments than the states of North Carolina, Arizona, and Texas. Local service providers and government agencies are often constrained in their efforts on DACA by state legislatures and politicians who drive budget decisions or support stricter enforcement.

Just like the role of the local government, the role of religious institutions differs by location. While Catholic Charities, the service arm of the Catholic Church, is active nationwide, in Houston and Charlotte—where more residents identify as religious<sup>39</sup> and long-term residents are more likely to favor private rather than governmental programs for those in need—we learned about the important role of faith institutions, particularly churches, in DACA outreach and connecting potential applicants to legal service providers.

The local response to immigration also influences individuals' decisions about applying for DACA. In places with a longer history of receiving immigrants and where resources to assist their application is greater, individuals may decide that the cost and risk of applying for DACA are not worth it if they are already able to work and live without constant fear of deportation. In newer destinations with stricter state or local enforcement mechanisms in place, however, the eligible population has a greater



motivation to apply for DACA given the heightened risk of deportation; paradoxically, these places have fewer resources available to help individuals apply.

In some places, an additional motivating factor for applying for DACA is access to driver’s licenses.<sup>40</sup> Metropolitan areas like New York, Chicago, and San Francisco are home to robust public transportation systems, making travel easier for those without driver’s licenses. (Unauthorized immigrants are also recently eligible to apply for driver’s licenses in California and Illinois, but were unable to do so at the beginning of DACA implementation.) In Charlotte, Houston, and Phoenix the transit infrastructure barely exists, making residents more reliant upon cars for travel. Unauthorized immigrants are unable to apply for driver’s licenses in North Carolina and Texas, but DACA recipients are eligible. In Charlotte, where local law enforcement routinely tickets unauthorized immigrants for driving without a license, leading to heavy fines and sometimes deportation, the cost and risk of applying for DACA can be worth the savings in traffic tickets alone. Phoenix has a similarly contentious enforcement environment. Arizona initially refused to grant driver’s licenses to DACA recipients, but after a lengthy legal battle was required to do so in late 2014.

Reinforcing the idea that local immigration policy influences motivations to apply for DACA are state-level data on the estimated DACA-eligible population compared to those who applied. Texas, North Carolina, and Arizona—all states that have adopted restrictive measures—make up a higher share of applicants nationwide than expected. At the same time, DACA applicants from California, Illinois, and New York make up smaller shares than they do of the population estimated to be eligible for DACA (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Estimated and actual DACA applicants by state of residence**

State of residence	Share of nation's:	
	DACA eligible	DACA applicants
California	30%	28%
Texas	13%	16%
Illinois	6%	5%
Florida	6%	4%
New York	6%	5%
New Jersey	4%	3%
Georgia	3%	3%
North Carolina	3%	4%
Arizona	3%	4%
Virginia	2%	2%
Colorado	2%	2%
Washington	2%	2%
Maryland	2%	1%
Massachusetts	1%	1%
Nevada	1%	2%

*Source: Estimated DACA eligible via MPI 2014. Data for DACA applicants' state of residence reflect USCIS-published data through December 2014.*

**Perceptions of the DACA-eligible population shifted as key stakeholders learned on the job and expanded outreach efforts.**

Advocates and practitioners were among the trusted entities that immigrants turned to for information about program eligibility and assistance in applying for DACA. As discussed in the first finding, as the program was getting underway advocates and service providers had to conjecture the profile of the eligible population, especially with regard to demographic, education, and migration characteristics.

When DACA was announced in June 2012, immigrant-serving organizations and youth-led advocacy networks had just 60 days to prepare before the program began, and they were in the dark on the application form and process. It is important to note that DACA grew out of years of advocacy for the DREAM Act, which was limited to those who were pursuing postsecondary education (or military service), a more narrow focus than DACA, which is open to those who are enrolled in or graduated from a U.S. high school, a high school equivalency program, or certain job training programs.<sup>41</sup> Additionally the mainstream media focused on the DREAMers as high-achievers, contributors, and future leaders while often portraying their parent's generation in stark and negative terms.<sup>42</sup> DREAMer organizations took the lead in many of the places we visited, and over the course of implementation service providers and DREAMer or student-focused groups began to work together. Many organizations that work with Mexican and Central American immigrants were particularly plugged into the advocacy around the DREAM movement. Thus, in the rush to prepare for DACA implementation, service providers and advocates were focused on young adults, especially those of college age, and those from Mexico, Central America, and, to a lesser extent, other parts of Latin America.

As implementation of the program began, the first wave consisted largely of "DACA-ready" applicants, those who clearly fit the eligibility criteria and had evidence handy, such as school enrollment records, for documenting continuous residence. Overlooked by service providers was the fact that motivation to apply for DACA would vary by birthplace, by age, and by whether people identified themselves as being eligible for the program. As time went on, it became clear that the DACA-eligible population was much more diverse than its initial conceptualization as "DREAMers."

Using FOIA data we analyzed age at application during the first seven months of the program. We found that DACA applicants nationally were much younger than the college age group popularly associated with DREAMers. Many were still of high school age when they applied, and for a logical reason: Demonstrating continuous residence is simpler with school enrollment records.

Thus, after the first wave of applicants organizations began outreach to those who were more difficult to reach and more difficult to convince, especially older immigrants who could be eligible for the program but lacked a high school diploma or equivalent. In addition to these immigrants, there were many potentially eligible who simply did not think the program applied to them. Often immigrants who were not from Spanish-speaking countries, those who were visa overstayers, and those who did not know they could qualify if they entered into an educational program thought the program was for other immigrants and not themselves. The high education attainment levels of DREAMers contribute to this perception. Some DREAMers who were unable to obtain legal work status prior to DACA pursued advanced degrees, making the education gap between this group and those who lacked a high school diploma even starker.

By the end of the first year of the program, many service providers and advocacy organizations corrected course and expanded their focus to those who did not have high school diplomas, those from non-Spanish-speaking origins, and those who did not see themselves as potential DACA applicants. Those living in rural settings, as well farmworkers, have also been highlighted as underserved or difficult to reach groups.<sup>43</sup>

Throughout DACA implementation, the evolution of how people talked about DACA was significant. Early along in implementation, people used the terms "DREAMer," "student," and "DACA recipient" almost interchangeably. DREAMer advocates in Phoenix discussed this perception gap and their efforts to clarify their language and conduct outreach to the broader DACA-eligible population. In each metro area we visited, there was a marked shift in outreach and approach to communicating with the less-stereotypical DACA candidate.

For example, leading up to the one-year anniversary, DACA service providers in New York City realized that the number of youth who had applied for the program fell below anticipated estimates. They realized that there were large numbers of potentially eligible people who were older, were parents, were

low-income, and had very low levels of education—and could be eligible if they enrolled in a qualifying educational program. But members of this population were unaware of their eligibility because they thought DACA was for college-educated DREAMers. This combination of misperceptions—by both service providers and potential applicants—prompted the city to initiate a program to reach these immigrants.<sup>44</sup>

As one service provider put it, getting these immigrants on the path to apply for DACA is one barrier, and finding an educational program that makes it worth it is another. For many, the incentive of getting a work permit must be weighed against the fact that many are already working and have neither the time, the money, nor the inclination to pursue a work authorization that offers little perceived concrete advantage.

All the while, practitioners and advocates looked toward data to measure their progress. We heard of two sources of frustration around lack of information about DACA applicants: absence of geographic and demographic detail, and timing of data releases by USCIS.

Service providers were frustrated by the lack of basic summary statistics from USCIS crucial to their work. Foremost of concern was the lack of geographical detail in the data released during the first two years of the program. USCIS typically publishes only the state of residence of applicants quarterly, without any additional characteristics attached. Two years into the program, however, a USCIS report on DACA applicants included statistics on applicants and approvals along with a few demographic characteristics for metropolitan areas with over 1,000 applicants.<sup>45</sup> Practitioners lament the inability to be able to know where within a region the pool of DACA applicants live; city and county entities find it impractical to use metropolitan-level statistics when determining where to focus resources.

In addition, the quarterly summary statistics lack detail regarding certain demographic characteristics of applicants—namely origin, education, and age. We know very little about the origins of DACA applicants beyond that the Mexican-born constitute a majority and the number of applicants from the top 20 countries of origin. But our analyses that used FOIA data reveal that applicants have come from 195 different countries—nearly every country in the world—and that 3.8 percent of applicants were born in Asian countries and 0.9 percent were born in African countries. USCIS has never published statistics about the educational attainment of DACA applicants, e.g., their highest education level, the number enrolled in school when they apply, the type of school or program they are attending, or the share meeting the additional education criteria. USCIS also does not publish summary statistics on applicants' ages.

The second source of frustration was that the intervals between releases of DACA statistics from USCIS lengthened after the first year of the program. While during the inaugural year data on DACA applications came out monthly with just a short lag between the day of release and the date the applications accounted for, USCIS switched to a quarterly release schedule with 6-8 weeks of lag time.<sup>46</sup> To those watching outcomes, a matter of a few months can make a difference, since information spreads quickly by word-of-mouth.

In addition, there was keen interest in how the renewal process would go given that it was tied to the date an application was approved. Service providers did outreach during the beginning of the renewal period, but the lag in the release of official USCIS statistics during the startup of the renewal period made it difficult for practitioners to track their progress.

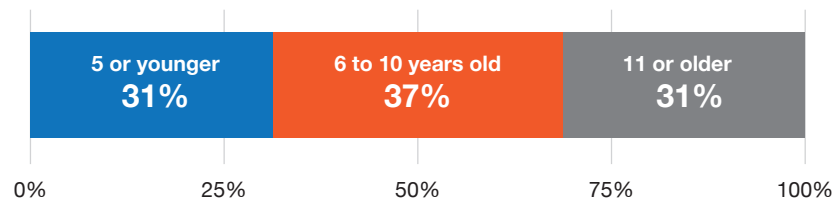
### **The decision to apply for DACA is influenced by individual, family, and immigrant origin-community dynamics.**

DACA is inherently an intergenerational program, both because the majority of those who are eligible for the program qualify due to the actions of their parents and because they are often still living with their parents. Additionally, the decision to apply for the program is both an individual one and one shaped by family and origin-community dynamics. It is laced with opportunity, risk, and obstacles. In every metro area we visited, service providers identified cost as a barrier, for both initial applications and renewals, for many would-be applicants, who are largely from low-income households.

However, three issues in particular stand out as having the greatest impact on the varying decision-making process to apply for DACA: age, educational attainment, and country of birth.

**Age at arrival and at time of application.** To be eligible for DACA, individuals must have arrived in the United States before turning 16. Although some eligible for the program arrived in the United States on their own, or without joining a relative already living in the United States, the majority were brought to the United States at a young age.

**Figure 3. Age of DACA applicants at arrival in the United States**



Source: Brookings analysis of FOIA data through March 22, 2013.

Most applicants have spent a good part of their childhood in the United States. Our analyses show that among applicants who applied in the first seven months,<sup>47</sup> more than two-thirds were 10 or younger at arrival, and 31 percent were under the age of 6 (see Figure 3). Many spend their teenage years here, transitioning to adulthood as the children of immigrants without legal status.<sup>48</sup> They may not have known about their immigration status, especially if they arrived at a young age. It is not uncommon for parents to withhold this information from their children, and often the children find out when applying for driver's licenses or postsecondary schooling, or when opportunities to travel abroad arise. Language barriers between parents and children can disconnect the two generations as parents become less involved in children's schooling and social lives, and they may exacerbate lack of communication about family matters around immigration. Young adults may be more comfortable than their parents when it comes to interacting with U.S. institutions, and parents who fear deportation may not fully support a child's decision to apply for DACA. Other parents want their children to have access to more opportunities and support their application process. Moreover, some potential applicants feel a sense of guilt that they are able to apply for DACA while their parents and/or siblings are ineligible. Many families are composed of members with different legal statuses, most commonly unauthorized parents with U.S. citizen children. DACA adds another layer of complexity to the estimated 16.6 million people already living in mixed-status families that include at least one unauthorized immigrant.<sup>49</sup>

Age also represents a stage in the life course. Given that DACA applicants can be as young as 15 or over 30, there is a range of experiences, motivations, and family considerations that can support or present obstacles to potential applicants. Our analyses of the age of applicants at the time they would have first been able to submit their paperwork for DACA in 2012 shows a group that skews young. More than half of all applicants (54 percent) were under age 21 when they applied, and 36 percent were 15 to 18 years of age.<sup>50</sup> So not only were the majority of applicants young when they arrived, they were young when they applied for DACA.

Those who are older and have been in the United States longer may already be working and see less of a reason to take the risk of applying and exposing themselves to the authorities that could deport them they may have a more difficult time documenting a longer presence (further away from educational institutions) in the United States, and they also have had longer times to interact with the criminal justice system.

For younger applicants, particularly those in high school and living with parents and siblings, there may be more than one person eligible in the household. If multiple siblings are eligible, the cost of multiple applications poses a greater barrier, and decisions around who applies first come into play.

**Educational attainment.** As discussed previously, those in school may have had an easier time gathering evidence to prove residency through school enrollment records. Schools are networks

that provide information about the program. Immigrants not circulating within such a network, like those who are older, those working, and those outside of major metropolitan areas, are less likely to be aware that they are or could become eligible for the program. For these reasons, those never enrolled in a U.S. educational program face more obstacles, and practitioners have a harder time reaching them.

Even among those in school, many have been discouraged by their lack of legal status because it limits job prospects. In places where unauthorized students are ineligible for in-state tuition and loans, appetite for applying for DACA may be tempered because the students may be unable to afford out-of-state tuition rates.<sup>51</sup> Still others facing poverty are pressed to find work and end up dropping out of school and trade work for studying. It may be that the educational requirement for DACA is both a motivator and a deterrent. But it is unclear what share of the nearly three-quarters of a million who have applied for DACA or of the others who have not yet applied needed to enroll in an educational program in order to qualify.

In addition to lacking the advantages that those tethered to schools may have had, others who were outside of educational networks likely also had less familiarity with the English language and U.S. institutions. One service provider in Houston described a kind of hierarchy of access to information and the relative need for assistance. First would be high school students and those who were primarily English speakers, including college students, who had a good facility for technology and would need little assistance; next would be older applicants, including those who did not attend school in the United States, who were less computer savvy and thus in need of greater assistance; and finally would be those who could not speak English well—and were likely lacking U.S. education—and would need the most help. Practitioners in other places tailored approaches to those who needed to gain additional education credentials depending on the context. Mentioned above, New York City invested in adult literacy programming, legal services, and community outreach to serve those who needed additional education, including the DACA-eligible. Slightly different motivations prevailed in Charlotte, where, given the strict enforcement environment, the immediate focus of service providers was to convince those needing the educational credential to enroll by emphasizing the benefits of deportation protection.

**Country of birth.** Immigrant communities help or hinder an individual's motivation to apply, and which way the influence goes varies by origin communities. As the program proceeded, practitioners gained knowledge about different groups and understood that each had variable starting points and needed different approaches.

The Mexican foreign-born stand apart with their well-developed immigration service and advocacy infrastructure, comprising information networks, local institutions, and sources of funding for DACA. For many Mexicans, identifying as unauthorized is not outside a normative, intergenerational experience. This collective experience, the maturity of the migration history, strong within-group leadership (especially on immigration advocacy issues), and the large numbers of immigrants who are unauthorized offer a kind of support. In addition, as discussed above, the Mexican government plays an instrumental role through its consulates, providing official documents for Mexican nationals; conducting outreach and partnering with advocates, community-based organizations, and legal service providers; and contributing funds to offset the costs of legal services and application fees. Furthermore, philanthropic investments in the Mexican and other Latin American communities have been ongoing for decades, and many funders were well positioned to invest in these long active and established community groups as soon as DACA was announced. It is not surprising, then, that Mexicans are more likely to apply than those from other regions of the world: They comprise 77 percent of DACA recipients, but 65 percent of those estimated to be eligible for DACA (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Estimated and actual DACA applicants by place of birth**

Characteristics	Share of nation's:	
	DACA eligible	DACA applicants
<b>Region of birth</b>		
Mexico	65%	77%
Central America	11%	10%
Caribbean	2%	2%
South America	6%	6%
Asia	10%	4%
Africa	3%	1%
Other	4%	1%
<b>Top countries of birth</b>		
Mexico	65%	77%
El Salvador	4%	4%
Guatemala	3%	3%
Korea	3%	1%
Honduras	2%	3%
Colombia	1%	1%
Philippines	1%	1%
Peru	1%	1%
China	1%	0%
India	1%	1%

*Source: Estimated DACA-eligible via MPI 2014. Data for DACA applicants' region of birth and top countries of birth reflect applications through October 2013 retrieved through FOIA (80 percent of applicants to date).*

To a certain extent, other Spanish-speaking communities have similar and shared experiences, especially certain Central Americans who have had years of temporary protected status (TPS), an administrative program similar to DACA.<sup>52</sup> They also benefit from a shared language with Mexican nationals, making outreach and information sessions more straightforward. The share of applications from Central and South American as well as Caribbean immigrants is on par with their estimated share of the DACA-eligible population (Table 3.)

Among the Asian communities with the greatest shares of unauthorized immigrants (Korean, Filipino, and Chinese), the experience is quite different.<sup>53</sup> Within these communities, privacy around legal status is valued. This is likely due to several factors. Generally speaking, these immigrants do not have the collective experience of large rallies, workshops, and demonstrations that Latin Americans have, nor is it common for ethnic media to provide coverage on immigrants without legal status. Consequently, shame and stigma of being undocumented within these communities is another relevant factor. Quantitative data bear this out: As a whole, Asians are estimated to make up 10 percent of the DACA-eligible population but account for just 4 percent of those who have applied.

Among the Chinese, there is strong distrust of the DACA program due to its temporary nature, and there has been advocacy in support of waiting for a program that offers permanent legal status over DACA. Among Chinese families, there is a reported trend that parents are reluctant to reveal their lack of legal status to their children and consequently young adults are blindsided by the news, often when they are preparing applications for college or for driver's licenses. We also heard that some parents were applying on behalf of their children without their children's participation. Application rates are also low among Filipinos, despite their having a very high profile advocate in the journalist Jose



Antonio Vargas and strong representation among the service-provider community. Among Koreans, privacy is a prime issue, and Korean parents of DACA applicants are likely to pay for legal services (to private providers) rather than seek help in public sessions, clinics, and workshops. One San Francisco service provider working within Asian communities described a stigma that divides some communities: Stereotypical “haves” that are well off, running businesses, well educated, and with legal status; and “have-nots” at the other end of the economic spectrum without legal status. Those in need of lower cost and pro bono services might not access them, choosing instead to pay a private service provider. This service provider called it a “soup kitchen mentality,” the idea that people considered free or low-cost services inferior to expensive ones.

In most metros we visited, we talked with service providers targeting applicants born in various Asian countries. Among some providers there were language and dialect barriers that have been difficult to overcome with limited staffing. For example, the many dialects among Chinese immigrants in the United States presented problems for service providers. Only in San Francisco and Los Angeles did we hear that some Asian-oriented service providers see a majority of Asian DACA clients. In fact most organizations offering services and advocacy to Asians served a majority of Latino DACA applicants, not Asians. In Houston, the experience of one Vietnamese service organization was not uncommon: It aided so many Spanish speakers applying for DACA that it hired a Latina staff member.

Among all three of these Asian groups, DACA has brought out intergenerational tension around legal status, and DACA-eligible youth are torn between casting shame on their parents and taking advantage of a chance for better educational and work opportunities. All three of these groups appear to have lower rates of application for DACA than estimates would predict (Table 3). One approach for DACA outreach in Asian communities featured flyers reaching out to parents; the flyers portrayed DACA as an opportunity to improve a child’s education and employment outcomes and did not emphasize legal status. Outreach to Asian groups beyond these three seems to be lacking.

While these three markers—age, educational attainment, and country of birth—seem to underlie the outcomes that we have seen thus far, other characteristics no doubt play a role. Gender seems to be important, especially among older applicants, but it is not immediately clear why. Analysis of applications data shows that, overall, applicants were fairly evenly divided by sex (51 percent female and 49 percent male). But applicants are progressively more likely to be female in each of the older age categories. Females made up 49 percent of applicants age 19 and under, 52 percent among 20- to 24-year-olds, 56 percent among 25- to 29-year-olds, and 58 percent among applicants 30 and older.<sup>54</sup> It may be that women are more likely to be in school or postsecondary training and less likely to be caught up in the criminal justice system, making outreach to them easier.

Another important attribute among potentially eligible immigrants that shapes self-perception and support networks is legal status upon entry. Among those who arrived on a valid visa and overstayed its terms, experiences and outcomes may be different than those who managed to evade detection by U.S. authorities, or “entered without inspection” (EWI). We heard reports that immigrants who are unauthorized by way of visa overstay did not identify with the DACA program and may not have been aware of their eligibility. This was especially the case among Asian immigrants who were more likely to enter the U.S. with documents (valid or not) than their Latin American counterparts.

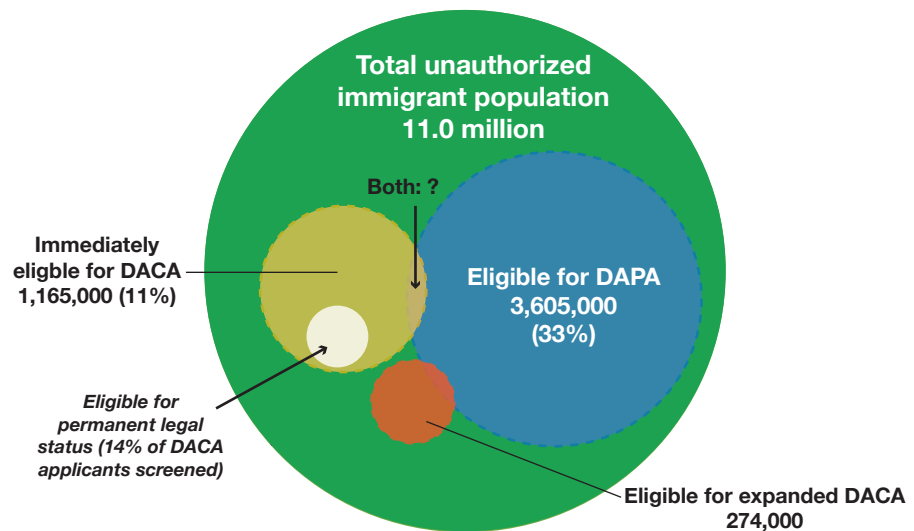
Finally, it is important to reiterate that affordability of the application fee is a cross-cutting issue. We consistently heard—across places and immigrant origin groups—that applicants expressed having trouble coming up with the funds for the application fee together with legal service fees.

There is a diversity of experiences related to DACA. The characteristics of immigrant communities as portrayed here are generalized, and it is the case, of course, that individuals have different experiences even within origin groups.

**Policy discussion**

The total number of immigrants in the United States who are estimated to be unauthorized is just over 11 million (Figure 4). Among that group, close to 4 million (33 percent of the total) are potentially eligible for DAPA (Figure 5), another estimated 1.2 million are currently eligible for DACA (not including those who will become eligible when they turn 15 or pursue the education requirement), and nearly 300,000 are eligible under the expansions in the recent executive action. There is some overlap in eligibility for DAPA and DACA, as some of the DACA-eligible are also parents. In addition, a nationwide survey of large legal service providers estimates that 14% of those screened for DACA were eligible for a different status that offers a pathway to legal permanent residency. It is expected that some DAPA and expanded DACA applicants will be eligible for these permanent statuses as well.

**Figure 4. The unauthorized immigrant population and estimates of those eligible for DACA and DAPA**



*Note: Diagram does not include population who may be eligible for DACA in the future due to age or educational attainment. Sources: MPI Unauthorized Immigrant Profiles 2015; Wong et al. 2014 (see note 23).*

**Figure 5. Eligibility requirements for DAPA**

You may request DAPA if you:
Have lived in the United States continuously since January 1, 2010;
Were physically present in the United States on November 20, 2014, and at the time of making your request;
Had no lawful status on November 20, 2014;
Had, on November 20, 2014 a son or daughter who is a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident;
And are not an enforcement priority for removal from the United States under the November 2014 guidelines*
*The November 2014 executive actions included a memorandum titled <i>Policies for the Apprehension, Detention, and Removal of Undocumented Immigrants</i> , which defined three new categories of crime for prioritizing deportations. Source: USCIS.

Insights from the implementation and administration of the DACA program are useful as cities, suburbs, towns, and rural areas turn their attention toward new policies that address the legal status of unauthorized adults. Through the work by practitioners and advocates, we have a greater understanding of potential applicants' barriers to applying for DACA as well as methods of assistance and outreach. This knowledge sheds light on how different places have approached the program and how various demographic and national origin groups have responded. DACA serves as an important point of reference for the implementation of DAPA (still held up in the courts) or any other future program that affects the legal status of unauthorized immigrants.

Using the DAPA-eligible population as a frame of reference for a future program is instructive. The DAPA program has notable similarities to DACA.<sup>55</sup> Unauthorized immigrants who are potentially eligible will have to weigh the decision to apply. National and local advocates and practitioners will be shouldering most of the outreach and assistance. State, local, and foreign governments will need to provide documents for those who request them. USCIS will need to increase its staff capacity to adjudicate applications in a timely fashion.

But there are also important differences between the two programs. First, the DAPA-eligible population is much larger than the DACA-eligible group (Figure 4). Second, those who would be eligible for DAPA have a very different profile than those eligible for DACA: They mostly arrived in the United States as adults and the majority likely have not attended school and may be lacking English proficiency. Given that DAPA targets parents, this group will likely be older on the whole than the DACA-eligible. Knowing that older DACA-eligible persons are harder to reach raises red flags for service providers and community-based organizations focused on outreach. DACA applicants, due to experiences in the United States at a young age, likely have greater access to and aptitude for technology, social media, and electronic exchange of information. Because of their U.S. schooling, the DACA-eligible are also likely to be more proficient or fluent in English than the DAPA-eligible. Conversely, because there is no education requirement for DAPA, that particular requirement will not be a barrier as it is for some pursuing DACA. Prior to implementation, it remains to be seen how parental status will be handled: Will fathers run into trouble establishing that they are parents? How will stepparents be treated?

DACA nonetheless offers valuable insights that should serve the implementation of a future program focused on those who arrived as adults. For example, we learned that not everyone eligible for DACA has applied for the program, in some cases because they are uncertain of their eligibility or are not aware that they may qualify, they face trouble coming up with the funds to pay for the application fee, or they are afraid of exposing themselves to the very government agency that can also deport them. This fear extends to trepidation that joining the program will put them squarely in line for deportation after the next president takes office. Service providers reported that this was a common fear among DACA applicants prior to the 2012 election, and with the 2016 election looming it is a fear among those who would be eligible for both programs. If implementation of the DAPA program is significantly delayed, anxiety will mount and may deter eligible immigrants from applying.

We also found in the DACA program that older applicants have more difficulty documenting continuous residence. Younger applicants typically have an easier time providing evidence of life in the United States primarily because of their ties to schools and enrollment records. DAPA candidates will be older than the average DACA applicant and will probably have lived for a longer period of time in the United States, making it more difficult to document arrival and prove they have lived in the U.S. for the required period. The kind of paper trail typically used to prove residency—household bills and government-issued documents such as driver's licenses—is often scarce for this group. For women, it may be harder to produce evidence with their own names because they may not be listed as heads of households on leases and may have not worked outside the home. Although both women and men may not have been authorized to work in the United States, many have, and they will use evidence from their jobs to document their presence; however, those with patchy employment histories or jobs in the informal sector may have more trouble compiling a record of continuous residence. Schools may play a role for DAPA if parents turn to their children's enrollment to help establish residency.

The variability among country-of-origin groups to apply for DACA is now well known. Programs that tailor outreach, provide services that fit with the needs of each group, and work through trusted messengers are important, especially among non-Spanish-speaking groups.

Finally, DAPA (or any similar program) has the potential to be much bigger and place more demands on municipal offices, community-based organizations, legal service providers, and local governments. But preparations for DAPA are already well underway by many organizations that lived through the DACA experience. Whereas the lead time for DACA was a mere 60 days, DAPA's announcement precedes its implementation by many months, allowing a head start for strategizing, fundraising, and organizing.<sup>56</sup>

Given these varying profiles of the DACA and DAPA populations, and building on what is happening in places around the country, we offer several ideas for policymakers and practitioners to strengthen implementation of DAPA or a similar program.

### **Reinforce that DACA is an ongoing program, and that renewals are important**

The third anniversary of the announcement of DACA on June 15, 2015 presents an opportunity for organizations and advocates to emphasize the message that the DACA program has not ended. Since there is no deadline for DACA, initial DACA requests should continue. Another consideration is that there are a few hundred thousand young people aging into DACA on a continuing basis over the next few years, and they will need continued information, outreach, and assistance in filing their initial requests. Others can pursue the educational requirement to become eligible and apply for DACA; providing support for this group should continue. Indeed, many practitioners are preparing to screen both potential applicants and their family members for eligibility for both programs.

Regarding renewals, all individuals who were approved through August 2013—71 percent of all beneficiaries—should have renewed by April 2015.<sup>64</sup> Because many fewer clients are seeking assistance for their renewal applications, service providers cannot measure how many of their clients are not renewing. Coupled with the fact that statistics published by USCIS can run up to six months behind, it is difficult to know how large the gap is between those who have renewed in time to maintain status and how many have yet to do so.

Nonetheless, it is critical that frontline practitioners reinforce and emphasize that those currently with DACA must renew 120-150 days in advance of the date their employment authorization expires, even if they are not working.<sup>65</sup> Frontline practitioners report that those with DACA understand the importance of renewing their status to maintain work authorization and deportation protection, but often have trouble saving for the application fee. Better outreach about DACA-specific loans and financial access may benefit those who are coming up against their renewal deadline. Another problem for service providers is that some of their clients submitted application requests during the specified window, but their application was not approved before their work authorization. While USCIS has protocols in place when a renewal application is unexpectedly delayed on its end to continue deferred action and work authorization, service providers across multiple metro areas report that this is not necessarily occurring and that DACA recipients who have submitted renewals on time have lost their jobs.

### **Engage the hard-to-reach population**

For the reasons outlined above—in particular, age and lack of attachment to educational institutions—we expect the DAPA-eligible population to be harder to reach than most of their DACA counterparts. In addition, immigrants in metropolitan areas often come from a diverse set of countries, but it was rare during our interviews to find service providers reaching out to DACA-eligible youth from countries in the Caribbean and Africa. Moreover, extra efforts to reach those living in rural areas or away from major metropolitan areas will be needed.<sup>57</sup>

One thing is clear from this multisite study: Each place has its own immigration profile, service infrastructure, and political climate, and what works in one place does not necessarily work elsewhere. Each place should focus on identifying the right access points to the DAPA-eligible and conduct outreach in those locales specifically. Consider health clinics and hospitals, churches and other houses of worship, schools, consulates, community resource and job centers, libraries, family resource centers, agencies responsible for business licenses, day labor sites, and English-language learning programs as primary points of contact to help identify an area's hard-to-reach DAPA-eligible, and build on any successful strategies to reach them. Many places are already engaged in this manner and should continue advancing their efforts and outreach presence.

Many among the DACA-eligible population have historically avoided government agencies because

of their unauthorized status. Thus, it is important to make contact with potentially eligible immigrants in places they are most likely to be reached with media they are likely to access. Campaigns through mass media, social media, and outdoor media, including in public transportation systems, were important for increasing awareness of the DACA program. For example, DREAMer networks use the Internet, social media, and mobile phones to organize widely. In response to lower numbers of applicants than expected, New York City embarked on an awareness campaign with ads in bus shelters, buses, and subway trains at the two-year mark in multiple languages.<sup>58</sup> The Televisa Foundation developed a bilingual campaign, “Think About It—“Piénsalo,” with a set of ads shown on Univision and El Rey Spanish and English channels as well as online videos.<sup>59</sup> National advocacy groups, such as the National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO), and the Mexican government created hotlines to field questions from individuals interested in information on DACA. The American Immigration Lawyers Association created a free mobile app, “Pocket DACA,” that included a self-screening tool for DACA eligibility, a searchable directory of listings for service providers in all 50 states, and links to important news and frequently asked questions. These approaches will also be important for those eligible for DAPA, but it is possible that because they are an older population they will need to be reached in other ways too, perhaps through their children enrolled in school.

The cost of DACA will remain a barrier, and we can consider those who have trouble gathering the \$465 application fee as a hard-to-reach group. In addition to outreach about the program, organizations should direct low-income applicants to credit unions and lending circles with DAPA-specific loans where they are available.<sup>60</sup>

For those conducting outreach, noting the benefits beyond work authorization and protection from deportation, like driver’s licenses (in some states) and opportunity to travel abroad with permission, may help prospective beneficiaries make the decision to apply.

### **Prepare for requests for documents and provide support for DAPA**

Many applicants will be compiling paperwork to provide proof of identity and evidence of living in the United States. They will be gathering proof-of-residence documents such as school records, medical and hospital records, utility bills, rental and mortgage receipts, and bank transactions. To demonstrate identity, passports, birth certificates, and other official government-issued documents, including those issued by other governments, such as a matrícula consular, will be important.<sup>61</sup> As applicants prepare their evidence, national, state, and local entities will have to respond to requests. While we noted above that some places developed systematic ways to request documents, others have yet to do so. Many cities have “311” one-stop phone lines for residents to request services such as repairing potholes, but these lines can also direct people to various departments, such as health and human services or motor vehicles, where residents can request copies of personal documents like parking tickets and tax records. Personnel should be trained to handle an influx of these kinds of requests, and multilingual staff should perhaps be increased. Immigrants may be preparing now but, due to the lawsuit preventing DAPA from being implemented, many may wait to take action. The recent Charlotte Immigrant Integration Task Force Recommendations to the city council included a recommendation to create an awareness campaign, in coordination with community organizations, around DACA and DAPA.<sup>62</sup>

One strategy, the Community Navigator Model, is being developed by a national partnership of advocates.<sup>63</sup> In the model, which has its origins in the health care field in Latin America, community health advocates, also known as *promotores*, reach out to vulnerable populations to educate and assist in accessing health care. This strategy of health care outreach has been used for several decades in the United States, particularly among Latin American immigrant women. Most recently, it has been used with the general population: Trained “navigators” assist consumers in understanding options and eligibility under the Affordable Care Act and help in enrollment.

The Community Navigator Model builds upon a lesson learned from DACA: Different organizations play unique roles within immigrant communities. Community-based organizations are most frequently on the frontlines, interfacing with individuals; they usually have limited legal staff, if any. The community navigator strategy builds on an existing infrastructure of trusted local service providers who interact frequently with immigrants, for example in libraries, adult English classes, and health clinics, to provide information, assistance in document preparation, and referrals to organizations that can help

at the next stage with individual casework and legal representation. Legal service providers can take a more focused role as well, conducting initial screenings and filing applications while not becoming bogged down in the time-intensive task of explaining how best to gather evidence. Local volunteers can be trained using resources from the national organization, ultimately to create a division of labor among individuals and groups that can provide varying levels of information and assistance and guide individuals with more complicated cases to appropriate providers. A coordinated approach among service providers on the ground where various entities educate and screen and others provide legal aid will help alleviate pressure at the outset and reduce duplication when large numbers of DAPA-eligible individuals are seeking assistance.

### **Reach employers and employees with information about work authorization**

Both employers and employees may perceive risks regarding changes to work authorization status. The DAPA-eligible may value having a job more than having work authorization, and they may worry that they will be penalized or fired if they disclose their lack of authorization status. Likewise, many employers may prefer to maintain the status quo regarding their employees and worry that accepting a change in an employee's status might catch the eyes of immigration enforcement. This contrasts with younger DACA applicants, many of whom are entering the workforce for the first time.

For those who have been working, the perceived costs of getting DAPA may outweigh the benefits. And it is especially likely that those from more insular communities, embedded in ethnic economies, may be unwilling to give up the security of their current job in order to try to get a better job even with work authorization. They may prefer to stick with the known.

Advocates and USCIS created guides for DACA beneficiaries that explain the rights and responsibilities of workers and employment issues.<sup>66</sup> These resources, for example, offer advice to workers with DACA on paying taxes, applying for a Social Security number, and understanding the employment authorization process. During our interviews it was rare to hear about outreach to employers regarding DACA and work authorization. USCIS should engage in a more directed discussion with employers in advance of DAPA implementation.

### **USCIS should maintain strong communication channels with practitioners, advocates, and applicants**

Clear communication and feedback mechanisms are essential to ensuring that DAPA implementation runs as smoothly as possible. USCIS should continue to prioritize transparency in its relationship with both service providers and applicants. The approach has two important dimensions: facilitating a smooth process and distributing data on program use.

There are a few direct steps USCIS could take moving forward to improve communication with applicants. First, USCIS should send work authorization cards via certified mail. We heard from DACA service providers in several metropolitan areas that packages containing employment authorization documents were identifiable and easy prey for theft, since they arrived by standard post. When their documents do not arrive, applicants are back to square one—they have to reapply and pay the fee again. Second, regarding DACA renewals, USCIS should consider a schedule with renewal dates specified by month for state and metro areas, and assist service providers and advocates to get the word out to their clients. USCIS currently sends renewal reminders by mail, but in addition it should consider texting or emailing applicants and their G-28 representatives (the attorneys or other representatives who have filed a notice of entry of appearance) reminders of when they are eligible to renew.

In another vein, the feedback loop surrounding DACA statistics faltered during the course of the program. Producing and disseminating more timely and detailed data about DACA applicants is another way the agency can improve this feedback loop. These data going forward for both DACA and DAPA should be published more frequently (monthly) with a shorter lag time, and cover a wider range of variables: educational attainment, country/region of birth, gender, and age at application. These variables are already captured by the DACA application and would not require any changes to the I-821D application form. Another useful piece of information would be the number and percentage of DACA requests and acceptances among applicants according to how they qualified for the program, whether they were immediately eligible at the start of the program, whether they aged into the program, or whether they became eligible by pursuing a qualifying educational program. This information



would help service providers know how effective outreach has been, and arm them with information to make improvements to outreach.

Additionally, service providers are unable to assess their DACA efforts because most data are currently provided only at the state level. Providing data that are more geographically detailed would bolster USCIS's relationship with those working in the field. Both service providers and USCIS would benefit greatly from being able to better assess which subpopulations are being served and which are not.

### **Build on DACA to make connections to educational, language, and employment supports**

The full potential of DACA and DAPA to positively impact the social and economic trajectory of individuals, families, cities, states, and the nation will only be realized when recipients are able to translate their new status into human capital gains. While DACA was not framed as an education program, its educational requirement provides immigrants with increased incentives and opportunities to (re)connect with the educational and employment system. For those without a high school diploma, DACA has offered incentive to (re)enroll and complete high school or to seek out adult education or training programs that would qualify them for DACA.<sup>67</sup> In Phoenix, Degree Phoenix is an initiative working to do just that. The program brings together high schools, three colleges, community organizations, and the city with the goal of improving postsecondary-degree attainment for Latino students. While it does not specifically target DACA recipients, it highlights examples applicable to them. Degree Phoenix brought together the right players to accomplish this, along the way expanding educational opportunities for DACA recipients.

Even though DAPA does not have an educational requirement, its implementation could serve as a mechanism for connecting the DAPA-eligible to educational, language, and employment supports in order to improve their labor force outcomes.<sup>68</sup> Schools, advocates, service providers, religious institutions, attorneys, employers, and governments who interface with DAPA applicants should be encouraged to connect their clients to programs that provide English instruction and/or vocational training. One example from DACA comes from San Francisco's Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs. A spin on the traditional youth summer jobs program, the DreamSF Fellowship hires DACA recipients for paid positions, placing fellows in community organizations implementing DACA and other immigration services.

For some programs, such as those funded through the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the work authorization that comes with DAPA will provide new eligibility.<sup>69</sup> Trusted voices in the immigrant community may see an increased demand for support beyond legal services; the Neighborhood Centers of Houston, which provide legal assistance, workforce development, and English instruction, are an example of this kind of organization. Opening these doors may provide DAPA recipients with increased awareness about and inspiration for occupational mobility.

Capacity to provide language and workforce training, however, is already stretched, and increasing knowledge of and eligibility for the training will not necessarily lead to greater access. Further investment—by philanthropy, employers, and government at all levels—is sorely needed to meet demand.<sup>70</sup>

## **Conclusion**

**T**he experience of implementing the DACA program offers valuable lessons for similar programs going forward, including DAPA and any future program offering temporary or permanent lawful status. The research presented here, from eight metropolitan areas, demonstrates that the real work of implementing a widespread program of this kind requires de facto coordination between the federal government, national and local advocacy groups, local service providers, community-based organizations, and foreign governments. This research also highlights the variation in local, regional, and state political environments, as well as the manner in which policy conditions create differing contexts that affect the outcomes of the program in terms of the number and characteristics of immigrants who apply. Perceptions of the DACA-eligible population were initially illustrated with images of DREAMers, but the depictions of the DACA-eligible population expanded as service providers and advocates made progress in assisting applicants and as statistics provided

(limited) information on harder-to-reach applicants. Ultimately, the characteristics and circumstances of potential applicants help explain who has applied for the program thus far and who has not.

There are still some important missing pieces to a greater understanding of DACA and DAPA. We do not know, for instance, how many of the nearly three-quarters of a million DACA applicants used a service provider for assistance with filling out and submitting an application. Therefore we do not know how universal the experiences are that we describe, and what the experience is like when one does not use these kinds of service providers.

Both the DACA and the DAPA programs are measures by the Obama administration to reset deportation priorities and to recognize the investments of certain unauthorized immigrants. DACA recognizes the value of investing in youth who have been raised in the United States and who will become productive members of U.S. society given the opportunity. DAPA, when implemented, lessens the chance that parents without legal status will be separated from their U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident sons and daughters, while giving parents an opportunity to contribute more fully to the economy and be better protected against labor exploitation.

Thus, DACA and DAPA are ultimately integration programs. They remove the fear of deportation and family separation and facilitate access to jobs, helping local communities and economies. But since they are temporary programs and can be ended at any time, it is critical that members of Congress use the experiences of these programs to design a program that offers permanent legal status to immigrants who are already on their way to being productive members of the communities in which they live.

## Endnotes

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## For More Information

Audrey Singer  
Senior Fellow  
Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings  
[asinger@brookings.edu](mailto:asinger@brookings.edu)

Nicole Prchal Svajlenka  
Research Analyst  
Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings  
[nsvajlenka@brookings.edu](mailto:nsvajlenka@brookings.edu)

Jill H. Wilson  
Senior Research Analyst and Associate Fellow  
Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings  
[jwilson@brookings.edu](mailto:jwilson@brookings.edu)

## For General Information

Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings  
1775 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington D.C. 20036-2188  
Telephone: 202.797.6000  
Fax: 202.797.6004  
Website: [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu)

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