REPORT

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Stepping Up for Community Amidst COVID-19, Xenophobia, and Violence:

A SURVEY OF NONPROFITS SERVING ASIAN AMERICANS, NATIVE HAWAIIANS, AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed stark inequities in many aspects of American society including economic opportunity, access to healthcare, access to childcare, ability to navigate public systems, and more. Asian American (AA) and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities were adversely affected by the pandemic in distinct ways because of the rising xenophobia and ongoing invisibilization of their people, resulting in rising anti-Asian hate as well as COVID-related deaths and struggles that were not seen or not counted in the public's eye. Amidst all that happened during the pandemic, the first responders for many AANHPI communities were the nonprofits that held close relationships with their community members.

AAPI Data partnered with Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP) to conduct a first-of-its-kind survey to capture the experiences of nonprofits serving AA and NHPI communities – who they are, the challenges and barriers they experienced, and how they met the moment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This brief is part of a multi-part series on this survey. In the coming months, AAPI Data will contextualize these results with an analysis of data from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to better understand how the nonprofit landscape has changed in the last 5 years, with the creation of new organizations, and the growth, decline, and departure of existing organizations. AAPI Data will also conduct follow-up interviews with a selection of respondents to better understand how nonprofits have navigated opportunities and challenges concerning funding, staffing, services, advocacy, and collective impact.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Most AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits rose to the challenge of serving more clients and expanding their geographic reach. The infusion of grant revenues, individual donations, and government contracts enabled them to meet the emergent needs of their communities.

> The vast majority of survey respondents received financial assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

> AANHPI nonprofits expanded services and community support during the pandemic.

> Current priorities for AA and NHPI communities include violence prevention, mental health support, language access, and disaggregated data.

> Lack of funder knowledge about AA and NHPI communities and lack of prioritization of AA and NHPI needs rating as the most significant barriers.

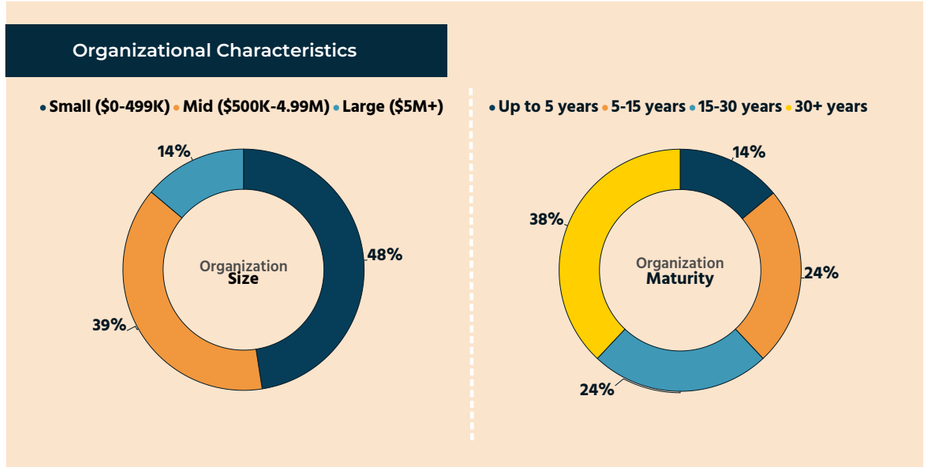
> Philanthropy has a critical role in the future of AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits and the communities they serve. How funders can help:

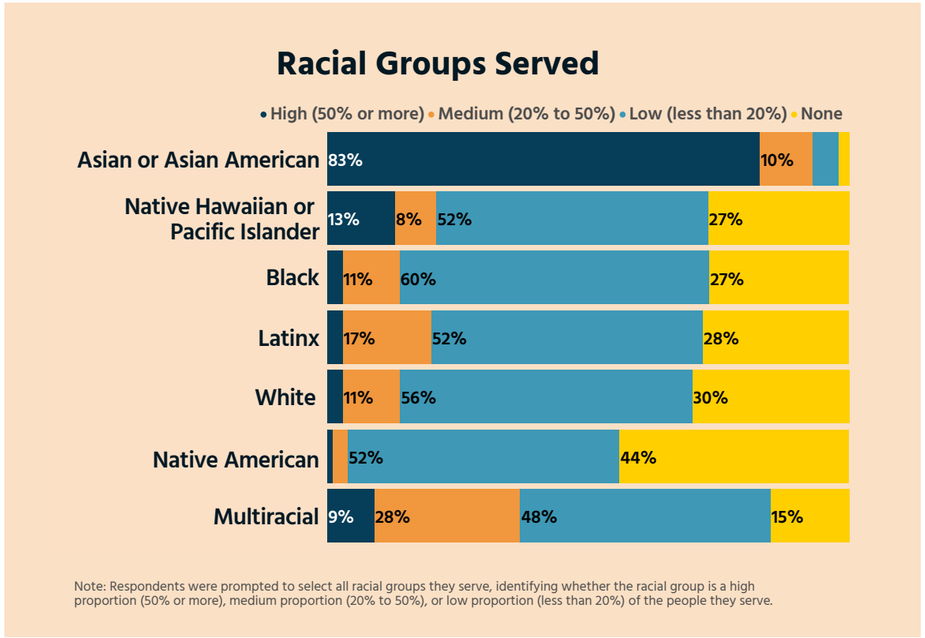
- Do the homework on understanding AA and NHPI nonprofits and the communities they serve.
- Support visibility of the experiences and concerns of AA and NHPI communities.
- Invest in AA- and NHPI-focused nonprofits, particularly smaller organizations.
- Invest in the long-term capacity of AA- and NHPI-focused nonprofits.

WHO RESPONDED TO THIS SURVEY?

AAPI Data employed a hybrid approach to drawing up a sample. First, AAPI Data obtained the sample list from Candid, the most comprehensive U.S. nonprofit information service, a mailing address list of over 12,000 organizations that have Asian, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities in their mission statement, activities, or populations served. The research team confirmed each organization as serving AA or NHPI populations through a manual review, which resulted in the removal of over 5,000 organizations that had no indicators of serving AA and NHPI communities in any significant capacity (see online Appendix for methods). Next, AAPI Data and AAPIP leveraged existing lists and networks to recruit additional AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits to participate. A total of 393 unique nonprofits responded out of about 8,000 who were invited to participate, representing a response rate of approximately 5 percent.

To our knowledge, this is the largest national survey of AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits to date. Nevertheless, there are important limitations to the survey sample. These are organizations that have survived the pandemic and have the bandwidth to complete an extensive survey. Organizations received the call to respond through existing lists maintained by Candid, AAPI Data, AAPIP, and AAPIP's regional chapters. There was an open call through AAPI Data and AAPIP's social media channels and networks as well. Philanthropy-engaged organizations were more likely to receive the call to participate than those who did not have existing relationships with philanthropic institutions. Finally, the survey offered a raffle of $500 and $1,000 prizes to organizations eligible for the 2023 Give in May campaign, a partnership of Asian Pacific Fund and AAPI Data. Eligibility requirements included (i) having been in operation for a minimum of two years, (ii) status as an independent or fiscally sponsored 501(c) (3) organization, and (iii) having at least 51% of those served as Asian American or Pacific Islander.





IN THIS SAMPLE:

Asian American Communities Served

Chinese (26%)

Japanese, Filipinx, Asian Indian, Korean, Vietnamese (9%-11% each)

Cambodian, Hmong, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Taiwanese, Lao (4%-6% each)

Burmese, Indonesian, Thai, Nepalese, Bhutanese, Iu-Mien, Khmu, Malaysian, Mongolian, Sri Lankan (1%-3% each)

IN THIS SAMPLE:

Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Communities Served

Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Marshallese, Tongan (4%-6% each)

Chuukese, Guamanian, Fijian, Palauan, Northern Mariana Islander, Saipanese, Yapese (1%-3% each)

WHAT HAS BEEN THEIR PANDEMIC EXPERIENCE?

The past three years have been a time of painful recognition of how vulnerable AANHPI communities are. They have also been a time of hope as the contributions and struggles of AANHPI communities are gaining visibility. The COVID-19 pandemic, the Atlanta spa murders, Trump-era xenophobia, and media attention on anti-Asian hate have activated resources and new ways of working in service of AA and NHPI populations.

This survey focuses on the experiences of the AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits. For more than 30 years, AA and NHPI nonprofits have received only 0.2% (or $0.20 out of every $100) of funding from private philanthropy (Seeking to Soar, AAPIP, March 2021). At a time when simply keeping the doors open is a struggle, what has been the experience of AA- and NHPI- serving organizations?

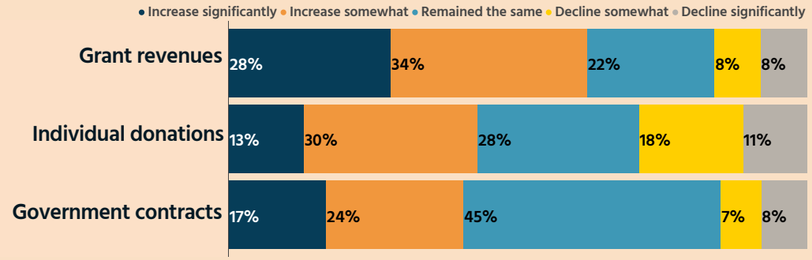
At a high level, the results confirm the narrative of what the pandemic asked of nonprofits across the country: Most AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits rose to the challenge of serving more clients and expanding their geographic reach. The infusion of grant revenues, individual donations, and government contracts enabled them to meet the emergent needs of their communities. This survey illuminates the experiences of the AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits that have survived the pandemic, with early insights on how to further support them moving forward.

I. The vast majority of survey respondents received financial assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic

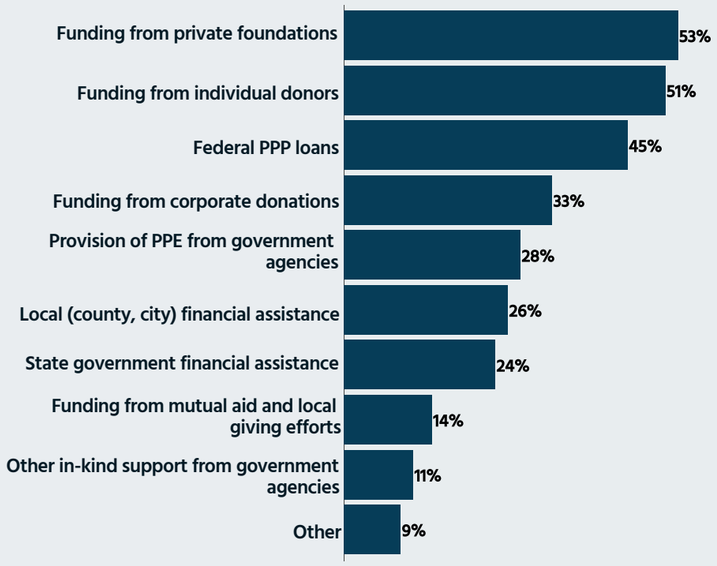
More than three-quarters (77%) of survey respondents experienced increases in grant revenue, individual donations, or government contracts between 2020 and 2022. These increases were most likely from grant revenues. More than half (57%) of organizations saw increases in revenue from more than one stream.

The three most common sources of financial assistance that respondents received during the COVID-19 pandemic were private foundations, individual donors, and Federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans. Corporate donations and public assistance from the local and state levels were also important.

Changes in Funding Between 2020 and 2022



Sources of financial assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic



Note: Respondents were prompted to select all that apply.

II. AANHPI nonprofits expanded services and support during the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic and anti-Asian hate our communities experienced in recent years have pushed AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits to offer new services and serve greater numbers.

Expanding the scope of services. Many nonprofits pivoted to addressing key needs during the pandemic, especially at a time of widespread unemployment, social isolation, and xenophobia and violence directed against AA and NHPI communities. According to the survey, the top five ways in which nonprofits extended their competencies include social media engagement (69%), telehealth services (59%), mental health support (55%), support reporting hate /incidents (48%), and interpretation/translation (45%). Many organizations reported expanding the scope of their services to meet emergent needs

> An Illinois senior adult daycare organization evolved its program to a home visit model, serving older adults in their own homes.

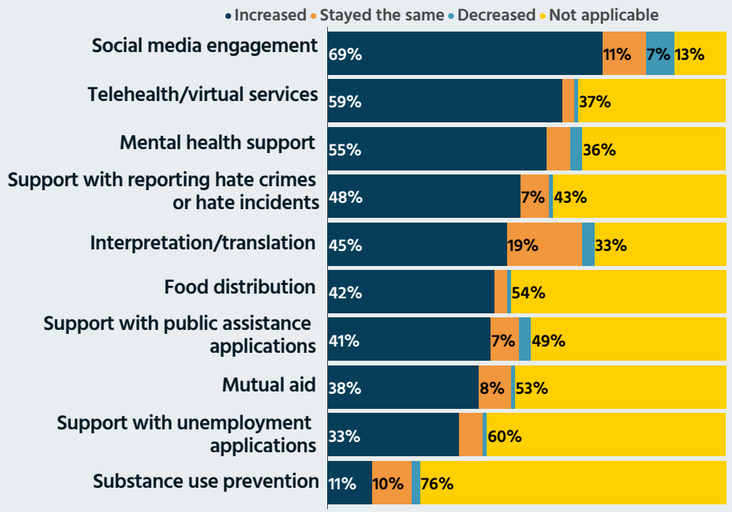
> A Japanese cultural center in California started a senior adult day program and an infant care center and a preschool.

> A Southeast Asian nonprofit in Indiana offering English and citizenship classes began health support and women's groups.

> A Nevada nonprofit focusing on voter registration and civic engagement started distributing food, COVID-19 vaccines, and flu shots. They have since expanded their scope of services to permanently include health and medical care.

Serving more people. A majority of nonprofits (61%) surveyed reported increasing the number of clients served during the pandemic. One quarter reported decreasing the number of clients served and 14% reported remaining the same. In terms of geographical reach, 57% reported expanding their geographical reach, 31% remained the same, and 13% experienced declines in their geographical reach. Respondents reported expanding a variety of services during the pandemic including telehealth virtual services, mental health support, and reporting of experiences with xenophobia and violence. Other important supports offered during the pandemic included interpretation/translation, food distribution, and assistance with seeking public assistance and unemployment insurance.

Changes in Services during the COVID-19 pandemic



III. Current priorities for AANHPI communities include violence prevention, mental health support, language access, and disaggregated data

The survey asked respondents to select priority issues for state and local governments to address in service of AA and NHPI communities. In line with the key needs that arose during the pandemic, most respondents selected anti-AA and anti-NHPI violence prevention and support (66%), mental health support (65%), language access (63%), and disaggregated AA and NHPI data (56%) as top priorities.

TOP AANHPI PRIORITIES:

- Anti-Asian or anti-NHPI violence prevention and support
- Mental health support
- Language access
- Disaggregated AA and NHPI data

CULTURE, LANGUAGE, AND MENTAL HEALTH

Several AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits reported responding to the significant mental health tolls of COVID-19 and the heightened xenophobia and violence. These organizations saw the need to address trauma, anxiety, isolation, lack of socialization, depression, and loneliness.

AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits filled in the gap in culturally relevant, in-language mental health supports. They helped break the stigma of mental illness and connected community members to the support they needed. One small nonprofit in Tennessee reported serving a breadth of populations in over 100 languages, including AA and NHPI communities. They offer on-staff capacity in Mandarin, Eastern Indian, and Korean, with connections to other languages through a network of interpreters. They focus on the need for culturally responsive mental health support for everyone.

Other priorities selected by respondents included applying for public support (34%), education (30%), cash assistance (22%), and food distribution (20%).

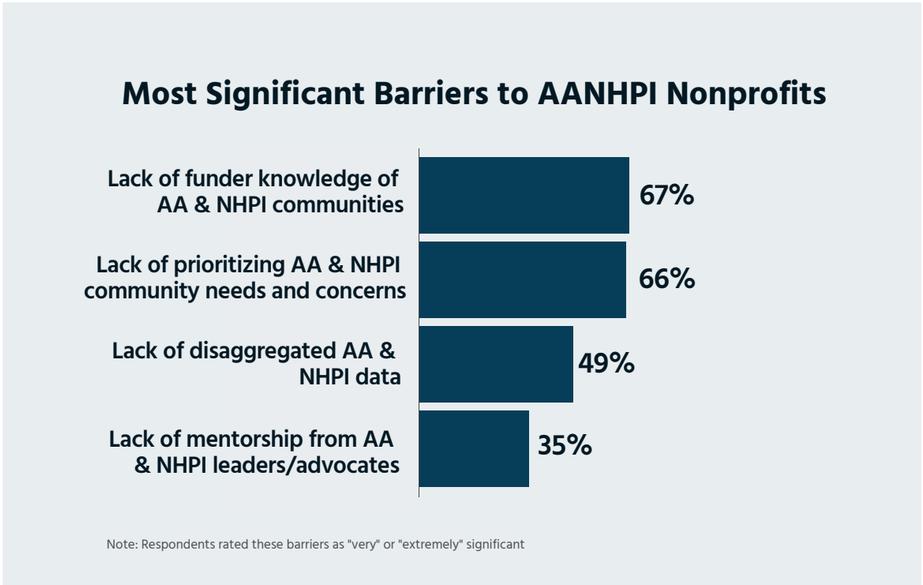
When examining differences by organizational characteristics, mid-sized nonprofits had a higher share of selecting disaggregated data and language access than small nonprofits. Primary populations served also made a difference in the priorities that nonprofits identified. Nonprofits serving Southeast Asians were more likely to select disaggregated data as a top priority than nonprofits serving East Asians, consistent with ongoing concern that the experiences of Southeast Asian populations are often masked by the aggregate data typically offered for Asians and Asian Americans. NHPI-serving nonprofits had the lowest share of selecting anti-Asian or anti-NHPI violence prevention as a priority than all other groups but had the highest share of selecting food distribution than East Asian- and South Asian-serving nonprofits.

IV. Lack of funder knowledge about AANHPI communities and lack of prioritization of AANHPI needs rating as the most significant barriers to AANHPI nonprofits achieving their missions

AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits have weathered a maelstrom of challenges in recent years, as all nonprofits have. And yet, their experiences were acute due to the longstanding invisibilization of AANHPI communities and disinvestment in AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits, while they navigated the rise of xenophobia and the health and economic disparities that were increasingly evident. Looking ahead, what do these organizations see as the most significant barriers to achieving their missions?

According to survey results, respondents were most likely to select lack of funder knowledge about AANHPI communities (67%), lack of prioritizing AANHPI community needs and concerns (66%), and lack of disaggregated data (49%) as the most significant barriers. About one-third of respondents also selected the lack of mentorship as a barrier.

Looking at organizational characteristics, mid-sized nonprofits were more likely than small nonprofits to rate lack of funder knowledge, prioritizing AANHPI needs and concerns, and disaggregated data as barriers. A larger share of Southeast Asian- and NHPI-serving nonprofits reported significant barriers in the lack of disaggregated data than East Asian-serving nonprofits. Southeast Asian-serving nonprofits were also more likely to report the lack of mentorship as a significant barrier compared to East Asian-serving nonprofits.



V. Philanthropy has a critical role in the future of AANHPI-serving nonprofits and the communities they serve

Philanthropy has a critical role in the future of AANHPI-serving nonprofits and the communities they serve. In particular, respondents identified four key ways in which funders can start on this journey with them: (1) do the homework on understanding AA and NHPI nonprofits and the communities they serve, (2) support the visibility of the experiences and concerns of AA and NHPI communities, (3) invest in AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits particularly smaller organizations, and (4) invest in the long-term capacity of AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits. As one respondent underscored that now is the time for philanthropy to step up:

> "The sunsetting of the Wallace H. Coulter Foundation will have a profound impact on the AAPI community because Coulter has been the largest and most consistent funder to grassroots for the last 15 years. [Coulter] has fostered the development and stability of many groups throughout the United States and California because they have created an ecosystem... The Coulter Foundation has provided stable and multi-year funding for civic engagement and other Foundation and government support will be needed."

RECOMENDATIONS

Do your homework to understand AA and NHPI nonprofits and communities

> **Understand that burden of educating others on AA and NHPI issues is heavy.** "Stop rewarding and tokenizing certain leaders, which helps create more inequity. Stop making grants that feel... like trauma trolling. I know the harm, the generational trauma, and the violence of assimilation our people suffer. Still, I do not want to share it with every funder just to receive a token amount of what we requested to do real work and heal our communities." (Washington)

> **Come to the table as an active partner in identifying strategic fit and navigating grant processes.** "The lack of understanding about the diversity of the AA and NHPI communities makes relationship building and clarity around strategies difficult to communicate. We often have to navigate perceptions of our communities, including model minority ingrained perceptions, when applying for grants. The language from philanthropy often returns to AA and NHPI communities' lack of ability to properly navigate philanthropic systems." (California)

> **Look beyond traditional due diligence metrics – understand the context and see the potential.** "Be attentive to the landscape, be creative, be local, and be willing to take on some risk. A grassroots organization that just pulled itself together might not be able to furnish two years of operating history and audited financial statements but $1,000 or $5,000 at the right moment could help ignite something with lasting effects. There is a real "last mile" problem in connecting policy work and advocacy with local communities and we need a stronger ecosystem of local organizations if we're going to affect generational change for everyone." (New Jersey)

Lean into trust-based philanthropic practices in recognition of the challenges faced by AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits

> **Acknowledge biases against AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits exist – they don't get the benefit of the doubt and they are not seen as experts.** "Funders often are biased against Asian-led or BIPOC-led nonprofits believing that we are unable to perform or deliver on the deliverables, thus we get little funding. However, white-led organizations can underperform but continue to get funding. Funders need to allow the community or nonprofit to tell them what the solutions are rather than tell the nonprofits... to change their services to meet the requirements of the funder. I'm tired of being told how to help my community. Leaders of the agencies know best what the solutions are." (Wisconsin)

> **Reduce the burden of process and recognize that they are spread thin.** "Multi-year, trust-based, general operating philanthropy [is needed]. We carry a heavy load in New Mexico and there is more need every day. The amount of reporting and application writing takes away significantly from the time we can spend with clients and serving the communities on the ground." (New Mexico)

Invest directly in AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits, particularly smaller organizations.

> **Be attentive to gatekeepers – when intermediary organizations add value and when they reinforce inequities."**

- Look harder for AA and NHPI organizations/leaders in under-organized communities instead of just giving resources to unrelated organizations that exploit the lack of AA and NHPI organizations to apply for funding intended for our community." (California)
- "There need to be separate funding lines for AA and NHPI in requests for proposals. It's not acceptable for Asian-dominant organizations to continue receiving funding intended for NHPI if those organizations do not have any NHPI staff, board members, or programming targeting NHPIs." (Southwest region)

Invest in the long-term capacity of AA- and NHPI-serving nonprofits

> **Be the one who offers flexible funding to support long-term capacity needs and break the starvation cycle.** "Philanthropy can help with operating costs, more flexible programming, and less meticulous reporting that government funding can be strict about." (California)

> **Recognize the "language premium" that exacerbates the starvation cycle for AA and NHPI nonprofits**. "Lack of recognition that CBOs provide first line defense in a health or social crisis and that the ability to provide critical services is dependent on the ability to effectively communicate in clients' native languages. There is a fragmented translation system in public agencies that does not engender trust among clients. CBOs do not get recognized or are [charged] a 'premium' for providing basic social services in clients' native languages." (California)

> **Recognize cultural and linguistic competency as valuable skills – and support AA and NHPI organizations in their efforts to compensate accordingly and retain talent.** "Currently many nonprofits face difficulties with hiring and retaining culturally and linguistically competent staff who can sustain our programs oriented towards addressing our community's needs and interests." (New Jersey, New York).

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Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP) is a justice-minded national philanthropy serving organization that provides unique community spaces for Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and allies in philanthropy.

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