



## Helping Disadvantaged Youth in Rural Communities: DACA Implementation and Funding Opportunities

### Overview

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, which took effect on August 15, 2012, could provide work authorization and relief from deportation to an estimated 1.76 million undocumented youth living in the United States.<sup>1</sup> About one-quarter of all currently DACA-eligible youth live in rural areas of the country, with particularly high concentrations of farmworkers and immigrants from rural communities in Mexico and Guatemala.<sup>2</sup> Although they face many of the same issues as their urban counterparts, rural immigrant youth are less likely to be college-bound or currently enrolled in college—and they are more likely to work in low-wage, immigrant-dominated industries with little job security, e.g., agriculture, poultry and meat processing, and construction.<sup>3</sup>

DACA offers an opportunity for young immigrants to further their education and seek better-paying jobs in the formal economy. However, an estimated one out of every two DACA-eligible immigrants in rural areas needs greater access to adult education courses to qualify for this unprecedented benefit—and that number is even higher (up to four out of every five) among farmworkers.<sup>4</sup> The supply of adult education programs and resources is wholly inadequate in rural areas of the country. In addition, potentially eligible immigrants confront other challenges, such as resources to cover the application fees and a lack of qualified immigration service providers.

Although not a path to permanent legal status or citizenship, DACA offers a chance for undocumented youth to come out of the shadows, strive to achieve their dreams, and increase their contributions to the social and economic vitality of our society. Their expanded access to education and the formal economy will reap important benefits for the country as a whole, such as developing a better trained and more diverse workforce and increasing our global competitiveness.

At the same time, recognition of these immigrant youth and young adults' stake in the future of the communities in which they live and work is an important first step in nurturing their civic engagement. It will also encourage and facilitate their involvement in civic life as volunteers and active participants in collective decision-making in local organizations and institutions.

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- 1 Batalova, Jeanne and Michelle Mittelstadt. *Relief from Deportation: Demographic Profile of the DREAMers Potentially Eligible under the Deferred Action Policy*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, August 2012. Web.
- 2 Kissam, Edward. *Making Good on the Promise: Helping Out-of-School Immigrants, Farmworkers, and other Rural Immigrants Qualify for Deferred Action*. October 21, 2012.
- 3 Sawyer, Adam, David Keyes, Christina Velásquez, Grecia Lima, and M. Miguel Bautista, “Going to School, Going to *El Norte*: Migration’s Impact on Tlacoctepense Education.” In *Migration from the Mexican Mixteca: A Transnational Community in Oaxaca and California*, eds. Wayne A. Cornelius, David Fitzgerald, Jorge Hernández-Díaz, and Scott Borger. San Diego: Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California, San Diego, 2009.
- 4 Edward Kissam estimates based on Rob Paral analysis of DACA-eligible in metro- and micro- areas and Department of Labor analysis of data from the National Agricultural Worker Survey.

## DACA's Implications for Rural Immigrants' Education, Careers, and Earnings

To qualify for DACA, potential beneficiaries must have either graduated from high school, received their GED, or be currently enrolled in school or a GED program. Adult education programs, including vocational training, adult basic skills, or ESL courses preparing learners to enter vocational training, fall under the guidelines for school enrollment.<sup>5</sup> Enrolling in an adult education program is a major challenge for out-of-school working youth and young adults in rural areas where availability of public transportation and classes are limited.

Farmworkers and low-wage immigrant workers in rural areas face additional barriers. Many have limited literacy and/or English proficiency if they began working as soon as they arrived in the United States—or if they dropped out of school in their home country. They may lack information about the steps needed to submit a DACA application and ways to fulfill the eligibility requirements, as well as access to updates from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services or USCIS (in part due to limited Internet access). Finally, given the nature of their ever-changing employment and living arrangements, it is often difficult for farmworkers to secure proof of continuous residency and the resources to cover the cost of the DACA application fee.<sup>6</sup> With three-fourths of farmworkers earning less than \$10,000 annually, the \$465 fee poses a significant financial burden for this population.<sup>7</sup>

Despite these challenges, DACA-eligible immigrants in rural communities stand to benefit significantly from greater access to educational opportunities and work authorization, as well as temporary reprieve from deportation. DACA will provide many with the chance to enter the formal economy for the first time, secure living-wage jobs, pursue their career dreams, and add their talents and drive to a more vibrant, diverse workforce. This infusion of work-authorized young immigrants will also help spur greater community and economic development, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

## Potential Beneficiaries

DACA is available to undocumented immigrants who meet the following criteria:

- ⊙ Arrived in the United States before the age of 16.
- ⊙ Younger than 31 years of age on June 15, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. "Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals." Last modified September 14, 2012. Web. USCIS has developed a number of resources that further clarify the process and the evidence required for DACA eligibility. The Education section of the USCIS FAQs provides a full explanation of who is considered "currently in school."

<sup>6</sup> National Immigration Law Center and Farmworker Justice. "DACA's Impact on Healthcare Access and Eligibility for Public Benefits." Presentation during a webinar, October 22, 2012. Some agricultural employers, for example, are fearful of providing an undocumented immigrant with proof they have worked for them; landlords illegally renting out sub-standard accommodations refuse to provide rent receipts and utilities may not be separately metered as an account in the renter's name.

<sup>7</sup> Employment & Training Administration – U.S. Department of Labor. "Chapter 3: Income and Poverty." In The National Agricultural Workers Survey. Last modified January 11, 2010. Web.

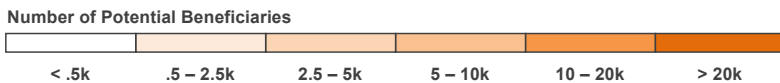
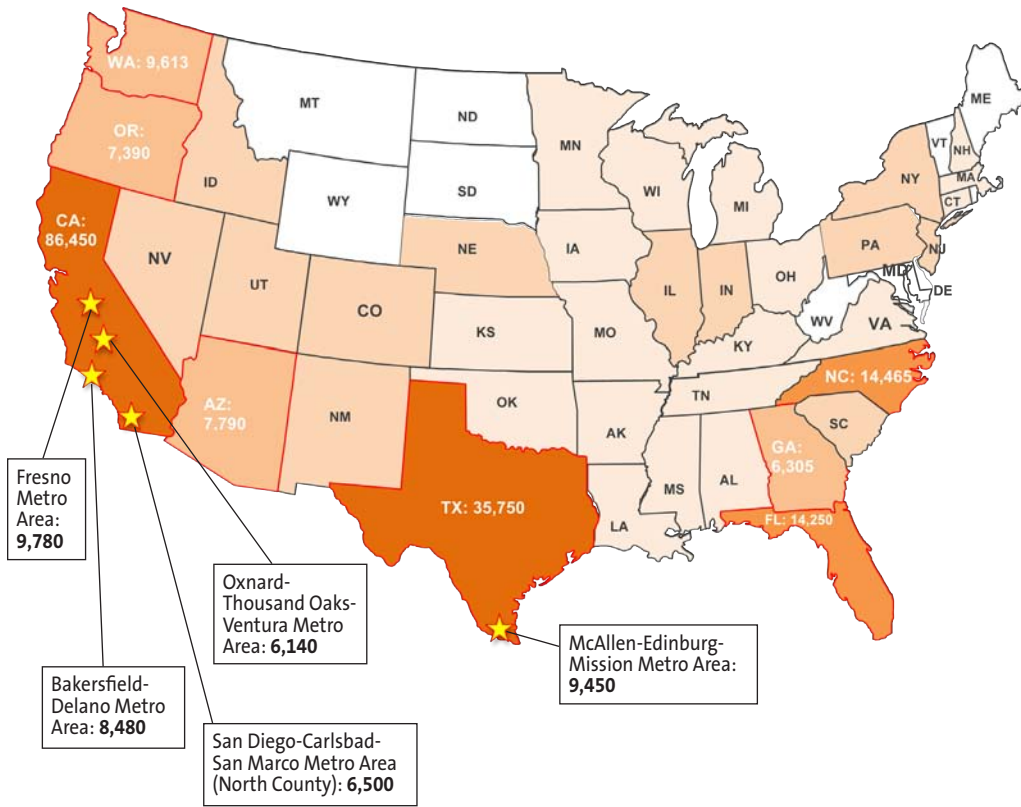
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- ⊙ Lived in the United States continuously since June 15, 2007; present in the United States on June 15, 2012 and when request for DACA is submitted.
- ⊙ Graduated from high school or received a GED, currently enrolled in K-12 schooling, an adult basic education program, vocational training, a GED program, or honorably discharged from the U.S. military.
- ⊙ No more than two minor misdemeanors, no felonies or significant misdemeanors, and not a threat to national security or public safety.
- ⊙ Entered the United States without legal authorization or overstayed visa before June 15, 2012.
- ⊙ Pay \$465 for biometrics and work-authorization fees.



**Top 8 States and 5 Metro Areas of Residence for Childhood Arrivals Currently Eligible for Deferred Action Residing in Rural Areas**



Source: Edward Kissam estimates based on Rob Paral analysis of DACA-eligible in metro- and micro- areas and Department of Labor analysis of data from the National Agricultural Worker Survey. For additional information on the rural DACA-eligible population, please contact GCIR at info@gcir.org.



## Demographic Profile of Rural and Farmworker Immigrants Eligible for DACA

Of the more than 252,000 immigrant youth and young adults in rural areas of the United States who are currently eligible for DACA, more than 40 percent live on the West Coast: approximately 86,450 in California, 9,613 in Washington, and 7,390 in Oregon.<sup>8</sup> There are also sizeable concentrations of currently eligible rural and farmworker immigrants in Texas (35,750), North Carolina (14,465), Florida (14,250), Arizona (7,790), and Georgia (6,305). Other states with significant populations (i.e., above 3,000) include: South Carolina, Colorado, Pennsylvania, New York, New Mexico, and Utah.<sup>9</sup>

Although high concentrations of rural DACA-eligible immigrants reside in California and Texas—most notably the Fresno, CA, Bakersfield, CA, and McAllen-Edinburgh, TX metro areas—there are a number of states (e.g., North Carolina, Florida, Washington, and Nevada) with substantial populations of DACA-eligible immigrants that live in dispersed communities far from urban centers.

Currently, 66 percent of the estimated potential DACA beneficiaries in rural areas of the United States are 15 years of age and older and can apply immediately for DACA. The remaining 33 percent are under 15 years of age and will be eligible for DACA benefits when they reach the minimum age requirement.<sup>10</sup>

Nationwide, the highest share of potential DACA beneficiaries come from Mexico and Central America (74 percent), followed by South America and the Caribbean (11 percent).<sup>11</sup> Most DACA-eligible rural immigrants are of Mexican origin. However, there are significant numbers of Guatemalan farmworkers in the Southeast, and immigrants of diverse national origins reside in other rural areas of the country (e.g., Hondurans in North Carolina, Somalis in Minnesota, and Hmong in California's San Joaquin Valley).<sup>12</sup>

The most pressing and immediate challenge is to assure the greatest number of the currently eligible immigrant youth can apply for DACA. It will also be important to work with K-12 schools to minimize dropouts so that as many younger DACA-eligible immigrants as possible secure at least a high school diploma, which affords them the easiest route to qualifying. It is very likely that younger students will be positively influenced by older siblings, neighbors, and friends whose earnings improve as a result of securing a work permit, the opportunities to go on to college or other post-secondary training, and other benefits related to DACA.

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8 Kissam, Edward, "An Evaluation of Census 2010 Coverage of Rural Hard-to-Count Tracts in California," Proceedings of the 2012 Conference on Hard-to-Count Populations, American Statistical Association, December, 2012. These estimates are adjusted to reflect a presumed Census undercount. There is evidence of about a 10 percent Census undercount of farmworkers and rural immigrants and the undercount in American Community Survey data which is the basis for estimating DACA-eligible is likely to be still higher.

9 Edward Kissam estimates and tabulations based on Rob Paral analysis of DACA-eligible in metro- and micro-areas, January 2013. (Because a number of major urban metropolitan areas include suburban and rural areas, these state totals account for the estimated DACA-eligible immigrant population residing in suburban and rural areas of major urban metropolitan areas.)

10 Ibid.

11 Batalova and Mittelstadt, 2012. Web.

12 Kissam, October 21, 2012.

## Funding Opportunities

- ⊙ **Outreach activities and resources** that provide farmworkers and other rural immigrant youth with reliable information explaining DACA eligibility requirements, as well as warning them of the potential for fraud by unqualified and/or unscrupulous immigration consultants, “notarios,” and/or attorneys. Successful outreach efforts may include the use of bilingual radio programs, hometown associations, informal social networks, and other nontraditional methods of communication.
- ⊙ **Orientation, legal screening, and application assistance workshops** to help the full range of rural DACA applicants—from those applying on their own to those needing more extensive assistance. Services may have to be delivered in mobile units given transportation challenges in rural areas. In particular, rural applicants will need assistance procuring documentation to prove continuous residency.
- ⊙ **Programs that assist out-of-school youth without a high school degree or GED to secure admission to adult education programs and successfully continue their education.** They will also need help avoiding the pitfalls of for-profit schools, as well as seeking academic and training opportunities that increase their employability and options to attain permanent immigration status. Funders should consider:

  - ⊙ Catalyzing collective community efforts among educational institutions (K-12, community colleges, and workforce training programs), local employers, civic leaders, and local government entities to increase availability of DACA-qualifying adult basic education and vocational training courses.
  - ⊙ Encouraging collaborative efforts with adult learning programs in designing DACA-qualifying courses in which educationally disadvantaged rural applicants can be successful. Courses crafted specifically to prepare students to take the GED in Spanish may be useful for some groups of DACA-eligible farmworkers.
  - ⊙ Supporting advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels for increased access and enrollment opportunities in alternative education and workforce programs that provide a pathway to DACA for farmworkers and rural youth not connected to any school system. This includes advocacy to remove barriers established by states to bar DACA-eligible immigrants from community college or adult education program enrollment.
  - ⊙ Investing in education alternatives for farmworkers and other rural DACA-eligible immigrant youth, such as distance learning programs that include: an initial introduction to self-directed learning; career orientation and planning; and advice for juggling work-life responsibilities.



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- ⊙ Working to support development of innovative new modalities for employment-oriented adult learning. For example, workplace programs sponsored by private sector employers (e.g., vocational ESL) or employment training programs crafted to meet priority community workforce needs.
- ⊙ Supporting program models that engage college and high school students in helping age-qualified, but educationally disadvantaged rural immigrant youth with ongoing advice on how to succeed in adult education programs, along with assistance and problem-solving help in other aspects of applying for DACA. In particular, rural DACA applicants may need individualized support to access appropriate adult education programs, to navigate unfamiliar bureaucracies in educational institutions, and successfully complete the courses in which they enroll.
- ⊙ Helping rural DACA recipients join the formal economy through job training and placement, mentorship, financial literacy services, and information about predatory lenders.
- ⊙ **Financial assistance** to defray the \$465 required fee for biometrics and work permit applications through low-cost loans funded by private donations, foundation grants, and program-related investments (PRIs).
- ⊙ **Capacity building** among networks of organizations in rural areas with emerging or growing immigrant communities, as well as in regions with sizeable immigrant and farmworker populations, but with limited philanthropic resources.
- ⊙ **Research and documentation** to measure the economic and social impact of DACA on the lives of individual beneficiaries, their families, and our society.

In all of the above activities, funders should seek to:

- ⊙ **Leverage the support and involvement of migrant-serving organizations and institutions** that have experience meeting the unique needs of farmworkers and other rural immigrant youth, e.g., migrant education programs, health clinics, hometown associations, churches, Migrant Head Start programs, farmworker employment training programs, etc.
- ⊙ **Engage community-based organizations and DREAMer networks** that can help low-literate and limited English-proficient rural youth and young adults understand that they too may qualify for and access deferred action—and that it is not just a benefit available to high school and college students and graduates.

Investment in these strategies will help increase educational attainment and enhance long-term job prospects and earning potential among DACA-eligible farmworkers and other young immigrants in rural areas—many of whom are currently confined to low-wage occupations, and who live with the constant threat of being separated from their families if they are deported. In addition, these investments



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will pay current and future dividends for rural and disenfranchised communities, which stand to benefit greatly by having a better educated, more diverse, and well-integrated immigrant workforce to support local and state economies and contribute to civic life.

## Learn More

For additional information, please contact Walter Barrientos, special projects manager, at [walter@gcir.org](mailto:walter@gcir.org) or 707.483.3960. Grantmakers that fund in California should contact Felecia Bartow, director of programs and research, at [felecia@gcir.org](mailto:felecia@gcir.org) or 707.303.0035.

