

# 4

## Rebirth from the Grassroots Up

Several nights after the DREAM Act failed to overcome a Republican-led filibuster in the Senate on December 18, 2010, members of different DREAM activist groups in Southern California met at MALDEF's headquarters in downtown Los Angeles. The youths were distraught. During the 2010 lame-duck period, there was a Senate supermajority, the House had already passed a version of the bill, there was a supportive president, Homeland Security expressed strong support for the bill, the principal adversaries of the DREAM Act were divided, and public opinion supported the Senate version of the bill. Even under these optimal political conditions, they failed to overcome the filibuster by five votes. They were also distraught because they were moving into an unfavorable political climate. In January 2011, anti-immigrant and Tea Party-inspired Republicans would take control of the House and Democrats would lose their supermajority in the Senate. These new political conditions would favor neither the DREAM Act nor Comprehensive Immigration Reform. Their window of opportunity had closed.

The DREAMers also exhibited exuberance and a powerful sense of hope, which was surprising considering the defeat and gloomy political outlook. The youths felt they had achieved the power to speak and express themselves in the public sphere. The emotional energy in the room reflected a sense of collective awe at their own abilities to bring

the DREAM Act this far. Most were undocumented, most were in their late teens or early twenties, most were the first in their families to have attended university, and most were experiencing political engagement for the first time in their lives. They had not only pushed the DREAM Act to the pinnacles of political power, but they established themselves as an important voice within the immigrant rights movement. In the speech from one of Dream Team Los Angeles's leaders, he expressed the sentiment, reflecting, "The process is what is important. They [unspecified adversaries] are afraid of the power we built from the bottom up! We're going to be attacked. Before, we didn't have the power to protect ourselves. Now we have the power to protect ourselves."<sup>1</sup> Similar themes were stressed by the lead attorney of NDLO, who said, "You guys were at the table this year when nobody else was! *Before others used the DREAMers, others represented your interests, now you represent yourselves.* Just keep doing what you're doing and ignore the critics."<sup>2</sup>

The DREAMers were filled with a sense of hope and amazement because they had asserted themselves as first among equals within the immigrant rights movement. They now represented themselves in politics and the public arena. Having asserted their autonomy from national immigrant rights associations, the new generation of DREAMers has had to draw upon its own resources and build a new infrastructure from the grass roots up. They needed cultural and symbolic resources to craft effective messages, arguments, and frames; they also needed an organizational infrastructure to connect activists to one another, train new recruits, mobilize their forces in different campaigns, and so on. Without this infrastructure, the voice of the new DREAMer would have been ephemeral; it could pierce the public debate but it would not be able to achieve the consistency and coherency needed to shape and drive the public debate over an extended period of time.

DREAMers have discovered alternative ways to build a voice and infrastructure. Small activist organizations with few funding options have drawn in resources from their immediate surroundings. They ask for assistance from friends, families, churches, schools, college administrators, immigrant organizations, and so on. These grassroots resources provide the means to sustain basic and often tenuous operations. As local DREAM organizations gain some footing by drawing on localized

resources, they also branch out to ensure that weaker organizations are provided support and assistance by stronger organizations. The process of branching out between DREAM organizations facilitates the flow of resources and energy through this network. The emergent infrastructure has enabled them to assert their continued autonomy and maintain a disciplined voice. The infrastructure is the body that provides the DREAMers with a clear, determined, and disciplined voice in the public sphere.

### The Resources to Speak

Pierre Bourdieu argued that the creation of a powerful public voice does not come naturally.<sup>3</sup> To voice political desires and demands, groups must possess high concentrations of cultural and symbolic capital. Actors need cultural insights of the national public and the political field to know what messages, tones, and performances work best to gain broad support. They also need symbolic skills and a certain degree of legitimacy to present messages that are not only compelling but also believable. The inexperience of many undocumented youths in the early years of DREAM campaigns deprived them of these essential cultural and symbolic resources, resulting in their dependence on immigrant rights associations. However, they have been able to acquire these resources over time, which has allowed them to express a powerful and autonomous voice on the national political stage.

In the earlier cycles of the DREAMer mobilization (2006–10), the leading rights associations produced a message to gain broad public support. Their strategy required the creation of an infrastructure that trained undocumented youths to deliver the message in a compelling and disciplined way. This infrastructure required intensive training of undocumented youth activists. DREAMers also had many opportunities to hone their representational skills through countless campaigns, Internet communications, campus-based discussions, community outreach activities, and media interviews. Each of these activities provided activists with opportunities to work out messages, think about what worked and what didn't, and refashion their language, symbols, and tones to enhance the power and resonance of their public arguments.

While this infrastructure was designed to produce messaging discipline, it allowed DREAMers to acquire the cultural and symbolic skills needed to become effective communicators. After two to three years of involvement with the movement, these activists came to understand the rules of the game and how to frame messages in ways to maximize their symbolic power in the public sphere. Thus, the infrastructure that was used to create disciplined activists and messengers helped transmit the skills and resources needed to produce a voice of their own.

Most active DREAMers were also raised in the United States. Undocumented youths were very familiar with the cultural underpinnings of American politics (for example, discourses, values, symbols, and moralities) because this culture was part of their national habitus.<sup>4</sup> Unlike recent immigrants, they did not have to learn new cultural rules and how to convincingly deploy these cultures in the public sphere. Most were able to tap cultural codes and express them easily through their speech, acts, and performances. They could make believable claims about being good Americans because they *were* American. They did not risk exposing their “foreignness” through the inappropriate use of terms and conduct in public. In addition to being “real” Americans, most of the leading DREAMers were university students and recent graduates who had spent years learning how to use language and analyze complex phenomena. Many of the leading activists were trained in political science, sociology, law, and history. They spent years studying American electoral politics, the civil rights and LGBT movements, communication and rhetoric, and feminist and cultural theory. They made direct use of this education to analyze political opportunities, develop strategies, craft messages, and forge legal tactics. Their advanced analytical skills enabled them to quickly learn the discursive and symbolic rules underlying the field of immigration politics. They understood the importance of cultural rules, skills, and tricks and became talented players in this field. Their university training also transmitted “middle-class” cultural attributes to many students raised in working-class families and neighborhoods. Many learned middle-class codes of language, dress, and taste through their university experiences, which allowed them to cleanse themselves of the stigma associated with immigrant and inner-city working-class worlds. They could draw upon this culture to present themselves not just

as any Americans but as “nice, middle-class” Americans. Their national and educational background therefore provided DREAMers with a wealth of cultural capital.

After their graduation from university, well-trained undocumented youths have had difficulty finding work in their fields because they lack work permits.<sup>5</sup> This has been an extremely frustrating and dispiriting experience. Contributing to the DREAMer movement has provided many with an important outlet to use their talents in a satisfying way. One of the most prolific artists of the movement has remained a fully dedicated militant because of his commitment to the cause but also because opportunities in journalism, his college major, were closed to him. After his graduation, he was not able to take internships and jobs for news organizations because of his legal status. Employment opportunities for this talented young man were limited to the lower ends of the service industry. He dedicated much of his free time to the DREAMer movement because of his passion for the cause, but also because the movement served as an outlet for his many talents:

When you graduate from college, there’s a feeling of going back to square one, of asking yourself what’s your place in society. My co-workers at the restaurant always ask, “Why did you go to college? You can’t do anything with it.” Not being able to use my degree was the worst feeling ever. So, I was waking up every morning and going to my job at the restaurant and hating every single minute of it. It was driving me crazy. . . . So, I started working with other recent graduates in Long Beach to think of ways to use our skills to get our stories out there. So we created a web site “Dreamers Adrift” to produce videos that tell our stories. . . . Drawing was my other outlet. I started to post my illustrations to Facebook and received great feedback from fellow DREAMers. Then people all over started to ask me if they could use my images. I would then go to demonstrations and people would come up to me and say, “You’re the guy who draws.”<sup>6</sup>

Most talented undocumented graduates experience a similar situation.<sup>7</sup> They face a sharp disconnect between their high aspirations, on the one hand, and the legal reality prohibiting them from working in their professions, on the other. The frustration felt by many DREAMers is captured well in one illustration depicting an undocumented college

graduate in the agricultural fields under the constant surveillance of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (see Figure 2 below).

The gap between the high aspirations of the youths and the legal barriers to the job market has made the DREAMer community a social space where undocumented university graduates can use their talents in satisfying ways. Dedication to the movement provides an opportunity to struggle for a just cause and it provides a space where talents can be deployed and aspirations fulfilled. Their participation in the movement also allows them to interact with broader political and cultural worlds than would otherwise be possible. They engage with the media, negotiate with political and social movement elites, and gain recognition and respect because of their work with DREAM campaigns. While legal barriers block the ability of students to employ their skills and develop professionally through the mainstream labor market, they can become respected legal experts, artists, journalists, communicators, and political strategists through their participation in the movement.

The lack of professional opportunities for highly skilled undocumented graduates has been a disaster for individual undocumented youths.<sup>8</sup> However, it has created a large pool of highly talented and mostly voluntary labor for the undocumented youth movement. The voluntary nature of their activities is important for incipient organizations with few to no resources to pay professional staff. Weekly Dream Team Los Angeles meetings are attended by approximately twenty to thirty-five activists, depending on the time of year and events being organized. Most of the regular attendees volunteer for various committees covering legal issues, communications, art, self-healing, among other issues. Volunteers dedicate themselves to their areas of specialization with a high degree of professionalism. The legal barriers to the professional labor market also contribute to retaining the best and brightest of these volunteers. Rather than student activists moving out of social movement politics to pursue middle-class careers, which is the case with most student-based movements, DREAMers have few choices but to stick to their movement. Blocked upward mobility for undocumented graduates has therefore provided the movement with a rich and deep reservoir of talented mostly voluntary labor to draw from.



FIGURE 2 *DREAMer in the Fields*. Image by Julio Salgado.

Sharing and pooling the resources of individual youths has been important. The DREAMers constantly connect to other talented youths and combine their skill sets in new and innovative projects. The artist from Dreamers Adrift recounts how he came to work with the communications leader of Dream Team Los Angeles: “There was this big United We Dream retreat in Memphis. I was hanging out with people from California. I met her through these people. She was like, ‘Dude, we need new images!’ She has been very enthusiastic about using my images and getting them out there. Yeah, so ever since that, we work closely to get new messages out into the media and to our fellow DREAMers.”<sup>9</sup> Prior to this, the artist was collaborating with other DREAMers on producing

videos and creating a web site, *dreameradrift.com*, about undocumented youth and their struggle for legalization. The constant networking between DREAMers has been important because it has spurred constant innovations in the production of messages, images, and other cultural works. Just as important, networking encourages the collectivization of individual resources and skills.<sup>10</sup> The talents of individuals are certainly their own, but the constant participation of these activists in reciprocal exchange networks makes their talents available to the broad collectivity of DREAMers.<sup>11</sup> Individual talents are seen as a collective resource of the movement, enabling organizers to call upon each other's assistance in different campaigns. DREAMers create a powerful and autonomous voice because these networks allow them to combine their cultural and symbolic skills in new and innovative ways.

The concentration of advanced skills, talent, and sheer drive has enabled DREAMers to assume leadership roles of their own movement and its different campaigns. One DREAMer with Dream Team Los Angeles has taken a leading role in devising the legal strategy of civil disobedience actions.<sup>12</sup>

And basically anybody who's been arrested for civil disobedience is because our member . . . initiated the project of creating the "how to get arrested" resource guide. "Alright, you're going to do civil disobedience? These are the things that are going to happen." She kind of formulated strategies on doing X, Y, Z and after doing X,Y and Z, this is going to happen. She and others came up with everything and they figured out the kinks too. "Once we do this, we have X amount of time to do this. After that we have X amount of time to do that. And after that, it's going to take X amount of time for the cops to come. When the cops come, this is how you talk to them, this is what you say." It's almost like reading a book.<sup>13</sup>

Another DREAMer assumed a general leadership position, taking an active role in convening meetings, devising the major strategic lines of the group, and representing Dream Team Los Angeles to outside organizations and politicians. Others have become specialized in messaging and communications. The communication specialist of Dream Team Los Angeles has worked to provide trainings to DREAM activists in California and across the country. As head of the communications committee, she



has also cultivated good relations with reporters and producers in the English- and Spanish-speaking media. These good relations have provided her with direct access to the media and opportunities to push key messages, sound bites, and talking points into the public sphere. “What we found is that it was really important to have good relations not only with reporters but also producers. The producers were important because they were the first ones to see the press releases, frame the story according to our messaging, and tell the reporter how to talk about it.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, the acquisition of cultural, analytic, and symbolic skills has enabled DREAM activists to assume central leadership functions within DREAMer organizations like Dream Team Los Angeles and United We Dream. They no longer depend on immigrant rights associations to speak on their behalf because they have developed the means to represent themselves and create their own voice in the public sphere.

### **Building a National Infrastructure from the Grassroots Up**

The DREAMer infrastructure before 2010 was largely top-down in design and execution. By contrast, the new infrastructure is grounded in local DREAM organizations firmly rooted in their local environments, namely, college campuses, community organizations, networks, and so on. Drawing resources up from the grassroots, they also connect to other groups and to state and national organizations. Rather than depending on resources to trickle down from parent associations to dependent undocumented activists, DREAMer groups acquire their own resources and circulate them to other activists in their networks. This flatter structure depends on constant reciprocal exchanges between DREAMers and a diverse range of allies.<sup>15</sup>

Many campus-based support groups in California have continued to operate under the auspices of the California Dream Network. The more militant of these campus groups have either broken off from the network entirely or maintained their affiliation with the network but also allied themselves with Dream Team Los Angeles or other Dream Teams in California.<sup>16</sup> A member from UCLA IDEAS described this relation:

And so, for a while, we maintained our participation in the California Dream Network and we maintained ourselves as an affiliate organization, but we had different strategies so you wouldn't see us as active there. That's one of the dynamics also. It's about maintaining your involvement in a coalition where you don't really agree with the strategies, right? But understanding that it is important to maintaining communication.<sup>17</sup>

Campus-based groups have provided this new generation of DREAMers with access to university and college resources, including office space, funding, administrative support, and a well-developed communications infrastructure. An activist with the Orange County Dream Team remembers that during the 2010 campaign, his group was able to employ the resources of its affiliated campus-based groups: "When the federal DREAM Act campaign was happening last year [2010], we were able to get resources from the campuses to do things like phone banking, print out flyers, and pressure chancellors to support the DREAM Act."<sup>18</sup> These college resources have been available to all chartered undocumented student associations.

Colleges and universities also function as a relatively safe space to cultivate basic organizational skills of undocumented youth. Student organizations provide newly recruited DREAMers the time (two to four years) and space to incubate basic skills. New recruits learn how to raise and allocate funds, how best to make collective decisions in an open and democratic way, how to stay responsive to members' needs, how to create solidarity and emotional energy, how to create alliances, and how to recruit new members to the cause. The communications director of Dream Team Los Angeles remembers that her messaging skills were refined through her engagement in UCLA IDEAS. By her senior year, IDEAS had developed a powerful messaging operation that would rival most immigrant rights organizations in California. Other undocumented immigrants (for example, day laborers, domestic workers, and so on) do not have a comparable space to develop their organizational and social movement skills. Difficult and fractured work environments present other undocumented immigrants with more barriers to cultivate organizing skills and capacities.<sup>19</sup>

Some campus administrators and campus institutions have taken a special interest in the situations of undocumented students and provided

them with additional levels of support. At UCLA (IDEAS), UC Santa Cruz (SIN), and CSU Long Beach (FUEL), campus-based associations received important levels of support from administrators and faculty. The level of support for UCLA IDEAS has stood out among these. The vice chancellor of student affairs at UCLA has met on a quarterly basis with UCLA IDEAS to discuss the development of the organization and outreach to undocumented students. The Student Affairs Office has provided resources to support the living conditions of undocumented students while providing IDEAS with support for their many activities including advocacy work and outreach to high school counselors. The chancellor of UCLA has been particularly receptive to IDEAS:

We're lucky to have a supportive chancellor. Every year either we request or the chancellor requests a meeting with IDEAS. Throughout the year we have constant communication with the administration at Murphy Hall [the administration building]. That is something that other undocumented organizations in California lack. IDEAS has been so instituted into the school that we feel comfortable and at home here. We feel more comfortable in school than anywhere else.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to administrative support, the UCLA Labor Center has collaborated with IDEAS since 2006 on several projects including cotaught courses on undocumented immigrants and two book projects. Support by administrators, faculty, and the Labor Center has made UCLA IDEAS one of the largest campus-based undocumented associations in the country.

Campus-based DREAMers have fed into off-campus DREAM organizations like Dream Team Los Angeles and Orange County Dream Team. While campus-based groups perform most of their work at their universities or colleges, Dream Teams in California were designed as community-based organizations for recently graduated DREAMers. After having developed their skills and talents in their different campus organizations, recent graduates have transferred those skills to off campus organizations like Dream Team Los Angeles and Orange County Dream Team. While there are strong personal and institutional ties between Dream Team Los Angeles and UCLA IDEAS, the former organization is not a UCLA-only group, with many of its core members

having attended other institutions including UC Santa Cruz, East Los Angeles Community College, CSU Long Beach, CSU Northridge, among other California colleges and universities. The campus-based organizations feed into off-campus groups and networks like the Dream Teams, allowing these off-campus groups to capture and harness the skills of well-trained undocumented university graduates.

The Dream Teams have also drawn support and resources from associations and institutions in their surrounding areas. This support has helped to build organizational capacities. Organizations like NDLON, UCLA Labor Center, and MALDEF have been instrumental in providing day-to-day resources to Dream Team Los Angeles. The Labor Center has provided Dream Team Los Angeles with basic support largely because of its long ties to UCLA IDEAS (since 2006) and its commitment to the DREAMer cause. It has provided office space, communication support, legal advice, and most importantly, paid internships. The director of the Labor Center stressed the importance of the internships for developing the organizational capacities of the DREAMers:

The difference in providing internship opportunities for the DREAMers is that for the first time you have a situation in which, instead of being in school full time and working in the underground economy with two or three jobs, these students have the time to dedicate to this. We are giving them that space to use their energy to do this and build this. This has been a huge factor.<sup>21</sup>

One DREAMer stressed the importance of this support for Dream Team Los Angeles: “So, four people were working doing internships there and they were heavily involved in the DREAM Act stuff. You were actually having some people focusing most their time on the DREAM Act, and that was really cool because it gave us the opportunity to just kind of have people that are always going to be there. It’s almost like paid staff, which is very interesting!”<sup>22</sup>

NDLON has also provided Dream Team Los Angeles with fiscal sponsorship. Sponsorship allows the Dream Team to gain access to foundation grants. In addition to this, NDLON’s proximity to Dream Team Los Angeles (both are headquartered at the UCLA Labor Center) provides its members with regular contact to NDLON’s staff attorneys and

strategists. “In addition to fiscal sponsorship, they [the NDLOM director and staff attorney] have been able to sit down with us a lot and provide help with political analysis. They often go to Washington, DC, so they help keep us informed about the broader political picture.”<sup>23</sup> Additionally, MALDEF has provided important levels of organizational support to Dream Team Los Angeles. Before moving to the UCLA Labor Center, MALDEF provided this incipient group of DREAMers with an office and equipment. MALDEF has continued to provide it with critical legal and political advice in its various campaigns. The resources provided by the Labor Center, NDLOM, and MALDEF have provided Dream Team Los Angeles with a strong base to build a resilient organization. It has subsequently become a powerful hub in regional and national networks and an independent ally of the California Dream Network headquartered at CHIRLA, less than a half mile down the street. While Dream Team Los Angeles has benefited from its ties to uniquely well-endowed organizations in its vicinity, other Dream Teams have largely employed the same model of drawing on the support and assistance of community organizations and other ally supporters in their immediate vicinity. These resources have been crucial for creating basic support such as office space, phones, meeting place, and so on for fledgling organizations.

While Dream Team Los Angeles has been able to draw from local support networks and become a strong organizational hub, it has also developed a strategy to redistribute resources to allies throughout DREAM activist networks. Dream Team Los Angeles has worked especially close with Orange County Dream Team. Operating since 2004, the Orange County Dream Team was one of the first community-based DREAM organizations in the country. It was run by undocumented youths (mostly recent university graduates), drew supporters from community-based organizations, and had long been an advocate of the dissident line. DREAMers affiliated with CHIRLA and UCLA IDEAS attempted to create a similar off-campus, “community-based” organization for recent graduates in 2008 (“Los Angeles Dream Team”), but this initial effort was not successful. When Los Angeles DREAMers made another attempt in 2009, they turned to their Orange County friends for support. A DREAMer who had been a member of Orange County Dream Team and became a member of UCLA IDEAS as a graduate

student, brokered relations between Los Angeles and Orange County activists.

Once Dream Team Los Angeles gained firm organizational footing and strong support, it shared resources with allies in Orange County.

Because Dream Team Los Angeles is centered at the UCLA Labor Center, it has access to resources that obviously we don't have. They were able to provide us with very specific trainings in leadership development and messaging. We don't have the resources to provide formal trainings to our volunteers. Much of what they learn happens through practice. These kinds of formal trainings are important because they allow volunteers opportunities to develop their skills. So through DTLA, we have been allowed to have those opportunities.<sup>24</sup>

The Los Angeles and Orange County groups also worked closely with one another to create a state-level network of Dream Teams (California Dream Team Alliance). The alliance would complement the campus-based California Dream Network by providing an outlet for recent graduates. They organized the first retreat in February 2011 and created a string of new Dream Teams throughout the state. The partnership between Los Angeles and Orange County Dream Teams has therefore provided the organizational backbone for a new, statewide network. Both organizations have sought to distribute their organizational resources, knowledge, and expertise through this network.

The California Dream Team Alliance has been strongest in Southern California because of the presence of Dream Team Los Angeles and Orange County Dream Team. Several Dream Team chapters in Southern California (San Fernando Valley, San Gabriel Valley, and the Inland Empire) have been created by activists with close ties to the Los Angeles Dream Team. Having gained organizing experience through this group, activists developed new Dream Teams in their own communities. They sought out the support of allies in community organizations and churches, recruited members through their own personal networks, and launched smaller campaigns in these communities. Two DREAMers from Los Angeles were instrumental in creating the San Gabriel Valley Dream Team. Both were active in Dream Team Los Angeles and powerful voices of the dissident wing of the DREAMers movement. In

March 2011, they decided to create a new Dream Team branch in the San Gabriel Valley (ten miles northeast of downtown Los Angeles). One of their mothers had been a longtime organizer in the area and was affiliated with a prominent immigrant association in Los Angeles. She helped this new Dream Team by allowing the group to use her own organization's facilities in Pasadena. The other organizer used friendship networks with students at Pasadena City College to recruit undocumented students into their new group. While this Dream Team now has regular meetings and a stable membership, it still lacks the resources of the Los Angeles group. Efforts have been made by Dream Team Los Angeles to provide trainings, workshops, and site visits to this and other newer Dream Teams in Southern California.

Dream Team Los Angeles has worked to distribute resources outward, but access to their resources has depended on geographic proximity and personal connections. Dream Teams in the San Gabriel Valley and the San Fernando Valley have become relatively sustainable organizations. They have stable members, a network of supportive community allies, and robust outreach operations. Both Dream Teams benefited from good relations with Dream Team Los Angeles and frequent contacts made possible by geographic and social proximity. The lead organizer of the San Fernando Valley Dream Team was able to take the metro from the San Fernando Valley to Los Angeles (a fifteen-minute ride) to attend weekly meetings. Accessibility to the center permitted her access to valuable information and skills while reinforcing her strong personal ties to the leaders of the movement. By contrast, the Dream Team in the ex-urban area of the Inland Empire has had greater difficulty establishing itself. A founding member of this Dream Team explained that organizing in the Inland Empire was difficult because of the more hostile political environment. While this area was adjacent to Los Angeles, it bore greater resemblance (demographically and politically) to inhospitable Arizona. This hostile environment has compounded organizing problems associated with the massive geographic size of the area because it constrains the mobility of DREAM activists in this region. Undocumented immigrants in California are prohibited from obtaining a driver's license, there are many police checkpoints in the Inland Empire, and public transportation options are poor and limited. This political geography has made it

difficult for DREAMers in the Inland Empire to meet on a regular basis. Such a terrain has also inhibited regular meetings with DREAMers in Los Angeles and Orange County. This has denied the opportunities to build deeper solidarities and gain access to needed training, knowledge, and resources.<sup>25</sup>

The local and statewide infrastructure has connected to the national organization of United We Dream. Dream Teams in Los Angeles and Orange County are important affiliates of United We Dream. United We Dream had had strong ties to RIFA-affiliated associations and struggled during the painful internal conflicts of 2010. It eventually embraced the dissident line, but it did so more slowly than other groups. The power shifts in the immigrant rights movements since 2010 have encouraged youths in United We Dream to assume greater autonomy while continuing their alliance with traditional rights associations. It continues to have a formal connection to the National Immigration Law Center. Though NILC continues to exercise its “sway” over United We Dream’s advocacy work, United We Dream has sought to exert its autonomy from this and other national associations.<sup>26</sup> It has moved its Washington, DC, office from NILC to the United States Student Association. It also planned to end NILC’s fiscal sponsorship and become its own 501 (c)(3) tax-exempted nonprofit association.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, it has plans to become a powerful fundraising force in its own right. “As far as the grant period, a lot of the funding that RIFA lost has gone to United We Dream. Not any of the big grants yet but United We Dream is lining itself up to get major funding from organizations like Ford and the Atlantic Philanthropies.”<sup>28</sup> The ability of UWD to gain fiscal independence by becoming a 501(c)(3) and applying for large grants will reduce its dependence on the national rights associations.

Groups like Orange County Dream Team and Dream Team Los Angeles continue to take an active role in this national organization because it allows them to stay connected to national campaigns and conversations. “DTLA and almost any other major group in any other major city have connections to United We Dream, just to be able to be like: ‘We want to be part of that conversation, even if we don’t agree with your policy or your strategy or your politics, whatever.’ It’s more about having your voice in the campaign, being part of the process.”<sup>29</sup> United



We Dream provides direct connections between the different DREAM groups and networks across the country, enables regular communication between DREAMers in different locales, circulates important information from well-placed activists in Washington, DC, and invests important resources in training and leadership-development workshops. The Internet and regularly scheduled conference calls have been instrumental in coordinating relations between the national organization and these local affiliates.

The local affiliates of United We Dream also draw upon grassroots resources to provide important levels of support to the national organization. Dream Team Los Angeles has not only supported different campaigns and the annual conventions but also worked with United We Dream and the UCLA Labor Center to support a summer internship program called “Dream Summer” in 2011 and 2012. They aimed to expand the internship model developed at UCLA’s Labor Center. They recruited unions and social justice associations and encouraged them to provide paid summer internships to these one hundred DREAMers. Dream Team Los Angeles and the Labor Center also hosted the one-week training that preceded the internships. Thus, local affiliates draw upon their grassroots resources to support major projects of the national organization. This reflects a much flatter network structure than that which existed before 2010.

The National Immigrant Youth Alliance (NIYA) was formed by the more “radical” DREAMers of the movement in January 2011.<sup>30</sup> Many of these youths were affiliated with the Dream Is Coming group that initiated the break with RIFA in spring 2010. This group has stressed its complete independence from immigrant rights associations and the “non-profit industrial complex.” Its scarce resources have limited its capacities to perform the same functions as UWD, but its advanced communication capacities have allowed it to establish an important presence in DREAMer networks and the public debate. “I think they have a really strong communications infrastructure. [The communication director] is excellent. He has all these producers and reporters on his cell phone. As far as pushing out the message, he is one of the best equipped people in the movement.”<sup>31</sup> As a radical and totally independent association, it employs the most confrontational methods to pursue its goals. “The

folks in NIYA just don't care. They want to be super out there and break every law they can. They have already been in jail and see this as a badge of honor and courage. But, if you do that kind of activism, then you really have to operate outside the nonprofit industrial complex. United We Dream, by contrast, is very much inside the complex."<sup>32</sup> The radicalism and idealism the National Immigrant Youth Alliance has resonated with many youth activists and allowed it the organization to position itself as an alternative to the more mainstream United We Dream.

This new generation of DREAMers has therefore developed a largely decentralized infrastructure. Three principal mechanisms tie this infrastructure together: local DREAMer organizations draw on resources from their local environments (college campuses and supportive progressive organizations); the more prominent of local DREAM organizations become hubs that circulate scarce resources and information to others in their networks (for example, Dream Team Los Angeles redistributing resources to allies across the state); and lastly, national organizations connect to local and regional networks. Each activist group within this flatter and more decentralized network acquires certain competencies and resources that are then circulated to others within this activist space. Campus organizations enable activists to acquire certain resources (from material resources to organizing skills) that can then be transferred to community-based groups like the Dream Teams or to support national campaigns. Community organizations like Dream Team Los Angeles circulate their own concentrated resources outward to campus groups, to other Dream Teams in the city and state, and to national organizations. In a resource-scarce network where no particular organization has achieved a monopoly over precious resources, the only way to build an autonomous and powerful group has therefore been through constant reciprocal exchanges between allied DREAMers.

Youth activists acquired the cultural and symbolic resources needed to express a voice in the public sphere over time. Highly acculturated and educated youths were able to acquire the cultural capital needed to craft effective messages in the public sphere. As these youths learned to become skilled, cultured, and disciplined activists, the movement became one of the only arenas where they could deploy their talents in

satisfying ways. The movement could draw on a pool of talented, committed, and motivated activists to continue the struggle. The acquisition of these essential resources allowed them to assert their autonomy from the leading immigrant rights associations and become an independent group within the general movement.

This new generation of youth activists has also developed an infrastructure that would allow them to mobilize and voice new claims over an extended period of time. It is this infrastructure that permits the sustained presence of the DREAMer in the public sphere. Whereas mobilizations like Occupy Wall Street were able to pierce the public sphere with their bold actions and broad Internet reach, they ultimately lacked the concrete infrastructure to support their presence over months and years.<sup>33</sup> Without this infrastructure, the new generation of DREAMers would have shared the same fate as Occupy Wall Street: after a series of highly visible and disruptive acts of civil disobedience, they would have dissipated into a political afterthought. Their abilities to develop a grassroots infrastructure saved them from this fate and allowed them to remain a potent force in the field of immigration politics. The infrastructure has drawn resources out and up from the grassroots (local associations, colleges, churches, and so on) and circulated these resources horizontally to other DREAMers operating at local, statewide, and national scales. Their abilities to tap these grassroots resources allowed the new generation of DREAMers to stay politically relevant and also to sustain their autonomy within the broader immigrant rights movement.