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Advancing Equity for AAPI Communities

Results and Recommendations from a Landscape Study of Asian American and Pacific Islander Organizations

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About The Asian American Foundation

The Asian American Foundation (TAAF) is a convener, incubator, and funder committed to accelerating opportunity and prosperity for the AAPI community. TAAF supports organizations committed to AAPI causes so that together we can more effectively take action against hate and violence, and build the infrastructure needed to improve AAPI advocacy, power, and representation across American society. TAAF was founded to solve for the longstanding lack of investment and resources provided to the AAPI community—particularly as anti-AAPI hate and violence persist at alarming rates. It strives to be a catalyzing force for the 23 million Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders across the United States in the pursuit of belonging and prosperity.

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To produce this report, the Urban Institute engaged a broad cross-section of stakeholders in the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) organization ecosystem between February 2021 and April 2021 to understand their priorities and identify key challenges and knowledge gaps. Using insights gleaned from the field as a basis, this report puts forth recommendations, opportunities to scale, and best practices for the philanthropic community, policy leaders, and other AAPI advocates to consider. We hope that funders and leaders will further develop and implement these recommendations to build inclusion and foster belonging for AAPI communities in the US.

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- Act To Change
- Asian American Journalists Association
- Asian American LEAD (Youth Leadership Empowerment and Development)
- Asian American Center of Frederick
- Asian American Collective
- Asian American Documentary Network
- Asian American Federation

- Asian American and Pacific Islander Civic Engagement Fund
- Asian American Progressive Student Union
- Asian American Psychological Association
- Asian American Unity Coalition
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice LA
- Asian Americans United
- Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy
- Asian Counseling and Referral Service
- Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies
- Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO
- Asian Pacific American Leadership Institute
- Asian Pacific American Media Coalition
- Asian Pacific Environmental Network
- Asian Pacific Islander American Public Affairs
- Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote
- Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council
- Asian Pacific Environmental Network
- Asian Women for Health
- Asians in America
- APIA Scholars
- Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations
- Center for Asian American Media
- The Center for Asian Pacific American Women
- Chinese American Museum Foundation
- Chinese American Parent Association
- Chinese for Affirmative Action
- Chinese Progressive Association
- Cia Siab, Inc.
- Coalition of Asian American Leaders
- Coalition of Asian American Leaders (network)
- Coalition for a Diverse Harvard
- Commission on Asian Pacific Islander Affairs
- East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation
- Empowered PI
- Empowering Pacific Islander Communities
- Faith and Community Empowerment
- Filipino Advocates for Justice
- Freedom, Inc.
- Golangco Global
- Gold House
- Hindus for Human Rights

- Indonesian American Association
- IW Group
- Japanese American Citizens League
- Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics
- Long Family Foundation
- Michigan Asian American Progressives
- Minority People's Email Network
- Missouri Asian American Youth Foundation
- Modero & Company
- Narasaki Justice
- National Asian American Community Foundation Project
- National Brown Berets Oakland Unit
- National Coalition for Asian Pacific Americans Community Development
- National Council of Asian Pacific Americans
- National Korean American Service & Education Consortium
- National Sikh Campaign
- NeighborWorks
- New Breath Foundation
- New Mexico Asian Family Center
- New Portland Foundation
- North Carolina Asian Americans Together
- OCA Asian Pacific American Advocates
- Oregon Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association
- Organization of Chinese American Women
- Organization of Chinese American Women, Maryland Chapter
- Project Include
- Raising Voices of Asian American Families
- Rising Voices Action, a project of Tides Advocacy
- Saahas For Cause
- Sikh Coalition
- Sobrato Philanthropies
- Stop AAPI Hate
- Surdna Foundation
- TDW+Co
- TransPacific Communications
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Advancing Equity for AAPI Communities

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) have long struggled for belonging, safety, and equity in the United States, but this struggle has reached a new level. AAPI communities today face a new specter of physical and mental harms arising from racialized accusations around the COVID-19 pandemic. As COVID-19 began sweeping across the nation, political rhetoric blaming the contagion on China fueled the scapegoating of Asian American people.¹ Widespread reports of hate incidents and violence, as well as AAPI's deepening fears of being targeted by discrimination and scapegoating, hearken back to more than a century of anti-Asian sentiment and discrimination in the United States.

As the nation grappled with the pandemic throughout most of 2020 and witnessed the racial reckoning ignited by the police murder of George Floyd (which in turn highlighted the long history of police killings of unarmed Black people), Asian Americans found themselves imperiled by escalating anti-Asian sentiment.² Between March 19, 2020, and March 31, 2021, the Stop AAPI Hate reporting center logged more than 6,600 hate incidents against AAPIs (Jeung, Yellow Horse, and Cayanan 2021). And before the fatal shootings earlier this year of six Asian women and two others in the Atlanta area on March 16 and of four Sikh Americans in Indianapolis on April 15,³ the Pew Research Center had already reported that almost 9 in 10 Asian Americans believe a lot of or some discrimination against them is present in society.⁴

The intensification of anti-Asian sentiment in the US, which is hardly a new phenomenon given the similar treatment Sikhs and Muslims experienced after 9/11, has reminded AAPIs that their sense of belonging in America is still precarious, their desire for safety and equity still elusive. These circumstances, along with the rising visibility of white supremacist organizations, led President Joe Biden to issue a memorandum on January 26, 2021, condemning and combatting racism, xenophobia, and intolerance against AAPIs.⁵ And on May 20, 2021, the president signed into law the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act introduced by two AAPI congressional leaders.⁶

Within the larger context of the nation's reckoning with race, a new window has opened through which the nation can bear witness to the fullness of AAPI experiences: to their collective struggles and triumphs; their differences and commonalities; and their right to belong, to be safe, and to be heard and valued in the national conversations on race and racism.

Grasping the Differences, Building upon Forces Unifying AAPI Communities

Historically, AAPIs as a whole have overcome formidable odds. Asian Americans were restricted from US immigration until 1965, and Pacific Islanders were colonized by European and Asian countries as well as by the United States. Today, Asian Americans stake claim to the highest average levels of income and education of all racial groups and occupy many hard-won leadership posts in the academic, corporate, and government sectors, including the vice presidency of the United States. However, AAPIs also occupy positions at the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum, with Pacific Islanders and Southeast Asian Americans among the AAPI communities with some of the lowest income and education levels in the US.⁷

The stark contrast of successes and challenges presents a complicated picture of AAPIs' experiences. Moreover, the myth of the "model minority" obscures important differences and variation within and across Asian American groups. According to the Pew Research Center, between 1970 and 2016, the income distribution among Asian Americans "transformed from being one of the most equal to being one of the most unequal among America's major racial and ethnic groups."⁸ A general pattern of economic polarization has emerged, with Chinese, Filipino, and Indian families demonstrating the highest levels of average income and Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander communities facing well above average poverty rates.

The myth that Asian Americans represent the model minority also masks significant racial gaps between white people and different AAPI communities. AAPIs have been at high risk of COVID-19 transmission because of their overrepresentation in the frontline health care workforce and because of other factors tied to the social determinants of health (Wang et al. 2020). Further, although AAPIs as a whole have had similar COVID-19 health outcomes as white people on average, these figures mask the greater burden faced by AAPI subgroups more likely to face structural disadvantages, such as Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.⁹ And Chinese Americans and South Asians (including Bangladeshis) experienced elevated risks from COVID-19 in some places like New York, where these communities tend to have lower incomes (Kalyanaraman Marcello et al. 2020).¹⁰ In the majority of states that track COVID-19 death rates for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, that group has shown among the highest COVID-19 morbidity rates across all racial and ethnic groups.¹¹ And nationally, the pandemic has triggered some of the highest increases in long-term unemployment for AAPIs compared with other racial and ethnic groups.¹² Moreover, even before the pandemic, Asian Americans had less representation at the top of the career ladder and felt that they had less opportunity to advance in the workforce.¹³

BOX 1

Who Are Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders?

Asian Americans made up the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group in the United States between 2000 and 2019; Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are also experiencing high levels of growth.^a

The US Census places two key definitions on the broad and diverse AAPI population, defining “Asian” as “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent [South Asia] including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.”

The Census defines “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander” as “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.”^b

A major challenge confronting AAPI communities is the systemic lack of recognition of diversity: many people and analyses gloss over the existence and distinctive experiences of many marginalized AAPI subgroups, such as Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities as well as Vietnamese, Hmong, and Indonesian populations, among others.^c And many of these overlooked AAPI groups have a dynamic mix of experiences. Vietnamese people, for example, largely immigrated to the US because of the US military’s involvement in the Vietnam War, and early Indian immigrants came to America as farm laborers.

^a Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, “Asian Americans Are the Fastest-Growing Racial or Ethnic Group in the US,” Pew Research Center, April 9, 2021.

^b “About Race,” US Census Bureau, October 16, 2020.

^c Li Zhou, “The Inadequacy of the Term ‘Asian American,’” Vox, May 5, 2021.

The diversity of the broader AAPI community is one of its strengths. AAPIs trace their roots to more than 40 countries, speak over 100 languages, practice an array of religious faiths, and experience distinctive generational patterns in the US. But broad forces, such as the experience of discrimination and the universal desire for belonging, equity, and safety, have also contributed to a unifying set of goals and aspirations across AAPI communities.

AAPIs’ shared history and ongoing experience of racialization is a potentially unifying force, with many AAPI organizations working independently and sometimes collaboratively around related social justice issues. Regardless of national origin, early immigrants from Asia faced arduous periods of racial discrimination and systemic injustice in education, voting, homeownership, and naturalization. Their history in this country is marked by immigration restrictions, forced incarceration during WWII, surveillance and profiling in the aftermath of 9/11, backlash to economic competition and global events, and hostile challenges to the loyalty of Asian Americans.¹⁴ Viewed as perpetual foreigners, Asian Americans have been regarded with suspicion as “others” rather than as Americans. Pacific Islanders also face a distinct set of challenges arising from the remnants of US territorial expansion

and are sometimes viewed as others even on their native lands. Anti-Asian racism is not new, but the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the danger.

Yet remarkably, it is precisely this shared experience of anti-Asian intolerance that yields the potential to catalyze change in today's urgent new era of racial reckoning. As funders listen to the field and explore how to construct an impactful response to this crucial period, philanthropic leadership and program staff should consider three key questions:

- What are the strengths and gaps of AAPI organizations that are working to advance belonging in AAPI communities? How might philanthropy help fill identified gaps and support existing efforts?
- In what ways might cross-racial solidarity with other groups combating structural racism, particularly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous organizations, help advance collective interests? How might an intersectionality lens, one that considers the role of women, LGBTQ people, people with differing abilities, and other marginalized groups, play a role in conceptualizing these coalition efforts?
- What short- and long-term investments in organizational infrastructure, research, and communications might be needed to promote relevant policy conversations and advance these strategic goals?

BOX 2

What Does “Belonging” Mean to AAPIs?

Research shows that the notion of “belonging” carries special resonance in AAPI communities. Beyond the idea of “fitting in,” the term “belonging” conveys a political demand for the US to confront its current and historical, legal, and social treatment of Asian Americans as “forever foreigners.” Asian Americans’ quest is not to belong to the traditional racial hierarchy but to disrupt it. It is within this social and political context that the power of belonging is more fully understood. Historically, from the moment that people from Asia stepped on to US soil, their experience was marked by pervasive questioning of their place in American society and of their loyalty.¹⁵ Throughout the late 1880s, these racialized sentiments painted Asian Americans as inferior to white Americans and as a threat to the nation’s character. Asian Americans were inserted into the existing racial hierarchy, and the history of immigration and other government policies often reflected a desire to play groups against one another.¹⁶ At the same time, the power of “belonging” has a very different meaning for Pacific Islanders, whose demand for inclusion in the US polity asserts that their land was taken through war and colonial practices. Moreover, their citizenship varies widely depending on their homeland’s formal relationship with the US government (e.g., some are “citizens” while others are “nationals” or “freely associated” migrants).

Project Overview

Our research team conducted a landscape study to understand the priorities of a broad cross-section of stakeholders in the AAPI organization ecosystem and to identify current knowledge gaps. Using insights gleaned from the field, this report puts forth recommendations, opportunities to scale, and best practices for the philanthropic community, policy leaders, and other AAPI advocates to consider. We hope that funders and leaders will further develop and implement these recommendations to build inclusion and foster belonging for AAPI communities in the US.

BOX 3

How We Did This

Between February 2021 and April 2021, our research team conducted a landscape scan to learn more about the priorities and challenges of AAPI organizations. Our scan consisted of a literature review, interviews, focus groups, and survey analyses identifying more than 400 AAPI stakeholders that we grouped into 13 broad categories (see figure 1 and the appendix for descriptions and the types of organizations in each category).

Researchers invited a cross-section of AAPI stakeholders to participate in 24 interviews and four focus group meetings. The findings draw from participant responses to questions about their organizations' missions, successes, leaders and collaborators, challenges and barriers, cross-racial collaboration, funding support for AAPI issues, and challenges and gaps in supporting community efforts.

We also developed and administered an online survey of AAPI organizations to understand their priorities, needs, capacities, areas of expertise, and challenges. This survey was not intended to be representative of all AAPI organizations. Rather, survey participants were recruited from a targeted outreach list created by the team and experts in the field and from direct outreach to relevant contacts, professional networks, and email groups for AAPI-focused organizations. The survey collected 103 responses representing 21 states and the District of Columbia. Most respondents had a local or grassroots (44 percent) or national (33 percent) focus. Moreover, the majority of respondents' organizations had been established for 15 years or more (59 percent) and had less than 10 employees (57 percent).

Overall the shares of interview, focus group, and survey participants from each state were California (31 percent), District of Columbia (20 percent), Maryland (8 percent), New York (8 percent), Pennsylvania (4 percent), Massachusetts (3 percent), Minnesota (3 percent), Washington (2 percent), Delaware (1 percent), Georgia (1 percent), Louisiana (1 percent), Michigan (1 percent), New Mexico (1 percent), Oregon (1 percent), Texas (1 percent), Virginia (1 percent), Wisconsin (1 percent), Florida (1 percent), Missouri (1 percent), North Carolina (1 percent), Ohio (1 percent), Rhode Island (1 percent), and not in a single location or not reported (6 percent). These states hold the majority of the AAPI population in the US.

FIGURE 1

AAPI Organizations Identified in Scan, by Type

The landscape study identified more than 400 organizations from the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) ecosystem, a vast and diverse space where individuals, groups, and organizations are committed to empowering, protecting, and advancing AAPI communities. Because such an ecosystem has not previously been documented, the Urban Institute grouped these actors into the 13 broad categories below, with the size of each block reflecting the relative number of stakeholders in each category.

The scan identified a range of stakeholders and sought to reflect the breadth and diversity of this space along multiple dimensions. However, because the analysis focused on civic and civil rights groups, the findings do not provide a comprehensive or representative snapshot of the entire universe of organizations working to advance AAPIs. Selected stakeholders were invited to participate in the study's interviews, focus groups, and online survey.



Organization examples

The different types of organizations and some examples of those within different categories are listed here.

Civic, direct service, grassroots, and labor

Census, civic education, and voter registration groups; community and economic development services (e.g., ESOL instruction, food stability, housing assistance, and job training/workforce development); domestic violence organizations; mutual aid providers; naturalization and immigrant-serving organizations; and networks organized by cause (e.g., racial justice, immigration reform, or common funding source), geography, or race or ethnicity

Civil rights, legal, and advocacy

Civil rights and public policy advocacy organizations, legal aid clinics, and legal defense funds

Business, economics, and trade

Chambers of commerce; corporate employee affinity groups; corporations, businesses, sole proprietorships, and start-ups; and small-business associations (e.g., restaurant owners)

Member, professional, or interest-based groups

Alumni associations; ethnicity-based organizations; heritage organizations; interest-based groups (e.g., parent associations or AARP); and leader, networking, or professional development organizations

Arts/culture and historical

Culinary arts; history organizations, historical societies, and historic preservation organizations; literary arts; museums; performing arts (e.g., dance, music, and theatre); and visual arts (e.g., architecture, film, and photography)

Government

AAPI advisory councils to local government, AAPI state legislative caucuses, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, and governors' commissions on AAPI affairs

Political

501(c)(4) or political advocacy organizations, political action committees, political organizations, political parties, and pollsters

Media

Journalism and social media (e.g., blogs) as well as advertising, marketing, and public relations

Philanthropy

Community and family foundations, giving circles, and social venture funds

Academics, research, and data

Academic or education-related organizations; Asian American studies centers; graduate or professional-degree schools (e.g., law); and university departments (e.g., American history, Asian American ethnic studies, education, film, and psychology)

Religious

Faith institutions and related nonprofits

Influencers

Activists; public speakers; and celebrities, personalities, and social media influencers

Student

AAPI graduate-student organizations (e.g., Asian Pacific American Law Student Association); AAPI student unions; scholarship funds and programs; and student-centered resource centers, offices, and programs

Source: Authors' analysis.

Throughout our research (which coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic), new reports of hate crimes and acts of discrimination targeting Asian Americans continued to appear on stakeholders' radar. Among these incidents, two high-profile mass shootings involving AAPIs occurred in Atlanta, Georgia, and Indianapolis, Indiana. The Urban Institute observed AAPI responses to anti-Asian incidents and the formation of new organized efforts to fundraise, form street patrols, and pool resources. These incidents and AAPI communities' responses to them were an important part of the period in which the study took place.

Key Challenges and Recommendations from the Landscape Study of Organizations Working toward AAPI Belonging, Safety, and Equity

A number of common themes emerged from our interviews, focus groups, review of the literature, and survey analysis. For AAPIs, arduous histories affected the formation of early US communities, while a unifying force has shaped an ecosystem of diverse AAPI communities sharing a collective demand for safety, belonging, and equity. Our work also identified common challenges, most notably the historic and ongoing experience of racism, patterns of marginalization within and across AAPI communities, and systemic difficulties in accessing resources to confront these and other challenges.

Urban researchers learned that these themes and challenges give way to opportunities to capitalize on AAPI diversity to build equity; to reshape the landscape of AAPI advocacy work by reimagining research driven by disaggregated data; and to advance policies that protect and support AAPI communities and their right to belong. Our researchers also identified opportunities to break down silos and tap into the unifying force to advance movements and build political power, to forge cross-racial solidarity with groups sharing the traumatic experience of racism and white supremacy, and to create a long-term funding model and new pathways for philanthropic investment for impact and scaling.

Based on the landscape study, this report lays out six recommendations supported by evidence and coupled with proposed actions:

1. Support efforts aimed at advancing policies that matter to AAPI communities.
2. Drive a national, multisector effort to improve research on AAPIs, including high-quality disaggregated data.
3. Create or support a national platform and convenings to strengthen existing connections and enhance collaboration among AAPI organizations.

4. Use public education and media communications to shift the public narrative on AAPI communities.
5. Invest in the power of multiracial coalitions by strengthening collaboration and coordination between AAPI organizations and other historically marginalized groups.
6. Address the need for increased funding support for AAPI organizations and more equitable flows to those at the grassroots and local levels.

Each recommendation begins by describing the challenge, why it is important, and the potential of addressing the issue. Then we present evidence and insights gleaned through our survey, interviews, and focus groups on how the AAPI ecosystem views the issues. Lastly, each recommendation proposes concrete actions to address these challenges across different policy areas, based on evidence and expertise in the field.

BOX 4

A Moment for Change: Opportunities for Action

President Biden signed his Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government in his first day in office, making racial equity a top priority for his administration.¹⁷ The executive order calls for a systematic approach to address inequities in federal government policies and programs that serve as barriers to equal opportunity. Further, the president announced actions to respond to the increase in acts of anti-Asian violence and to advance safety, inclusion, and belonging, and he signed another executive order reestablishing the White House Initiative on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders, which is charged with coordinating and advancing federal efforts around AAPI discrimination.¹⁸

Philanthropists, corporate leaders, and other stakeholders looking to support or advance the goals of these executive orders can look to the recommendations in this study for insights to inform and align their strategic investments.

Recommendation 1: Support Efforts Aimed at Advancing Policies That Matter to AAPI Communities

Advancing policies that benefit AAPIs begins with an investment in community civic engagement. Lack of AAPI political mobilization by candidates and political parties is a long-standing feature of US politics (Wong et al. 2011). Although Asian American voter turnout has increased since the 2016 election cycle,¹⁹ Asian Americans remain underrepresented in the electorate and in elected office.²⁰ Policy influence also requires the capacity to build an AAPI issue agenda. Even as AAPI communities have become more diverse in national origin, immigration history, language, religion, and culture, a remarkable level of agreement has emerged on issues such as the environment, health care, government programs to address economic inequality, and gun control—crossover issues that are of great importance to many demographics in the larger political landscape (Wong and Shah 2021). But the policy issues of greatest importance to AAPI communities do not always see the light of day. Strategic investments in AAPI-focused policy research and development can help advance evidence-based policies that matter to AAPIs, especially AAPI subgroups whose priorities often go unseen at the policy table.

Key Findings

Throughout our survey, the policy issues that AAPI communities said were “extremely overlooked or underinvested in” were

- poverty and inequality (reported by 69 percent of respondents);
- political action, engagement, representation, and power and coalition building (68 percent);
- racial equity; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and representation (63 percent);
- civil rights, including antihate, antidiscrimination, and voting rights (62 percent);
- LGBTQ issues (62 percent);
- health, health care, health insurance, or mental health (59 percent);
- justice system reform (59 percent);
- workforce development, employment, and labor issues (59 percent);
- immigration and immigrants, including undocumented, refugee, and asylee rights (57 percent); and
- women or gender issues (57 percent).

I think there was the emphasis on Dreamers and talking about the valedictorians and the one that got into medical school. Well, what about the undocumented students who didn't have access to financial aid and who couldn't go to college or those who had to work to support their families? Because they didn't have access to benefits like food, health insurance, things of that nature.

—Leader in AAPI civil rights, legal, or advocacy organization

Actions

Funders, governments, and other stakeholders can support efforts aimed at advancing policies that matter to AAPI communities.

- **Articulate and advance a collaborative, multi-issue AAPI policy agenda.** Invest in the development and amplification of an AAPI policy agenda similar to the National Council of Asian Pacific American's platform and parallel efforts in other communities such as the Black Economic Alliance agenda (BEA 2021; NCAPA 2020). Public opinion research that shows converging attitudes and alignment among AAPI communities on various policy priorities can help guide this agenda. Despite community diversity, research reveals strong policy concordance:
 - » **Environment matters.** The 2020 Asian American Voter Survey shows that 80 percent of registered Asian American voters reported that the environment was a "very" or "extremely" important issue to them in the November elections, ranging from 74 percent of Chinese voters to 89 percent of Indian voters.²¹
 - » **Health care matters.** Data from the 2016 National Asian American Survey show that relative to the general US public, larger shares of registered Asian American voters support the Affordable Care Act and believe the federal government should increase income taxes on people making over a million dollars a year (Ramakrishnan et al. 2016).
 - » **Government programs to address economic inequality matter.** Data from a 2012 Asian American Survey by Pew showed that 55 percent of Asian Americans preferred "bigger government with more services" over "smaller government with fewer services" (Pew Research Center 2013). Just 27 percent of white Americans had the same preference for a bigger government with more services. Nearly a decade later, findings from the 2020

Asian American Voter Survey confirmed these trends, with all Asian American national-origin groups preferring the former over the latter.²² Data from the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey indicate that 73 percent of Asian Americans compared with 63 percent of white Americans believe middle-class families should get a tax cut by having the wealthiest families pay more in taxes.²³

- » **Gun control matters.** In national polls, Asian Americans consistently outpace the general public in supporting gun control measures.²⁴
- **Fill the knowledge gap on AAPI public opinion and policy views.** Fund public opinion data collection through grant-supported surveys, reports, infographics, and short briefs on AAPI attitudes toward the environment, health care, gun control, and a public social safety net—all strong consensus areas in AAPI public opinion. Many AAPI community organizations and members of AAPI communities may not be aware of converging attitudes among diverse segments around these issue areas.
- **Advance from attitudes to policy messaging and action.** Although convergence around these issue areas is clear in public opinion research, AAPI-specific messaging and opportunities for activism have been less developed. These shared interests can be a starting point for building a recognizable AAPI policy agenda. Conveners and convening opportunities can help transform shared opinions into concerted action by providing clear guidance on actionable steps for organizations and their members on consensus issues and by awarding grants to several stakeholders in support of “coordinated, policy-focused campaigns” rather than to a single organization (Locke and Fine 2016). Funders and other organizations seeking to support the ecosystem can catalyze the movement- and power-building potential of grassroots work by organizing these forums, investing in community organizations, and building bridges in areas of consensus within AAPI communities and across racial groups.
- **Target economic inequality.** Because poverty and economic polarization affect groups of all national origins, addressing economic inequality is another area of strong shared policy interest among AAPIs. For example, in a study of AAPIs in California, Southeast Asian and Pacific Islanders had the highest overall rates of people working while struggling with poverty, while Chinese, Indian and Filipino Americans constitute the largest raw numbers of AAPIs working and struggling with poverty (Ramakrishnan et al. 2019). Further, street crimes against Asian Americans tend to occur in ethnic enclaves (i.e., Chinatowns, Japantowns, and others), that are more economically disenfranchised.²⁵ Programs and funding to address economic inequality within AAPI communities can be attached to ongoing antiviolence initiatives that

recognize that incidents such as the 2021 Atlanta shootings were the result, in part, of the economic vulnerabilities faced by AAPI workers.

- **Target housing policy.** Recent housing studies suggest that one of the consequences of the persistent racism and othering of AAPIs is that AAPI communities experience disinvestment.²⁶ At the same time, residents face discrimination and are sometimes displaced from their communities. Compared with white Americans, AAPIs experience different treatment in the housing market, such as when seeking information on available property and during efforts to view available properties.²⁷ Although overt racism against AAPIs in housing has declined, evidence remains of subtle discrimination, such as a landlord or broker agreeing to meet with an AAPI homeseeker and then providing less helpful information. By investing in high-quality, affordable housing for AAPIs with low incomes and advancing policies that support investments in historically AAPI communities, stakeholders can promote housing security and stability among AAPIs, in particular those with low incomes. Further, policymakers should ensure that fair housing protections extend to AAPIs at all income levels.
- **Target policies affecting AAPI youth.** Although much of the attention on surveillance and policing in schools has focused on young Black people, recent evidence suggests that Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander youth were routinely profiled by police and national security personnel as well.²⁸ Even though Asian American youth on average succeed in school, their school experiences are not without challenges: many AAPI youth report that school climates are often unwelcoming. As such, more attention needs to be paid to the educational experiences of AAPI youth to ensure that they are protected from racialized surveillance and policing and that they attend schools where they have a sense of belonging.
- **Support civic engagement around policies affecting AAPIs.** Consider grants to support civic engagement to press decisionmakers on AAPI policy interests, including year-round voter registration programs for groups that can expand in-language capacity to maximize outreach. Language access remains a barrier to AAPI political participation.²⁹

Recommendation 2: Drive a National, Multisector Effort to Improve Research on AAPIs, Including High-Quality Disaggregated Data

AAPIs face significant disparities across a spectrum of issues, including health, education, political representation, and access to government programs and services. Advocacy efforts aimed at changing policies and practices to address these disparities require a better understanding of the complexity of needs and priorities in AAPI communities. More and better disaggregated research and data are paramount to understanding such diverse communities because those tools enable decisionmakers to home in on the needs of underrepresented groups such as Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders; Southeast Asian Americans; youth; and refugee populations, such as displaced Bhutanese and Burmese people. Without high-quality, population-specific data, unique AAPI stories are too easily reduced to stereotypes, needs are overlooked, and investments are not well targeted. Absent robust data, AAPI organizations often rely on their own small-scale data collection, which is irregular and limited by a lack of training, capacity, and funding. Further, the data are often national and are not localized.

Stakeholders described the need for relevant policy-oriented research, such as basic information on key indicators that are routinely collected by government agencies. For example, the interactive 2019–2020 National Health Interview Survey tool, produced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, provides drop-down tabs for accessing data on white, Black, and Latinx people’s health status,ⁱ health care use, and health behaviors, but the tool does not provide drop-down tabs for accessing data on AAPIs.³⁰ The American National Election Study, funded by the National Science Foundation, includes a less robust sample of Asian American respondents (who are interviewed in English only) that cannot be analyzed with confidence alongside the white, Black, and Latinx population samples.³¹ The Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s COVID Data Tracker shows that Asian Americans as a whole are accessing vaccines at rates higher than their share of the population, but these data are not disaggregated, potentially concealing gaps in vaccine access for certain AAPI subgroups.³² These data do not allow for targeting specific Asian American or Pacific Islander communities in vaccine access programs that are tailored to their language, geography, and other characteristics.

ⁱ This report uses the term “Latinx” to refer to people of Latin American ancestry. We use this term to be more inclusive because it is not gender specific.

Key Findings

- Lack of access to disaggregated data on AAPI communities significantly impedes the ability of AAPI organizations to provide needed resources to the communities they serve and to bring attention and support for policies addressing the needs of underrepresented subgroups. The 2020 Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators Study Survey was only conducted in English and Spanish.³³ Although it found that Asian Americans were the racial group least likely to say they would respond to the decennial census, the study most likely vastly underrepresented Asian American reluctance to participate because it was biased toward English speakers, who are most familiar with and likely to fill out a census form. A biased sample that was not disaggregated by national origin made it very difficult for Asian American communities to address barriers to Census inclusion.
- Approximately two-thirds of respondents in the Urban Institute survey reported that data and research gaps in the (1) issues and (2) measures captured, (3) a lack of geographic granularity, and (4) the frequency of research and data collection are extreme challenges in working to advance AAPI communities. Lack of disaggregated research and data was an even more frequent concern, with approximately three-quarters of survey respondents citing the issue as an extreme challenge. A specific example of these challenges is that community organizations were not publishing self-reported hate incident data broadly or consistently between 2002 and March 2020, so capturing the breadth of the problem and identifying target priority areas was difficult.³⁴ Further, official government data on hate crimes are substantially lacking.³⁵ Consequently, it is nearly impossible to conduct a longitudinal study to accurately assess the level of bias incidents that Asian Americans faced nationally before the pandemic compared with the current year. Instead, researchers must rely on survey respondents' recollection of such incidents prior to 2020, which may be less accurate than consistently collected data.
- In the Urban Institute survey, respondents said that data, polling, and research on AAPIs was overlooked as a priority for advancing AAPI communities (72 percent felt the issue was “extremely overlooked”). Further, three-quarters (76 percent) reported that a lack of data and research was extremely challenging in working to advance AAPI communities. For instance, even in 2019 (before the pandemic), detailed data collection in California revealed that Hmong were the group in that state with the highest rates of individuals working but struggling with poverty (44 percent; Ramakrishnan et al. 2019). Yet because of their population size, Chinese Californians constituted the largest share of AAPIs working and struggling with poverty. This type of detailed data helps advocates better explain both the complexities of AAPI poverty and how to direct resources.

It's really hard to paint a story of why people should invest in our communities because people will just think: model minority, you don't have any needs. The data [are] not even disaggregated. So, without that investment in data and more advocacy and power building, I don't think we'll ever be able to really tell our story and advocate for our own needs.

—Leader in AAPI philanthropic organization

I think that as we look at this aggregate data, it's not just about numbers, it's about racial equity. It's about the numbers accurately reporting what the conditions of these communities [are], the challenges that they face.

—Leader in AAPI political organization

Actions

Invest in the production and analysis of high-quality data and research needed to provide granular information about AAPI communities, inform advocacy and public policy, and improve funders' ability to track and evaluate the philanthropic investments channeled to AAPI-led organizations.

- **Invest in AAPI-focused data collaborators.** Identify organizations, academic centers, and research institutions with expertise in AAPI communities and demonstrated commitment to using community-engaged methods to develop new and disaggregated data. Grant programs should invest in research on civic engagement, policy attitudes, health disparities, involvement with the criminal justice system, attitudes about race, poverty, inequality and wealth, labor and work experiences, immigration experiences and attitudes, and barriers to occupational mobility (Stafford 2010).³⁶ Grant programs should include requirements for conducting or translating research in AAPI languages and formats that can be easily consumed by media, policymakers, and advocates.
- **Invest in the advocates of AAPI data disaggregation.** Support AAPI-focused advocates who can encourage elected officials and government agencies to advance the collection of high-

quality data on AAPIs. Organizations can partner with other communities pursuing parallel efforts to improve data use and disaggregation and learn from best practices (Kauh, Read, and Scheitler 2021; Rubin et al. 2018). Research and policy work can help make permanent the reestablished White House AAPI initiative’s directive to support AAPI data collection across the federal government and to maintain a hub or user-friendly page that includes data on AAPI federal employees.³⁷ For example, the National Center for Health Statistics conducted the National Health Interview Survey of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in 2014 to identify the health challenges and community needs that were obscured in other data because of small sample sizes and lack of disaggregation (NCHS 2017).

- **Foster strategic collaboration and engagement around disaggregation.** Facilitate greater engagement between AAPI researchers, funders, and policymakers to encourage advocacy and action on behalf of AAPI communities by providing training grants that focus on the production and use of research evidence in policy, especially for grassroots community organizations. The William T. Grant Foundation has taken a lead in this area through its Research Grants on Improving the Use of Research Evidence program.³⁸ Collaborate with the “use of research evidence in policy and practice” funding community to support programs that encourage researchers with expertise in AAPI communities to develop strong relationships with advocates and decisionmakers and to identify activities that help research findings inform policy (Farley-Ripple, Oliver, and Boaz 2020).
- **Innovate in the data disaggregation space.** Develop or support policy think-tank efforts that could be an incubator and centralized hub for developing evidence around policies of specific relevance to AAPIs, including immigration, economic polarization, and antidiscrimination. Funders can help scale up and support established efforts, build out initiatives or centers at established organizations, or help start new organizations. The Pew Research Center’s Hispanic Trends Project provides a replicable model: it has a clear mission “to improve public understanding of the diverse Hispanic population in the United States and to chronicle Latinos’ growing impact on the nation,” as well as robust leadership and staff support.³⁹ Established efforts that could be expanded include AAPI Data, the Institute for Asian American Studies, the Asian American Studies Center at UCLA, and the Center for the Study of Asian American Health at the NYU Medical School.
- **Partner with federal data leaders.** The federal government can also invest in AAPI-focused research and data initiatives following the model of the National Research Center on Hispanic

Children and Families and current plans to establish a Center for Research on African American Children and Families.⁴⁰

- **Support community-engaged work.** Target grant programs to community-engaged methods research that addresses the needs of underrepresented AAPI communities (including Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders, Hmong, Cambodians, Indonesians, Bangladeshis, and Bhutanese) as well as community organizations that work with low-income or marginalized occupational segments of the AAPI population in community-based research partnerships using best practices (McElfish et al. 2019). Grassroots and local organizations often have strong ties to underrepresented groups in the community and often collect data on the communities they work with. Investing in these organizations provides an opportunity to build connections from the ground up and to create pathways for local and grassroots groups to partner with community and national organizations to support and strengthen data collection and analysis. National and community-based AAPI funders can also help support grassroots organizations and their research and evaluative activities by providing training and technical assistance.
- **Advance data systems, policy research, and AAPI polling.** Track real-time AAPI policy opinions through sponsorship of surveys and policy-oriented research programs. Funders can support efforts by advocates, academics, and researchers to better understand, measure, track, and share AAPI opinion and support for key, cross-cutting policy issues.⁴¹ They can also create research grants to support demographic analysis and policy-relevant research agendas.⁴² For example, researchers identified increases in Asian American health insurance coverage after the implementation of the Affordable Care Act and projected that repealing the law would decrease coverage (Gunja et al. 2020).⁴³ Other work has identified lower homeownership rates for AAPIs and the continued challenge of housing discrimination against AAPIs that call for greater federal enforcement of fair-housing laws.⁴⁴ Other promising areas include research on language provision in the Voting Rights Act and Asian American and Pacific Islander mental health-seeking behaviors (Fraga and Merseth 2016; Choi and Miller 2014). Quality data and research are needed at the local, state, and national levels for different issues AAPI communities face to persuade governments and funders to address them. National statistics on pressing AAPI issues are unlikely to influence state and local elected officials who care most about AAPI data and concerns for their jurisdictions. Lastly, data can be used to dispel myths and effectively mobilize communities around issues.

Recommendation 3: Create or Support a National Platform and Convenings to Strengthen Existing Connections and Enhance Collaboration among AAPI Organizations

Convening is essential to formulating and advancing advocacy work. AAPI stakeholders are rich in diversity and often coalesce around ethnic communities, geographic regions, industries, issue areas, and alliances. Cross-sector convenings through national conventions, trainings, or events are possible, but participants often stay bound to tight networks, and crossover between silos is limited. To be clear, stakeholders report that organizations in the AAPI space collaborate, but this collaboration is mainly driven by personal connections and tends to be sporadic or ad hoc. Although social media has generally made convening easier, convening across silos remains a weak spot in the AAPI ecosystem. Many grassroots organizations with small budgets would benefit substantially from systematic efforts to include them in cross-community convenings that would help them grow their strategy and leadership capacities, spread promising ideas and approaches, and reduce duplicative efforts.

Supporting the organizational ecosystem also requires a dialogue to address systemic challenges in philanthropy, such as the needs and priorities of Pacific Islander and other marginalized subgroups, and it requires pursuing strategies to invest in infrastructure and capacity building for smaller and grassroots organizations that support these communities. Stakeholders and organizations generally felt that much good work is occurring in the AAPI space, and it is important for funders to not duplicate efforts. Rather, they feel there is a need to coordinate and consolidate efforts to help underrepresented communities and overlooked issues and organizations. Stakeholders also highlighted inadequate infrastructure and the need to develop capacity for activities such as communications and leadership pipelines in the AAPI nonprofit and advocacy space and to develop connections with other fields, such as business, government, philanthropy, and media. Efforts to convene, connect, coordinate, and break down silos across AAPI organizations can help foster greater investment in the ecosystem and support movement building and the development of policy agendas that unify and advance AAPI communities.

Key Findings

There is a systemic challenge to distributing financial resources to organizations that are distanced from central networks and relationships. In the nonprofit sector overall, the largest 5 percent of

nonprofit organizations account for nearly 88 percent of the expenditures in the sector⁴⁵—the AAPI ecosystem is no different.

It would be helpful if we had one central place where people convened, and we literally lock the door, saying, 'You're not leaving until we find a way to do this together.' It's not to discount the diverse voices that exist in the community. It's just to be a little bit more effective in honing our messages. ...We would be better off if we had three to five key things that we really need and want to help foundations, governmental agencies, nonprofits, and corporations steer their dollars and their resources effectively.

—AAPI leader in business, economics, or trade organization

Not all AAPI groups access funding equally. For example, East Asian organizations tend to get more funding than [South East] Asian organizations, certain South Asian organizations get more funding than low-income [South Asian] communities, and [Pacific Islanders] do not get adequate resources at all.

—AAPI leader in civic, direct service provider, grassroots, or labor organization

Actions

Build and expand dialogue and strengthen connectivity and collaboration between AAPI organizations across sectors.

- **Invest in AAPI ecosystem builders.** Cultivate and fund “ecosystem builders” or backbone organizations to steward the ecosystem of organizations working to advance belonging. The Kauffman Foundation, for example, is performing such a role in the entrepreneurship space.⁴⁶ Organizations or leaders playing this role can facilitate the major operations necessary for dialogue and collaboration toward the collective goal of belonging and prosperity by providing the glue that bonds participants to collaborative action. They can provide the infrastructure,

support, and leadership required to steer the collaboration and hold participants accountable; they can also coordinate and activate the work of grassroots organizations. For example, similar to an ecosystem builder, the Advancement Project delivers a two-tiered approach: on the local level, it provides legal, policy, strategic campaign, and communications support, and on the national level, it helps weave a racial justice movement.⁴⁷ This can serve as a model for the AAPI organizational ecosystem. Alliance for Asian American Justice is a newly formed group of law firms nationwide that launched a pro-bono initiative to aid targets of hate crimes.⁴⁸ Integrating the legal group's efforts into an AAPI version of the Advancement Project is a potential way to bring cohesion to the different services involved in the community's response to hate crimes.

- **Facilitate access and connectivity within the AAPI ecosystem.** Maintain an online directory of self-reporting national and local AAPI organizations to capture the breadth of the ecosystem, including the new groups that have emerged in the past year, elevate the visibility of all AAPI organizations, and render the ecosystem in a visual form. Make the directory searchable by organization attributes such as theories of change, constituencies, history, structure, budget, staff and volunteers, programs, impact, and funders and partners. Doing so will allow visitors to export reports showing different slices of the community. Feature different AAPI organizations to raise their profiles, especially community and grassroots organizations. Similar to the Catalogue for Philanthropy, select reviewers from different fields to choose the AAPI organizations from a pool of applicants.⁴⁹ To level the playing field for AAPI organizations serving underrepresented groups, create separate judging categories (e.g., by budget size).
- **Facilitate strategic dialogue and collaboration that breaks down silos.** Convene stakeholders across a rapidly growing ecosystem, an invisible and diverse mass of connections, by crossing the sector boundaries of profession, industry, geography, organization type, interest areas, or group membership. With broad representation in mind, be strategic in bringing together different stakeholders, fostering engagement and connectivity, and breaking down silos. These forums also provide an opportunity to bring down barriers across racial groups; learn from their efforts; and foster cross-racial collaboration, coalitions, and alliances. Provide funding support for financially constrained stakeholders to participate at the table, particularly groups engaged in grassroots movement building and community engagement work. Support an inclusive and equitable agenda by sponsoring workshops and conferences around issues or communities with traditionally limited visibility, including AAPIs whose political voices are often marginalized (such as LGBTQ people, women, people with disabilities, members who

face intra-group discrimination, and AAPI organizations based in regions where AAPIs are experiencing population growth, such as the Midwest and the South).

- **Invest in putting a cross-section of AAPI issues, including intersectional issues, on the radar.**

Address the range of interconnected challenges that low-income AAPIs face by supporting networks of community-based organizations that address communities' needs. These issues include affordable housing, education, financial security, community and small business development, and racial solidarity.⁵⁰ These organizations often coordinate and collaborate at the local and state levels and across racial lines with allied, grassroots groups working to address the same issues. Link funding to address economic inequality within AAPI communities to existing antiviolence initiatives that recognize that incidents such as the 2021 Atlanta shootings were partly the result of the economic vulnerabilities of AAPI workers, white supremacy and nationalism, the intersection of gender and racism, and the vulnerabilities of AAPIs as immigrants and workers in low-paying service industries.

Recommendation 4: Use Public Education and Media Communications to Shift the Public Narrative on AAPI Communities

The public narrative on AAPIs is full of distortions, myths, and stereotypes that stymie the goal of ending anti-Asian sentiment. Despite AAPI's contributions to this country, they are still considered perpetual foreigners and seen as parties to geopolitical threats or challenges and rivalries that are beyond their control. They are plagued by racialized tropes that include portraying them as diseased, uncivilized, exotic, emasculated, or docile. And the model minority myth positions Asian Americans as being smarter and more industrious without recognizing the disparities across communities, continued underrepresentation of AAPI subgroups, or how their success stories are used to undermine Black Americans in particular.

The American public holds little understanding of the diversity, history, and humanity of AAPIs and how they can be scapegoated during times of crisis. Recent media coverage of the intensification of anti-Asian rhetoric and attacks on AAPI communities underscore the perils of this prevailing public narrative. But investing in public education and strategic initiatives, campaigns, and multiracial coalition-building can counter the prevailing narrative and promote belonging and equity by communicating the humanity and diversity of AAPI communities and their many contributions to American life.

Key Findings

- Approximately 83 percent of respondents to the Urban Institute survey reported that limited public or general knowledge of AAPIs and AAPI issues was extremely challenging to the advancement of the broader community, and another 13 percent reported that the issue was somewhat challenging.
- More than one-third of all participants in the Urban Institute's interviews and focus groups called for disrupting stereotypes that surround AAPIs so that minorities are not pitted against each other. They called for narratives that lift up and examine the diverse histories of AAPIs within the broader context of race relations in US history. This work includes collaborative and cross-racial work that is being done through educational curricula, social media, film, advertising, and other tools.

It's a white author master narrative of who the Asian American is, the perpetual foreigner, the model minority. And so, the success, I think, of the Asian American media community has been, a part of like writers and like journalists, has been a part of rewriting that narrative through our own lens.

—Leader in AAPI media organization

I actually would like to see more ethnic studies, more ... programs that teach us the history of the people in the United States, so that every one of the groups can see themselves in the American fabric.

—AAPI leader in academic, research, or data organization

Actions

Invest in public education and media communications to shift the public narrative on AAPI communities, issues, and history.

- **Invest in organizational capacity for AAPI storytelling.** Build local organizations' voice and capacity, enabling them to carry out public education awareness programs to dispel long-held myths about AAPI communities by highlighting their diversity across geography, language, education, immigrant experience, and politics.⁵¹ This could take the form of programming and infrastructure grants to support communications and other capacities (Inouye et al. 2012).⁵² These investments could fund activities such as presentations to communities and local government officials, media training for organizational leaders and members, and website and media development grants that allow for digital hosting. They could also help support professional production and editing of videos and build on educational materials that have already been developed through efforts such as the Asian Americans Advancing Justice curriculum and lesson plans and tools hosted by other organizations.⁵³ A good model for this type of coordinated local campaign is the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center's data equity campaign, which coordinates state and local efforts around the collection of high-quality data on Southeast Asian American communities through regular convenings and strategy sessions

and the development of shared campaign materials such as briefs, toolkits, and infographics.⁵⁴ Another model is the We Are Sikhs initiative of the National Sikh Campaign, a public relations and marketing campaign that includes TV commercials, news stories, digital advertising, and social media engagement.⁵⁵

- **Support AAPI knowledge hubs.** Draw upon and invest in organizations such as the Association for Asian American Studies, a hub for historical, social, cultural, and economic research on AAPI populations in higher education.⁵⁶ However, these types of organizations are often underresourced: the association currently operates with no permanent staff and no physical location. Partner with academic institutions, especially Asian American Studies programs or centers, or national organizations, to house and staff these kinds of knowledge-producing associations. For example, the African Studies Association has such an arrangement with Rutgers University.⁵⁷
- **Invest in AAPI-focused college curricula.** There are more than 70 Asian American Studies units (departments, programs, centers) in US colleges and universities.⁵⁸ These programs are distinct from Asian Studies units in that they offer a dedicated curriculum on the experiences of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the US and have consistent course offerings taught by faculty specialists. These units often owe their existence to student demands for courses that include rigorous content on Asian American histories, communities, and cultures. Investing and expanding these programs and AAPI-serving institutions through funding focused on student-faculty research projects, cocurricular programming, scholars-in-residence programs, postdoctoral fellowships, and grants to support collaboration between Asian American Studies units and other Ethnic Studies programs on the same campuses will enhance the learning experience of tens of thousands of students each year.⁵⁹
- **Invest in AAPI curricula for K–12 schools.** Support curriculum development for K–12 schools and teacher training on Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies and greater integration of AAPI history in education on American history.⁶⁰ Fund and coordinate campaigns seeking to adjust existing frames, and implement these curricular options through legislative or administrative action. For example, Illinois recently passed a mandate that public schools teach Asian American history (Lin and Gupta 2019).⁶¹
- **Strengthen AAPI perspectives and content in mainstream media.** Promote a new narrative through mainstream media content development, such as the PBS series *Asian Americans* and accompanying curriculum, and through deeper engagement with ethnic media channels, especially ethnic social media.⁶² Consider adopting investment models (like the California

Heath Care Foundation’s sustained, long-term support for health journalism) and apply them to AAPI-focused journalism.⁶³ Fund formal media trainings for AAPI organizational leaders as the Asian American Journalists Association has done for the AAJA Studio, and make these resources available broadly.⁶⁴

- **Strengthen the AAPI social media and news media voice.** Strengthen the presence of AAPI organizations in social media, especially over ethnic-based social media platforms. This is an important way to counter voter-suppression efforts and divisive falsehoods that are driven by disinformation campaigns and flourish in these spaces. Support programs that encourage reporting on AAPI communities and issues, including efforts such as the Report for America fellowship program that enabled the *Sacramento Bee* to create an “Asian American community beat.”⁶⁵ The fellowship trains a reporter and brings hundreds of stories on the AAPI population to the *Bee*. And bolster training programs and opportunities to support editors and journalists in ethnic media with greater adherence to normative journalistic standards, such as conflict-of-interest disclosures and fact-checking norms.⁶⁶

Recommendation 5: Invest in the Power of Multiracial Coalitions by Strengthening Collaboration and Coordination between AAPI Organizations and Other Historically Marginalized Groups

Several stakeholders we interviewed recognized the benefits and power of multiracial coalitions but also acknowledged the internal and external challenges that come with navigating complex issues across ethnicities, migration histories, language needs, generational divides, and class differences. Several stakeholders identified the internal challenge of racial bias within the AAPI communities. And several interviewees highlighted the external challenges posed by the model minority myth, the perpetual foreigner narrative, the lack of trust and knowledge about the AAPI communities, and the need to foster a shared space where AAPIs are not used as a “wedge” between other minority groups and dominant groups.

Tapping into the unifying force that binds AAPI communities can help drive social transformation both within and beyond the communities. Forging solidarity across allied groups and bringing a racial equity lens to different issues such as poverty, housing, and the environment can advance social justice issues for AAPI organizations and their allies. By working together, multiracial coalitions can align skills and resources including funding, advocacy efforts, networks, media outreach, and legal expertise to advance justice. And in doing so, funders can help break down barriers, build trust, and promote collaborations among groups who will benefit most from addressing inequities in the United States.

Key Findings

- More than half (56 percent) of respondents to the Urban Institute survey reported that *some* of their work is in collaboration with or focuses on non-AAPI allied communities, and roughly one in five (19 percent) said *most* of their work was with or concentrated on these communities. Additionally, 8 percent of these AAPI stakeholders reported their organization’s primary racial or ethnic focus was on non-AAPI racial and ethnic groups and allies.
- Approximately two-thirds (64 percent) of respondents to the Urban Institute survey reported that racial equity; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and representation were a major focus of *their organization*.

- In the Urban Institute survey, respondents identified the following advocacy issues, all with strong potential for cross-racial collaboration, as being extremely overlooked or underinvested in for AAPI communities:
 - » Political action, engagement, representation, and power and coalition building (68 percent)
 - » Racial equity; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and representation (63 percent)
 - » Civil rights, including anti-hate, anti-discrimination, and voting rights (62 percent)
-

Many issues are not seen as ‘Asian issues.’ Immigration is a Latinx issue, race is a Black issue, there's a lack of language that is truly inclusive of Asians.

–Former leader of AAPI civil rights, legal, or advocacy organization

We can't win anything alone and there's no system that actually just only impacts the Asian American community. And if we're trying to look at systemic change, then ... it's about learning how to build formations that know how to move in solidarity.

–Leader in AAPI civic, direct service provider, grassroots, or labor organization

It's also making sure that the racial solidarity work that we do is actually built on substantive engagement with each other. ...We need to acknowledge very plainly that we do have racial bias within our community, that no community is immune to the predominant narrative, the racial racist ideology that has been baked into the founding of this country.

–Leader in AAPI civil rights, legal, or advocacy organization

Actions

The power of coalition can propel social justice for AAPI communities and their allies, but it requires strategic navigation and support.

- **Support cross-racial collaboration with the civil rights establishment.** Build on existing collaborations and coalitions among Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and AAPI organizations to strengthen the work in the civil rights and civic engagement space.⁶⁷ Trust and allyship can amplify the work and needs of AAPI organizations, fostering the exchange of ideas among multiracial organizations and increasing the representation in the racial and social justice space. Support connections and coordination between AAPI civil rights and civic organizations and leaders of other civil and immigrant rights coalitions, such as the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, NALEO Educational Fund, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and the National Immigration Law Center, to develop strategies and initiatives to advance existing AAPI initiatives. Coordinating and ensuring the integration of multiracial coalitions from the national to local levels will increase the potential and value of cross-racial collaborations. Support could be provided to the Leadership Conference's grassroots outreach efforts to strengthen them and to connect the chapters and affiliates of national AAPI organizations with local multiracial coalitions.
- **Invest in models and tools for solidarity work.** Invest in AAPI-led organizations that focus on building racial solidarity such as the Asian American Organizing Project, which has developed tools and trainings to address anti-Blackness, Black and Asian alliance, transformative justice, power, privilege, and racial trauma.⁶⁸ Invest in organizations committed to working collaboratively with Black, Latinx, and Indigenous leaders to advance culturally relevant organizing, learning, and leadership practices such as Voices for Racial Justice.⁶⁹ Other replicable models include the Asians for Black Lives initiative, a landmark response to the call for multiracial solidarity in the Black Lives Matter movement, and efforts by groups like South Asian Americans Leading Together that have expressed support for Black Lives Matter and raised the need to address anti-Black racism within AAPI communities.⁷⁰ On the philanthropy side, the Horizon Foundation's support of community organizations to receive training, coaching, and organizational development and to meet regularly within a racial equity collaborative is a good model to integrate organizations with predominantly immigrant members.⁷¹
- **Promote opportunities for solidarity, learning, and cultural adaptation.** Deepening the learning and knowledge sharing with established civil rights and civic organizations can inform

AAPI agendas and organizational strategies by connecting civic engagement to issues important to AAPI communities and ensuring approaches are culturally adapted. Key areas of deeper learning and integration could include voting rights, civil rights, antiracism, immigration, and educational equity.

- **Partner with organizations that do strategic coalition work.** More support is needed for AAPI organizations pursuing litigation strategies, because they do not yet have robust legal defense funds or teams that would enable them to expand into litigation across racial issues. The American Civil Liberties Union is an example of a potential collaborator that has a track record of successful advocacy and litigation aiming to secure and protect the rights of women, LGBTQ people, and voters.⁷² Invest in local initiatives to strengthen connections for AAPIs between different policy issues and civic engagement. Partnership efforts can learn from models such as the Latino Community Fund Georgia, which has partnered with local organizations to educate Georgia voters on key issues leading up to the 2020 elections.⁷³ This type of work helps to make the connections between people's day-to-day lives; evolving local, state, and federal policies; and election outcomes.
- **Invest in grassroots networks organized around unifying issues.** Support localized efforts in areas of consensus by backing new initiatives as well as by growing and scaling existing networks and actors. Funders can strengthen and expand existing networks of national, state, and local AAPI organizations around areas of consensus, such as the immediate concern with hate crimes. Models with successful track records include the Coulter Consortium funded by the Coulter Foundation and the Shared Liberation Network funded by the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund. These organizations have supported key state and local leaders with strategy development, funding, and implementation assistance around select issues such as the census count, civic engagement, and racial equity work.⁷⁴ The networks serve as incubators for smaller organizations to grow their capacity and funding until they too can assume state and local leadership roles. State and local organizations within these networks also have relationships with counterparts serving other racial groups through their collaborations on shared priorities such as the census count, voting and other civic engagement, and racial equity.⁷⁵ Supporting AAPI networks accomplishes two goals: it invests in the member organizations and the cross-racial networks, which leverage existing resources, and it enables communities to unite around common causes and build grassroots power.
- **Build a collaborative infrastructure around cross-issue movements.** As a part of a strategy to invest in the ecosystem of AAPI organizations, funders can partner with movement hubs. One

example of this is Solidaire Network's initiative to support and strengthen a Black movement ecosystem through the Black Liberation Pooled Fund.⁷⁶ This fund has made significant investments in Black-led social change organizations and movement building around the country by investing in the development and sustainability of movement infrastructure and in grassroots organizers. Similar efforts can build on the leadership and infrastructure provided through initiatives like the Racial Equity Anchor Collaborative, a broad-based collective of racial equity organizations that includes the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum.⁷⁷

- **Invest in centering the people at the margins.** Invest in programs and centers that focus on building inclusion and belonging across other overlooked groups, such as Youth UpRising and the Skyline High One Land One People Youth Center, and in AAPI queer-focused organizations, such as the Visibility Project and National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance.⁷⁸

Recommendation 6: Address the Need for Increased Funding Support for AAPI Organizations and More Equitable Flows to Grassroots and Local Organizations

Foundation funding for AAPI communities today accounts for only 20 cents of every \$100 of US grantmaking—similar to AAPI award levels three decades ago (Kan 2021). Funding for AAPI programming tends to follow on the heels of crises rather than addressing long-term needs. Consequently, a major constraint facing AAPI organizations is a lack of multiyear funding to support operations, staffing, and programs, giving them little flexibility to address emerging and long-term issues such as anti-Asian hate and belonging. Many AAPI organizations, particularly smaller ones, have limited access to funding for racial justice work that could help build capacity to highlight issues that affect AAPIs and advance policies that benefit AAPI communities.⁷⁹ However, for administrative and logistical reasons, many foundations prefer to distribute larger grant amounts to a smaller set of grant recipients rather than administer a large number of small grants.⁸⁰

Key Findings

- Seventy-five percent of the Urban Institute survey respondents cited lack of funding or funding instability as extremely challenging for advancing initiatives focused on AAPI communities.
- According to respondents to the Urban Institute survey, AAPI-targeted funding would ideally be distributed through
 - » national AAPI umbrella organizations with national and state or local representatives (31 percent of respondents);
 - » direct grants to organizations through proposal competition (22 percent);
 - » direct grants to pre-selected or invited organizations (13 percent); and
 - » regional AAPI organizations (12 percent).

So, it's not a one-time investment from one foundation, but it's a long-term investment and a long-term commitment at the same time, be able to do rapid response in a coordinated way so that foundations can give too many things that fit in their strategy, but it shouldn't be one creating a conflict between communities of color.

—AAPI leader in philanthropy

Actions

Strengthen funding pathways locally and nationally to help expand the amount of philanthropy available to AAPI organizations.

- **Invest in the national infrastructure of the AAPI ecosystem.** Currently, too few entities in the AAPI organization ecosystem are capable of delivering large sums through the organizational landscape. This leaves a disconnect between activated donors and opportunities. To ensure AAPI issues are embedded in national policy priorities and debates, funders and leaders need to invest in and grow organizational infrastructure and network builders that have helped build movements and lift up agendas in similar spaces. These institutions can act as conduits to direct sustained resources and lift up leaders in organizations doing grassroots community work that fosters engagement, attention, and power. Through the creation of one or more national-scale aggregation and regranting models, this infrastructure enhancement could bring larger philanthropic resources from corporations and ultra-high-net-worth individuals to AAPI communities. Existing models serving similar roles in the broader philanthropic space include Gates Philanthropy Partners and the Stand Together Foundation, which provide platforms for donations of all sizes.⁸¹ Other models include collaborative aggregated funding that is more focused on a smaller group of individual and institutional donors, such as Blue Meridian Partners and Co-Impact.⁸² Notably, new aggregation models in the AAPI space have the potential to align with efforts to promote racial justice across racial lines. Much like the recently launched Anti-Racism Response Network, any new funding aggregation initiatives should coordinate or collaborate with the foundations and funds currently working to dismantle structural racism in an intersectional way to avoid replication and to leverage the impact of the work.⁸³ Examples of the existing philanthropic efforts in this space include Ford, Kellogg, and Groundswell.
- **Invest in the local infrastructures of the AAPI ecosystem.** Community foundations play vital roles in their regions because of strong relationships with donors and deep knowledge of local nonprofits. They also have a critical role in providing infrastructure and support for collective giving at the local level that, if enhanced, can increase the level and accessibility of funding for grassroots organizations. Because of the foundational work of Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy and others to establish a national campaign to build a movement of giving circles toward AAPI communities, a rich network of giving circles exists in several cities with funds housed at and supported by the local community foundation, including the Saffron Circle at the Boston Foundation and the Arizona Asian Pacific American Women's Giving

Circle at the Arizona Community Foundation.⁸⁴ Research has documented that giving circles expand grassroots giving and directs money to causes that are not typically funded by mainstream philanthropy. As a result, giving circles can be effective tools for economic and racial justice. Currently, AAPIs make charitable donations at lower rates than other racial groups, but there is room to grow and the opportunity to strengthen giving (Ramakrishnan et al. 2020). Enhancements to the current giving circle infrastructure could include (1) greater investment to expand the number of giving circles and their access to the technical assistance and network building that organizations like Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy provide, (2) greater connection between giving circles and the Asian American Employee Resource Groups at corporations to better leverage employee donation-matching programs, and (3) integration with the growing “Give in May” pledge to bring broader visibility and growth to that effort as it continues to scale.⁸⁵

- **Channel equity-focused investment streams through high-impact intermediaries.** Direct large grants through equity-focused intermediaries to take advantage of the knowledge, connections (e.g., chapters and affiliates or community partners of national organizations such as OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates, Japanese American Citizens League, National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, and the Asian American Justice Center), and networks (e.g., the Coulter Consortium and the Shared Liberation Network’s expertise and the resources they bring to ensure that grants reach small- and mid-sized organizations) (Bamdad and Misra 2020). Intermediaries come in a variety of forms, including donor-advised funds, giving circles, community foundations, fiscally sponsored pooled funds, fund aggregators, and social ventures that allow funders to shift from a “retail” system to a “wholesale” program.⁸⁶

Conclusion

The Urban Institute's landscape study of a broad subset of AAPI organizations working in many focus areas and different geographies reveals a diverse cohort of communities whose unifying force gives shape to an ecosystem of stakeholders pursuing safety, belonging, and equity for AAPIs. Despite the remarkable diversity among AAPIs, researchers identified common challenges in the AAPI ecosystem, most notably the historic and ongoing experience of racism, distinctive patterns of marginalization and intersectionality within and across AAPI communities, and systemic difficulties in accessing resources to confront these and other challenges.

The evidence points to the need invest substantially in programming and actions designed to advance equity for AAPIs by filling in gaps in knowledge and data and to build the capacity of mission-driven nonprofits and grassroots organizations in the ecosystem. Targeted, flexible investments and creative approaches could strengthen the capacities of AAPI organizations, develop new opportunities for cross-sector coordination and collaboration to increase knowledge and access to resources, and drive programs and services aimed at meeting the critical and evolving needs of AAPI organizations in sustainable ways. Notably, funders could bring their investment model in alignment with the priorities and missions of AAPI organizations and the articulated needs of the communities they represent.

With the complexity of issues confronting AAPI subgroups, including disparities within and across AAPI communities, evidence points to the urgent need for coordinated, multisector investments in disaggregated research data. Illuminating and understanding the many disparities that marginalized AAPI subgroups face in housing, health, education, income and wealth, and other areas is the first step toward finding equitable solutions in policy and practice.

Funders, policymakers, and other agents of change could better target resources to AAPI national and local organizations to advance equity and inclusion within and across AAPI communities. Evidence-based strategies can guide and strengthen efforts to help AAPI organizations tap into the power of coalition and multiracial solidarity to advance social justice work across groups. Similarly, local, state, and federal governments could do more to identify gaps in resource access and thereby make smarter, community-informed investments to address them. For example, in light of stakeholder concerns over new and old forms of anti-Asian sentiment and a public narrative that degrades AAPI life, policymakers could prioritize funding to public education designed to counter this negative narrative and focus on the humanity, complexity, and contributions of AAPIs.

Evidence points to new opportunities to capitalize on AAPI diversity to build equity, advance movements and build political power, forge cross-racial solidarity with groups sharing the traumatic experience of racism and white supremacy, and reshape philanthropic investment for greater impact and scale for AAPI organizations. At this pivotal time of social justice awareness and action in the US, opportunities exist to advance policies and practices to support AAPIs and their right to belong, to be safe, and to be heard and valued in the national conversations on race and racism.

Appendix: Categories of Organizations Identified in the Landscape Scan

Table A.1 describes 13 broad categories that the Urban Institute grouped the ecosystem of actors working to advance AAPI communities that were identified in the landscape scan.

TABLE A.1
Organizational Categories Identified in the Landscape Scan

Organizational category	Description
Academics, research, and data	Provides the research and data that more accurately depict AAPI communities and serves as the basis for policy advocacy.
Business, economics, and trade	Contributes industry captains, workers, and consumers that render AAPIs visible as key economic drivers.
Civil rights, legal, and advocacy	Serves as the champions for fair and equal treatment and inclusion of AAPIs in law and society. Though the areas the organizations cover are broad, the number of organizations and staff are few and underresourced.
Civic, direct service providers, grassroots, and labor	Delivers frontline support to community members, ranging from basic needs to health care, naturalization, and voter registration. They also create a pipeline to community building, empowerment, and solidarity activities.
Arts/culture and historical	Captures and reflects the diverse experiences of AAPIs, such as their origins and American stories, which transmute into a collective identity that can be celebrated or rallied.
Government	Reflects AAPI government representatives and symbols of pride for a rapidly growing population demanding to be recognized as a political force.
Influencers	Serve as the lighthouses within local and national communities for information, connections, or mobilization.
Media	Reports stories that are inclusive of people of color, bringing culturally competent viewpoints.
Member, professional, or interest-based groups	Efficient communication channels that convene large numbers from communities.

Philanthropy	Channels private resources to AAPI organizations that are underfunded, views communities from a higher level, and elevates issues for public awareness.
Political	Endows the AAPIs in politics and government with the capital and power base to influence change.
Religious	Represents an emerging voice in race and social justice.
Student	Provides organizers and convening spaces to address community issues and share AAPI history largely still not taught in educational institutions.

Notes

- ¹ Throughout the report, we use the term “AAPIs” when referencing contexts and situations impacting or related to AAPI communities broadly. We use the more narrow “Asian American” and “Pacific Islander” terms when referring to issues and circumstances that are more specifically related to one of these groups.
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