



# **AAPIs Connect: Harnessing Strategic Communications to Advance Civic Engagement**

**AAPI CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FUND & UCLA CENTER FOR NEIGHBORHOOD KNOWLEDGE**

**2020**



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## Executive Summary

Stories have always been the most compelling way to motivate people to participate in the democratic process and change the hearts and minds of everyday individuals. The explosion of digital communications platforms has expanded opportunities and given rise to new approaches to reach and activate diverse audiences. Unfortunately, these new platforms have also become vehicles for fomenting intolerance, fear, and misinformation as well as isolating and cementing divisions among communities. America is both more connected and more disconnected.

In these times, when hate and violence are on the rise, stories of communities mobilizing together against injustice or inhumane policies are urgently needed. Too often the voices and spirit of progressive Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are absent in any such public discourse. Meanwhile, there is a false narrative of the AAPI community as apathetic or conservative.

With the goal of supporting greater narrative power for AAPIs, the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund is pursuing a multipronged strategy that enables a cohort<sup>1</sup> of local AAPI groups to craft and promote stories by, for, and about the community by assessing their needs and building their capacity. The first step toward this longer-term effort is the development of a joint report with the UCLA Center for Neighborhood Knowledge that surveys the AAPI communications landscape. Part of a larger project at the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund supported by the MacArthur Foundation, this report may also be helpful to other entities that serve and engage AAPI communities.

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<sup>1</sup> The AAPI Civic Engagement Fund's cohort of grantees reaches over 30 ethnicities and groups in 17 states and thus represents a sample of AAPI nonprofit groups but in no way represents the full diversity of AAPI communities and experience in this area of work.

This report seeks to answer the following larger questions:

- What are some of the unique characteristics of the AAPI population influencing communications and community outreach?
- What strategies and practices are employed by those working to reach AAPI audiences and communities?
- What are the current strategic communications capacity, needs, and priorities of groups working with AAPIs?

The report revolves around four main areas:

- **Demographic profile on AAPIs:** Relying on publicly available census data, this section provides a picture of AAPIs focusing on media consumption and targeted outreach strategies include age, language ability, nativity, and broadband access.
- **Literature review on AAPI media consumption, community-led media, and the capacity of community groups:** Existing studies and literature provide an overview of AAPI media source preferences and the current communications capacity of community organizations.
- **Top lines from survey of AAPI Civic Engagement Fund Cohort:** Given that existing studies about how AAPI organizations practice communications are limited, this project also included a survey of the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund grantee cohort. A more detailed summary of these results along with stories from groups about their work are forthcoming.
- **Strategies, tactics, and advice from content creators, trainers, and communications practitioners:** This collection of stories, strategies, and best practices from those working in AAPI spaces helps inform outreach and collaborative efforts in the changing media landscape.

## Key Findings

### AAPIs and Media

- The AAPI audience includes at least three main audience types relating to language ability and years in the United States: (1) monolingual English, (2) bilingual, and (3) limited English proficient. To maximize impact, organizations or campaigns aimed at reaching AAPIs require resourcing and planning that consider the diversity of the AAPI audience.
- Social media has been growing rapidly. A 2018 Nielsen survey showed 83% of AAPIs report using some form of social media. Other surveys have also shown that among Asian ethnic groups, Vietnamese and Filipinx Americans are most likely to post about politics on social media at 38% and 30%, respectively.
- Only 82% of Pacific Islanders have computer access with broadband, which is a lower rate compared to that of Asian Americans (92%) and other racial groups. An additional note is that, in a survey of Californians, AAPIs do not show higher connectivity rates than other racial groups and still lag behind non-Hispanic whites in regard to access.
- AAPIs are often categorized as apathetic or less civically engaged—a reflection of historically lower voter registration and turnout rates. However, voting participation has been increasing in recent years. In addition, a few studies coupled with observations from experienced organizers and community leaders suggest that alternative methods of measuring engagement may reveal that AAPIs are equally engaged, but rather than taking part in mainstream associations are instead dedicating their time and resources to local structures and institutions outside of the mainstream, such as churches, alumni associations, and clubs, where their volunteerism and participation go unmeasured. Such findings help illustrate that it can be the structural and systemic (including race and cultural) barriers that prevent or discourage greater participation of AAPIs within mainstream processes and institutions.
- Traditional media continues to play a crucial role. It is on a relative decline but far from irrelevant.

## **Communications Capacity and Needs of AAPI Groups**

A survey of the Fund's grantees underscored that the majority of local AAPI groups have little to no strategic communications capacity or infrastructure. This includes the lack of any funding or resources to support dedicated staffing, skill building, or tools. Given that the AAPI community is not a monolith and that even within specific ethnic groups language capacity and preferred forms of media consumption vary significantly, this key finding should be alarming. Further, while AAPI groups no doubt envision greater strategic communications goals of crafting strategy, developing messages that resonate, and essentially seizing narrative power, too often their limited capacity relegates their activities to simply increasing their organization's reach to the AAPI community and promoting the availability of programs and information.

For too long, AAPIs as both individuals and a community have struggled to be seen, heard, and acknowledged. Technology offers the potential for AAPIs to be more connected with one another and to larger society, but if unaddressed, it also has the potential to exacerbate divisions and create a more disconnected America. The counterforce is to enable AAPI groups to effectively communicate stories, experiences, and insights to be heard and seen not only by one another but also by the general public and policy makers. Fostering a sense of belonging generates the motivation to become engaged. In doing so the greater social justice movement becomes vibrant, more representative, and genuinely multiracial.

## Recommendations to Funders

- **Give voice to those who are marginalized and have less access to power. Fund AAPI groups to build an infrastructure for communications to become a strategic function of their overall work.** Effective in-language work requires additional staff time and resources for interpretation, translation, and content creation to reach the most impacted community members, who face cultural and linguistic barriers to accessing information.
- **Support more studies on how AAPIs get their information and how AAPI community groups' use of communications can contribute to the testing, development, and execution of new strategies and tactics in this dynamic field.** There is a scarcity of studies that adequately capture the cultural and linguistic diversity of AAPI communities. Existing quantitative and qualitative studies have been useful in revealing some patterns; however, a well-designed quantitative approach and additional qualitative studies are needed to reveal deeper patterns and findings at a disaggregated level. Such findings would offer more meaningful analysis into group-level differences and be applicable in a variety of contexts.



## Useful Definitions

**COMMUNICATIONS** is defined as a two-sided process involving the delivery of messages and also an understanding of how individuals receive messages.

**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS** is the employment of communications to achieve a strategic goal and includes the identification of the audience and development of an effective narrative with culturally informed content (messages) and methods (including storytelling).

**TRADITIONAL MEDIA** refers to both format and audience. It includes older forms of media available before the advent of the digital age, such as print, radio, and television. Traditional media tends to be top-down and unidirectional, going from the source to readers and viewers. It is often referred to as *mainstream media* because its primary audience is white and English speaking.

**ETHNIC MEDIA** refers to both format and audience. It is aimed at the interests of a particular ethnic group and includes both traditional media sources and digital media. Sources may report in-language, in English, or both.

**DIGITAL MEDIA** includes information in any format that can be transmitted over the internet or computer networks.

**SOCIAL MEDIA** is broadly defined as any web-based community application that allows users to interact, collaborate, and share digital media. Examples of social media include websites, listservs, social networking, exchange forums, and blogs. Whereas traditional media is unidirectional, social media has the potential to foster collaboration and dialogue.



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## Introduction

### **About the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund**

The AAPI Civic Engagement Fund was established in 2014 with the mission to foster a culture of civic participation within Asian American and Pacific Islander communities by supporting the growth of AAPI groups as organizational-movement and power-building leaders that achieve specific policy, systems, and transformational change. It holds the vision that AAPIs must be an integral part of strengthening America's democracy, in advocating for improving the quality of life for all, and in creating vibrant multiracial communities.

### **About the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund Cohort**

Since 2014 the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund has supported 25 AAPI organizations in 17 states: California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington State, and Wisconsin. Some are pan-AAPI and others focus on specific subgroups (South Asians, Southeast Asian Americans, Muslim Americans, and Pacific Islanders).

All the leaders and organizers of these AAPI groups come from the very community for which the organization is focused on raising the consciousness and building the power: low- to moderate-income families and individuals, immigrants and refugees, undocumented, youth, women, seniors, LGBTQ, and limited English proficient community members. Nineteen groups (95%) are led by women as executive or co-executive directors, and in 16 groups (64%) women lead the organization's civic engagement programs.

The Fund's 2019 cohort included 18 groups of which all participated in the strategic communications survey (figure 1). Two-thirds of the groups do not have dedicated funds for communications work, and five have limited

funds. Just five groups have a full-time, paid communications person on staff; six groups rely on volunteers or part-time staff, and the remaining five have no dedicated staff to support their day-to-day communications and outreach activities.

**FIGURE 1: AAPI CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FUND 2019 COHORT**

ORGANIZATION	STATE	COMMUNITY
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Atlanta	GA	AAPI, Chinese, Indian, Korean, Muslim American, Vietnamese
APACEvotes	WA	AAPI, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese
Asian Pacific Environmental Network	CA	Chinese, Laotian, Vietnamese
CAA AV-Organizing Asian American Communities	NY	Bangladeshi, Chinese, Korean
Coalition of Asian American Leaders	MN	Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Indian, Korean, Laotian, Vietnamese
EMGAGE	FL	Arab American, Muslim American, South Asian
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities	CA/ Nat'l	Chamoru, Compact of Free Association migrants, Fijians, Marshallese, Native Hawaiians, Palauans, Samoans, Tongans
Filipino Advocates for Justice	CA	Filipino
Freedom, Inc.	WI	Black, Cambodian, Hmong

ORGANIZATION	STATE	COMMUNITY
Hana Center	IL	AAPI, Korean, Latinx, multiracial youth
Hmong Innovating Politics	CA	Hmong, Laotian, Mien, Thai
Korean Resource Center	CA	Korean, multiracial youth
Mekong NYC	NY	Cambodian, Vietnamese
New Mexico Asian Family Center	NM	AAPI, Afghani, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Nepalese, Pakistani, Taiwanese, Thai, Vietnamese
New Virginia Majority Education Fund	VA	Bangladeshi, Filipino, multiracial American, Vietnamese
OCA – Greater Houston	TX	Burmese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese
Providence Youth Student Movement	RI	Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Southeast Asian
Southeast Asian Coalition	NC	Black, Bunong, Burmese, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Latinx youth, Nepalese, Southeast Asian, Vietnamese

Figure includes all groups receiving funding through 2019 and into 2020. All 18 groups participated in the survey.

## Project Scope

The landscape analysis includes:

- Demographic profile on AAPIs to understand the diversity of and unique challenges in reaching these communities;
- Review of existing studies on strategic communications to reach AAPIs;
- Summary and top lines from a survey of the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund Cohort on the strategic communications capacity, priorities, and needs of organizations;
- Summary and top lines from interviews with strategic communications practitioners on the changing media landscape and best practices for reaching diverse AAPI communities; and
- Selected resources.

## Methodology

The analysis uses a mixed-method approach to understand the diversity and unique challenges of reaching AAPIs and the needs of the Fund's grantee partners. We approach this landscape analysis in two parts. The first part uses existing quantitative data sources and studies to highlight what we know about AAPIs and to provide a baseline understanding about the target population. The survey instrument asked closed and open-ended questions. We report top lines for some key questions and categories that emerged from the open-ended question responses. Figure 2 provides a summary of the methodological approach.

Some of our understanding on AAPI communities for this first part comes from general national surveys conducted by the federal government. This includes (1) the American Community Survey (ACS), (2) the Current Population Survey (particularly the Voter Supplement and the Volunteer Supplement), and (3) the American Time Use Survey. These surveys contain information on who has access to the internet, primary sources of information (albeit for limited purposes such as information on voluntary information), and levels of civic and

voter engagement. The surveys usually contain sufficient numbers of AAPI respondents to generate statistical estimates for AAPIs at the national level.

Most of the statistics are available through data portals, but this information has two major limitations. The first is that the format of the tables (e.g., how information is categorized and reported) is static. In other words, users have limited ability to customize the output. The second limitation is that they do not disaggregate the information for the Fund's target population (AAPI young adults, immigrants, and ethnic subgroups). Moreover, information for small geographies (particularly at the submetropolitan level) is not readily available for AAPIs.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to learning from AAPI Civic Engagement Fund grantee partners about their strategic communications work and needs, interviews were also conducted by email and in-person with practitioners who create and disseminate media content and provide technical assistance for strategic communications. Practitioners were selected using a snowball approach and shared reflections and lessons from their work in the communications and content-creation sphere.

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<sup>2</sup> It is possible to generate disaggregated estimates by using the Public Use Micro Data Samples, which contain individual records. This enables technically proficient users to produce customized tabulations. Because of limited AAPI sample size, such tabulations may require pooling multiple years of data. Unfortunately, most AAPI community groups do not have the technical capacity to conduct such an analysis.

**FIGURE 2: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

<b>1. WHAT WE KNOW</b>	<b>APPROACH</b>	<b>PURPOSE</b>
	Demographic Profile	Background statistics from the 2017 ACS to provide a profile of AAPIs; including published data from American FactFinder and custom tabulations of individual-level data from the Public Use Microdata Sample
	Review of Existing Studies on Strategic Communications	Identify existing studies that discuss (1) how the AAPI population communicates and acquires information, (2) how AAPI community organizations produce content, and (3) the communication practices of AAPI organizations
<b>2. FILLING IN THE GAPS</b>	18 AAPI Civic Engagement Fund Cohort Survey	Information on current practices, challenges, capacity, experience, and priorities relating to strategic communications
	5 Organization Interviews	Building on surveys to gain a better understanding of target population, approaches to reaching the organization's target population, challenges, and success stories
	15 Practitioner Interviews	Insights and guidance on best practices from the field of communications and content creation
	Assessment of 5 Analytical Tools and Websites to Track Reach	Identify analytical tools, how they work, what they do, and to what degree they are useful in targeting AAPIs

## Demographics: Asian American and Pacific Islander Communities

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders accounted for less than 1% of the population in 1950 but have been the fastest-growing racial and ethnic group over the last decade. In 2017, there were roughly 22.7 million AAPIs.<sup>3</sup> By 2040, the population is expected to reach a tipping point when 1 in 10 Americans will be AAPI (Ong et al., 2016a, 2016b). Like the nation as a whole, the population will age over the next quarter century, will remain majority immigrant, and will increase in diversity as the share of multiracial AAPIs grow (Ong et al., 2016a, 2016b).

**AAPIs are diverse.** This diversity is reflected in many of the socioeconomic characteristics that reveal the different needs and challenges communities face:

- Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities have high rates of incarceration (AAPI Civic Engagement Fund & Groundswell Fund, 2019).
- Well over a third of Laotian, Cambodian, and Hmong Americans did not graduate high school (AAPI Civic Engagement Fund, 2019).
- Korean Americans have some of the lowest health insurance rates at nearly a quarter uninsured (AAPI Civic Engagement Fund, 2019).

<sup>3</sup>This number represents our best estimate using a combination of 2017 ACS PUMS and published numbers on American FactFinder to adjust for the overcount from Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who identify with both groups. We provide three categories because of the way race data were collected across decades. Prior to 2000, the census only asked single race; thus, prior data are for Asians plus Pacific Islanders. The census moved to multiracial counts starting in 2000. Starting in 2000, we traced both the “alone” and “inclusive” categories used in the census. In some cases we use AAPI while in others we report Asian American and Pacific Islanders separately. This is done in trying to be accurate given limitations in data.

### **National trends in growing income inequality are also taking place among AAPIs.**

- Income data for the nine metropolitan areas where AAPIs are most highly concentrated (Boston, Chicago, Honolulu, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle, and Washington, DC) show AAPIs are overrepresented in both lower-income and upper-income categories (relative to non-Hispanic whites), which indicates enormous economic diversity by geography and economic status among AAPI groups (Ong, 2016).
- Overrepresentation in lower-income categories also translates into higher poverty rates for AAPIs than non-Hispanic whites but lower than other people of color. It is critical to note that combining all AAPIs obscures the significant economic diversity of communities and variations by age, immigration status, and geography.
- Generally, the poverty rate for AAPI elderly is twice as high as that for non-Hispanic whites (Ong, 2016). Pockets of very high poverty exist among Southeast Asian American and Pacific Islander children, and nearly half of AAPIs in poverty reside in poor neighborhoods (48%) (Ong, 2016).

**Geographically, AAPIs are highly concentrated in major urban areas.** The nine metropolitan areas mentioned above house about 60% of AAPIs (Ong, 2016). According to data from the 2017 American Community Survey, AAPIs are also disproportionately concentrated in a few states (figure 3). California and New York, the states with the two largest Asian American populations, are home to two-fifths of all Asian Americans but only one-sixth of the total U.S. population. Pacific Islanders are even more concentrated. Hawaii and California, the states with the two largest Pacific Islander populations, are home to nearly half of all Pacific Islanders but only contain one eighth of the total U.S. population. Outside of these states, AAPI populations are rapidly growing across the U.S. in states that include Florida, Georgia, Illinois, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia.

**AAPIs are moderately segregated among localities within states.** A dissimilarity index, a widely used measure of segregation, shows that to achieve full integration about 45% of AAPIs would have to move from areas where they are overrepresented to areas where AAPIs are underrepresented.<sup>4</sup> AAPI segregation is only slightly lower than for African Americans and Latinx (48% and 49%, respectively).



**FIGURE 3: CURRENT ASIAN AMERICAN AND NATIVE HAWAIIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER POPULATION BY STATE**

State	Asian Americans Living in State	% of Asian Americans Living in State	State	Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders in State	% of Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders Living in State
California	6,634,125	31%	Hawaii	366,803	26%
New York	1,917,511	9%	California	321,326	23%
Texas	1,571,986	7%	Washington	93,660	7%
New Jersey	966,405	4%	Texas	61,902	4%
Illinois	807,418	4%	Utah	48,177	3%
Washington	804,163	4%	Nevada	42,137	3%
Hawaii	797,617	4%	Arizona	36,763	3%
Florida	738,196	3%	Florida	35,683	3%
Virginia	671,849	3%	Oregon	34,697	2%
Pennsylvania	519,346	2%	New York	30,124	2%

Source: 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

<sup>4</sup> The dissimilarity index ranges from 1 to 0, where 0 denotes complete integration and a value of 1 denotes complete isolation. Values can be converted to percentages. We used 2017 1-Year ACS PUMS data and Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) geographies to capture both regional and intraregion levels of segregation. PUMAs are areas with about 100,000 persons and are defined for populations that tend to share common characteristics and local political boundaries.

## **AAPI Communities and Communications Needs**

Strategic communications is a useful tool to increase civic engagement; however, there are a number of distinct challenges facing organizations that serve and engage with AAPI communities. Roughly one out of three AAPIs do not speak English well while 41% are bilingual. Figure 4 shows language ability broken down by AAPI ethnic groups. This includes those who are monolingual English speakers, bilingual, and limited English proficient. Based on language preference and years in the U.S., these three groups comprise different audiences with both distinct and overlapping communications needs.

In terms of nativity, the majority of AAPIs are immigrants and refugees (46% naturalized citizens and 31% non-U.S. citizens). Figure 5 shows nativity by ethnic group. Differences in the experience and backgrounds of native, immigrant, and refugee groups add another layer to consider for crafting outreach that is relevant and appropriate.

Other useful points to consider for strategic communications are that the majority of AAPIs are women (52%), and the largest age group is between 35 and 44 years of age (16%). About 1 in 6 Asian Americans (16%) identify as multiracial, whereas more than half of Pacific Islanders (57%) identify as multiracial and about 21% identify with more than one racial group.

**FIGURE 4: LANGUAGE ABILITY BY ETHNICITY<sup>5</sup>**

	Monolingual English	Bilingual Speakers	Limited English Proficient
Asian Indian	23%	57%	20%
Bangladeshi	8%	46%	46%
Bhutanese	5%	25%	70%
Burmese	6%	23%	70%
Cambodian	24%	36%	40%
Chinese	20%	35%	45%
Fijian	19%	57%	24%
Filipino	35%	44%	22%
Guamanian/Chamorro	71%	23%	6%
Hmong	13%	50%	37%
Indonesian	24%	44%	32%
Japanese	56%	21%	23%
Korean	25%	34%	41%
Laotian	23%	40%	37%

	Monolingual English	Bilingual Speakers	Limited English Proficient
Malaysian	26%	46%	27%
Marshallese	19%	38%	43%
Mongolian	13%	45%	42%
Native Hawaiian	85%	12%	3%
Nepalese	7%	40%	53%
Pakistani	15%	57%	28%
Samoaan	52%	38%	10%
Sri Lankan	30%	49%	21%
Taiwanese	16%	44%	40%
Thai	25%	32%	42%
Tongan	37%	43%	19%
Vietnamese	15%	35%	51%
Other Asian	49%	30%	21%
Other NHOPI	42%	32%	26%

Source: 2013–2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

<sup>5</sup>Limited English speakers include those who reported speaking English less than very well: “well,” “not well,” and “not at all.” Bilingual speakers include those who speak a language other than English but reported speaking English “very well.”

**FIGURE 5: CITIZENSHIP STATUS BY ETHNICITY**

	U.S.-Born Citizen	Naturalized U.S. Citizen	Not a U.S. Citizen
Asian Indian	13%	44%	43%
Bangladeshi	8%	53%	39%
Bhutanese	2%	15%	83%
Burmese	3%	29%	68%
Cambodian	29%	52%	19%
Chinese	20%	45%	34%
Fijian	19%	50%	31%
Filipino	25%	53%	22%
Guamanian/Chamorro	93%	4%	4%
Hmong	46%	42%	12%
Indonesian	11%	35%	54%
Japanese	57%	14%	28%
Korean	19%	50%	30%
Laotian	28%	52%	20%

	U.S.-Born Citizen	Naturalized U.S. Citizen	Not a U.S. Citizen
Malaysian	11%	23%	65%
Marshallese	12%	7%	81%
Mongolian	8%	23%	69%
Native Hawaiian	97%	1%	2%
Nepalese	3%	23%	74%
Pakistani	16%	55%	29%
Samoaan	86%	8%	6%
Sri Lankan	11%	48%	41%
Taiwanese	22%	55%	24%
Thai	17%	49%	34%
Tongan	45%	28%	28%
Vietnamese	19%	62%	19%
Other Asian	46%	36%	18%
Other NHOPI	45%	12%	43%

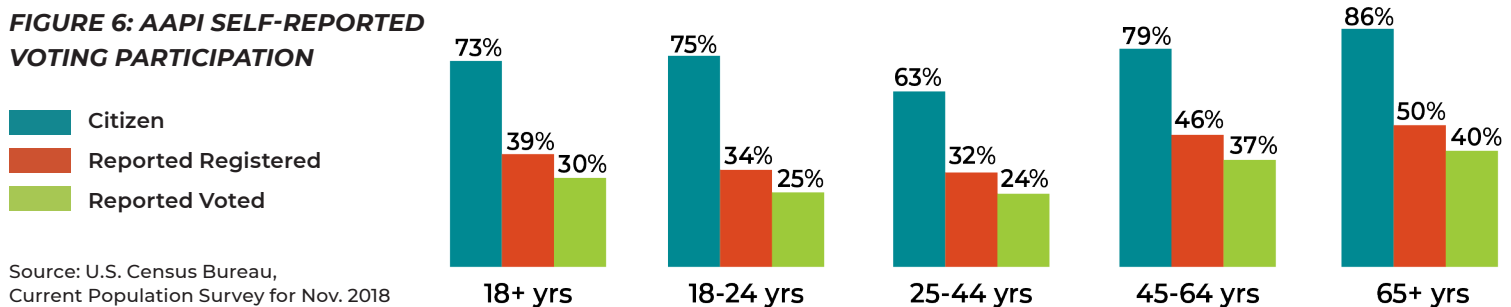
Source: 2013–2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

## AAPI Communities and Civic Participation

While many AAPIs are active within their own communities, they are less involved in the larger civil society as reflected in lower historical voter registration and turnout rates. This is a topic that requires further exploration. While there is high turnout among those who register to vote, only about half of those eligible to vote are registered,<sup>6</sup> which suggests that significant impacts can be made by doing more work to register voters (figure 6).

It is noteworthy that engagement and participation trends are changing. AAPI participation and mobilization has been on the rise. A significant factor is the growth of community-based organizations carrying out year-round civic engagement programs and the activism and leadership role of women of color. In 2018, AAPI women had the second-highest rates of lateral mobilization, with 76% reporting talking to friends and family about voting. This same year saw an uptick in protest participation across different ethnic and racial groups (AAPI Civic Engagement Fund, 2019).

**FIGURE 6: AAPI SELF-REPORTED VOTING PARTICIPATION**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey for Nov. 2018

<sup>6</sup>This information comes from the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey for November 2018 and may not reflect full 2018 turnout.



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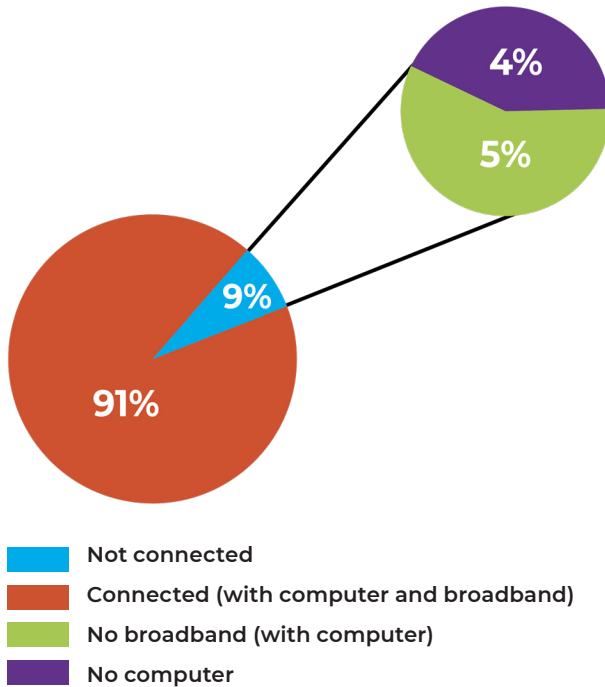
## **Literature Review: AAPI Communications and Community-Led Media**

The purpose of this literature review is to assess and summarize the available information on three topics: (1) how the AAPI population communicates and acquires information, (2) how AAPIs produce content, and (3) the communications practices of AAPI community organizations. Overall, we found a paucity of relevant published academic studies, and few specialized surveys, that were conducted or sponsored by special interest entities (see appendix A for additional information on methodology). These findings are consistent with the consensus of scholars and practitioners who have stated that AAPI communications topics are understudied. Despite this limitation, the existing publications do provide some useful insights.

### **Limitations of Existing Studies**

Although we have been able to identify a fair number of relevant publications, most studies have significant limitations. There are still severe gaps in our knowledge about the AAPI population in general and AAPI nonprofits in particular, a conclusion shared by others (e.g., Lake Research Partners, 2018). Most existing surveys are not representative of AAPIs, do not account for differences between ethnic groups, and Pacific Islanders are often excluded. Furthermore, there appear to be significant geographic differences that are not often accounted for in larger national studies. This means that any statistical findings should be used cautiously, with an understanding about what the numbers capture and don't capture. Moreover, we have not found any detailed analyses about the type and magnitude of biases that potentially skew the results.

**FIGURE 7: AAPI ACCESS TO INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES**



Source:  
2013–2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Nonetheless, these studies point to several important qualitative conclusions. Traditional media remains an important channel for news and information, the use of social media has grown rapidly and continues to evolve, and ethnic media sources continue to connect with the hard-to-reach segments. Insights from existing literature and the findings from this project’s organizational survey and interviews will hopefully help to inform AAPI groups seeking to improve and strengthen their communications strategies and in adopting and implementing a multifaceted approach to outreach.

### **AAPI Communications and News Sources**

The literature on how the AAPI population communicates and acquires information is relatively less scarce than on the other two topics. This section starts with data reported by the census around questions of information access. Other sources are based on specialized population-based surveys, most of which cover only Asian Americans and not Pacific Islanders. For the purpose of this review, population-based surveys are designed to provide a broad understanding of how Asian Americans communicate and acquire information. It should be noted, however, that these surveys have limited coverage. They often focus on a particular ethnic group (e.g., ones with the largest population), geography (e.g., locations with large

numbers of AAPI), or language group (e.g., English speaking). Moreover, they use selective sampling and data collection methods that may have inherent biases (e.g., surname identification, contact methods other than fully randomized sampling, limited number of Asian languages used). These limitations tend to bias many findings away from segments of the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund’s intended target groups, particularly the less acculturated and engaged immigrants and refugees.

**FIGURE 8: PROPORTION HAVING A COMPUTER AND BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY BY RACE**



Source: 2013–2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; “connected” is defined as the share of households with both a computer and broadband internet. Tabulations are for Census “-Alone” categories.



## Connectivity

### AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

Access to computers and broadband internet is related to access, use, and impact of information and communication technologies. Nationally, roughly 1 in 10 AAPIs do not have ready access to computers and broadband (figure 7). In 2017, Asian Americans were the “most connected” racial group, with 92% having access to both broadband and computers. A lower share of Pacific Islanders (82%) had this level of connectivity (See Figure 8). It is important to note that there are likely wide variations by geography, language ability, and ethnic groups.

### OTHER STUDIES

While several national surveys find that Asian Americans are more digitally connected than other racial groups, this may not be true for all regions. A series of surveys covering California, which tends to be on the forefront of the use of technology, found that Asian Americans are no more connected than the general population, and lag behind non-Hispanic whites (Field Poll, 2014, 2016; Berkeley IGS Poll 2017, 2019). Although the Asian American sample in each individual survey is relatively small, the qualitative finding (Asian Americans are not the most connected) is consistent across all four years. Were there to be additional studies, the results might show that these findings are not distinct to California, debunking stereotypes of AAPIs as being more technologically connected overall.

*1 IN 10 AAPIS DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO BROADBAND.*

*ONLY 82% OF PACIFIC ISLANDERS HAVE COMPUTER AND BROADBAND ACCESS. THIS IS LOWER THAN THE 92% FIGURE FOR ASIAN AMERICANS.*

*IN CALIFORNIA, AAPIS ARE LESS DIGITALLY CONNECTED THAN NON-HISPANIC WHITES.*

## Social Media Use

The Nielsen report (2018b) includes information on the use of social media, with the purpose of informing those who want to reach Asian Americans as consumers. It is important to note that the “sample design of our research is not managed in Asian languages,” although respondents include both English-speaking and non-English-speaking respondents. For their samples, a very large majority of Asian Americans (83%) use social media, and some rely on foreign social media to communicate with family and businesses abroad. The report argues that internet advertisements (as opposed to television or phone) are the most effective way to advertise to Asian Americans. Despite the emphasis on social media and the perception of a “digital revolution,” the report also finds that Asian Americans spend a significant number of hours watching television. Other studies have also found that mass media, particularly television, remains a major source of information (Cheong and Park, 2015; Soh et al., 2007):

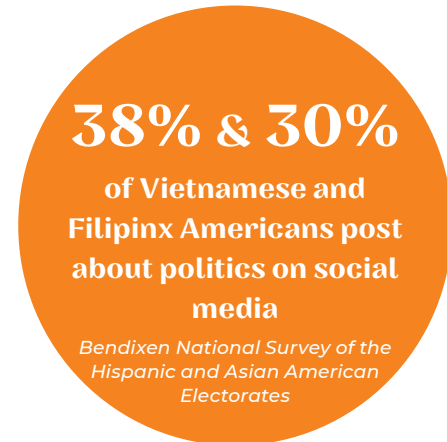
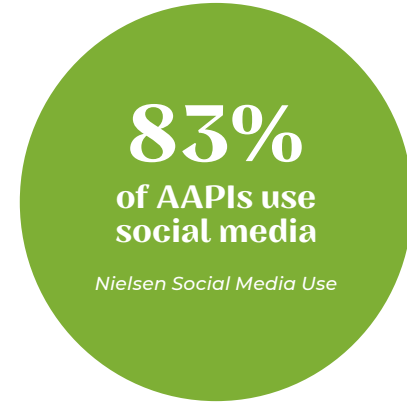
The Pew Foundation has also produced findings for Asian Americans from its national population-based survey. It is transparent in stating that the interviews are conducted in English only because of the high cost and other difficulties of surveying non-English speaking AAPIs (Gao, 2016). Like results in the American Community Survey, Pew also finds that English-speaking Asian Americans are more digitally connected compared with other racial groups. Nearly all (95%) use the internet, 84% are in households equipped with broadband service, and 91% own a smartphone with internet access (Perrin, 2016). One more common type of survey targets registered voters or those who voted. It is important to note that this approach is based on a highly selective subpopulation—one that is more English proficient, acculturated (particularly among immigrants because of naturalization requirements), educated, and civically engaged.

One of the earliest and most-cited academic studies is the 2008 National Asian American Survey, a nationally representative survey of registered voters that was conducted in English and multiple Asian languages (Wong et al., 2011). Despite the sample selection bias, a surprising one-third of the interviews were conducted in a

language other than English. The study found that Asian Americans were much more likely to get their news from traditional channels (85% from television and 65% from newspapers) than from the internet (55%). About a third of those relying on traditional media received their information from a mix of English- and Asian-language sources, or exclusively from Asian-language sources.

In the 2016 National Asian American Survey, respondents were also asked about ethnic media as a source of political news (Ramakrishnan et al., 2016). While 21% of Asian Americans turned to ethnic media (with 10% relying on both ethnic and mainstream media), there are wide variations among groups with at least a third of Vietnamese (39%), Chinese (34%), and Korean Americans (33%) relying solely on ethnic media for political news.

Similar voter surveys prepared by consulting firms also find similar results (e.g., APIA Vote and AAPI Data, 2018; Asian American Decisions, 2018; Bendixen, 2005, 2007; Lake Research Partners, 2012; Latino Decisions, n.d.; Ramakrishnan et al., 2016): a preference for Asian language sources by a large subset of voters, a continued reliance on traditional media (particularly for older voters who are more likely to be immigrants or refugees), and growing use of the internet and social media (particularly among younger Asian American adults). The latter phenomenon seems to be particularly impressive, with digital usage expanding from a small minority a decade or so ago to over half in more recent surveys.



**61% & 72%**  
**of Filipinx and Korean  
Americans use the  
internet to get news**

*Bendixen National Survey of the  
Hispanic and Asian American  
Electoralates*

**at least 1/3**  
**of Vietnamese,  
Chinese, and Korean  
Americans rely solely  
on ethnic media for  
political news**

*2016 National Asian American  
Survey*

In the findings reported in the above studies, figures also show some differences among groups in how they receive and share information. Bendixen's 2005 study showed that while nearly 70% of those surveyed reported English-language media was their primary source of information, over a third of Chinese and Korean American respondents get their news from Asian language media. The National Asian American Election Eve Poll, conducted across multiple election years, consistently shows that for immigrants and refugees and for those who choose to take the survey, Asian-language television was the main source of political news.<sup>7</sup> The internet as a primary source has grown across all ethnic groups surveyed. The fastest growth was seen among Filipinx and Korean Americans with now 61% and 72%, respectively, using the internet to get news.

The 2018 Asian American Voter Survey found that Vietnamese Americans (38%) and Filipinx (30%) were the most likely to post about politics on social media compared with Asian Americans as a whole (APIAVote and AAPI Data, 2018). The survey also asked about political/community issue discussions on WeChat, WhatsApp, and KakaoTalk messaging platforms. On this question, Asian Indians and Korean Americans were the most likely to engage in political discussions on WhatsApp and KakaoTalk, respectively, followed by 16% of Chinese Americans, who reported having such exchanges with family and friends on WeChat.

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<sup>7</sup> This includes findings from 2012, 2014, and 2016. See References section for citation information on these polls.

## ETHNIC MEDIA

The literature on ethnic media generally argues that this institution has expanded with the growth of the immigrant and refugee population, often serving as an important source of information on the sending country (Hickerson & Gustafson, 2016; Lin & Song, 2006; Viswanath & Arora, 2000). Ethnic media is also a valuable source of information to help immigrants and refugees understand and navigate the United States. It is estimated that in 2005 there were over 700 ethnic media organizations serving 51 million adults (Shi, 2009). As mentioned previously, a large proportion of Asian American immigrants and refugees get their information from this source, particularly those with limited English language ability. There is very little information on ethnic media and younger AAPI adults, but it is likely that those more proficient in English do not rely on this source. Alternative press catering to youths, such as the progressive *Gidra* newspaper (Ryoo, 2009), tends to have limited reach and be relatively unstable.

The literature on the production of AAPI social-media content is extremely limited. One article on production argues that the ease of entry into content creation and distribution has created a diversity of stories by and about AAPIs (Mayeda, 2016). Art and cultural institutions have been an important resource for content (Kawahara, 2007; Odo & Ong, 2007). There has also been growth in the number of AAPI social media “influencers” (Nielsen, 2018a). Most of these, however, operate in the “pop culture” sphere, focusing on comedy, lifestyle, foodie-ism, and other light entertainment.

*ETHNIC MEDIA, WHETHER IT IS DIGITAL OR IN THE FORM OF TRADITIONAL PRINT AND BROADCAST, PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN REACHING IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE COMMUNITIES.*

*IT IS PARTICULARLY CRITICAL FOR REACHING THE MOST IMPACTED COMMUNITY MEMBERS, INCLUDING THOSE WHO MAY BE RECENT IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES, LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT, OR ELDERLY.*

## Community-Led Media and the Capacity of Community Groups

There is a paucity of studies on the communications practices of AAPI community groups. One existing social-movement study examined how Asian Americans utilized the internet to organize and advocate in response to Washington, DC, Councilman Marion Barry's 2012 disparaging remarks about them. At the time, a group of activists organized a Twitter and Facebook campaign called "Say Sorry Barry" to inform, update, and mobilize Asian Americans to demand an apology (Chow et al., 2012). While this case may have been an outlier then, it can also be seen as a precursor to the predominant use of social media by AAPIs today. One study found that organizations serving Asian American immigrants lag behind those serving Latinx immigrants (Brown, 2015).

Given the limitation of the literature on AAPI community groups, there are potential lessons learned from a fairly large literature on how nonprofits in general behave. Many of these studies are descriptive and prescriptive, with a few that are analytical. Social networking websites can be driven by user participation and user-created content (Tredinnick, 2006); however, **a survey of health-oriented community-based organizations found that most social media engagement is unidirectional** (Ramanadhan et al., 2013). The majority of the posts were about organization promotion and information "pushing," which is a missed opportunity for user engagement (Waters et al., 2009). Overall, organizations tend not to interact on social media with community members. Interactivity is key to developing relationships (Jo & Kim, 2003; Ramanadhan et al., 2013). Human interest stories have the potential to draw the most engagement. Integrating stories with the data and information that organizations need to share, inviting the community to the process, and being mindful about platforms can be instrumental in encouraging interaction. Some key takeaways and recommendations include the following:

- Research suggests that there is a missed opportunity because community-based organizations are not taking advantage of all the options on social media websites to cultivate relationships, although this is most likely due to cost factors (Waters et al., 2009; Westcott, 2007).
- Public engagement on social media is also difficult because the public does not tend to respond to the

typical social media strategies seeking general feedback, encouraging volunteerism, and pursuing other solicitations (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Cho et al., 2014). Dynamic and innovative campaigns require time and resources that can be limited in many organizations.

1. Posts with photographs tend to elicit more responses (Strekalova & Krieger, 2017).
  2. Polls and invitations to submit content can be another low-cost tactic for engagement.
  3. To avoid losing interest, organizations should avoid repeating content across platforms. Each platform can have very distinct audiences.
- Organizations are less likely to use hashtags or retweet other content, which marks a missed opportunity (Lovejoy et al., 2012). Campaigns can be unified and boosted across platforms with a hashtag. Moreover, capabilities to track hashtags can enhance an organization's ability to track and measure reach.
  - Public education appears in the largest share of mass tweets, with fewer posts directed at other tactics such as public events, direct action, and voter registration (Guo & Saxton, 2014). Organizations do and should use an “advocacy mix” where public education happens in mass tweets and direct action might happen through targeted newsletters, for example.



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## Survey: AAPI Civic Engagement Fund Cohort

Along with the incredible ethnic diversity of AAPI communities come distinct lived experiences, and unique barriers and needs that require linguistic and culturally appropriate approaches to reach, inform, and motivate communities. The AAPI Civic Engagement Fund grantee cohort consists of organizations across the country dedicated to empowering and engaging AAPI communities. To support the development of and strengthen groups' communications infrastructure, the cohort was surveyed to identify current strategic communications capacity, needs, and priorities.

The cohort described having distinct and multiple audiences along the lines of age, language, immigrant and refugee experience, geography, and by individuals' relationship to the organization. Some groups cast a wider net, targeting not only AAPIs but also other communities of color, marginalized groups, and allies, whereas others focus on specific groups, membership base, and clients.

Most groups included growing their base and community support as their definitions of success. Turnout at programs and events and increases in contacts are some of the tangible, quantitative outcomes. Groups also included changing narratives around a community or issue, developing more-informed community members, and neutralizing the opposition's messaging efforts among desired outcomes.

### **In general, measures of success fall into five larger categories, which include:**

- Getting coverage that leads to a jump in contacts to the organization;
- Being able to control the narrative on an issue;
- Developing more-informed conversations among community members or in the community;



- Achieving issue objectives (issues are discussed and/or framing and values are reflected in policy or discourse); and
- Organization staff members becoming leading, publicly recognized voices on key issues

Top goals for groups include increasing the organization's reach to the most impact communities and increasing the accessibility of information and programs to these folks. These two larger categories come from groups being asked to list their top three priorities. Responses were grouped into a few different subcategories. Groups included in their responses outcome, product, and process-/operation-oriented goals, and included priorities such as boosting mobilization and base building, increasing influence, developing a fundraising campaign, updating or creating their organization website, hiring dedicated staff, acquiring tools, and establishing relationships with local mainstream and ethnic media.

Top needs identified by groups to accomplish their goal(s) fall into three categories: dedicated staff and/or training, funding and equipment, and strategy/tactics. Nearly all groups (94%) expressed that, to accomplish their communications goals, they needed strategic planning and/or increased organizational capacity/staff. Two-thirds (67%) expressed a need for funding to pay staff, purchase equipment, and/or carry out their goals. About three-quarters (76%) expressed a lack of organizational capacity, 28% a need for funding, and 10% a need to implement tactics.

The need for increased organizational capacity is a primary and universally shared consideration for groups. While the need for funding is widespread, fundraising was rarely articulated as a goal of strategic communications. Groups need more opportunities to understand the impact that integrated communications can provide beyond reach to their specific audience of community members. Only a few organizations expressed the implementation of tactics themselves as a need. Appendix B provides supplementary information that details how answers were categorized.

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*IT CAN ALSO HELP ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERS REALIZE THAT COMMUNICATIONS WORK CAN TAKE A LONG TIME AS [THE WORK] MOVES AT THE PACE OF COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE.*

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## Conversations with Media Makers

We conducted email and in-person interviews with practitioners who create and disseminate media content and provide technical assistance for strategic communications. Practitioners were selected using a snowball approach. Practitioners offered a wide range of advice on how to reach targeted audiences, insights on tactics, and advice on creative collaborations.

### Jen Soriano on Strategic Communications for Social Justice

#### **Integrate communications within an organization's overall plans and activities**

Avoid not giving communications the space and resources needed—a lot of the time, communicators in community-based organizations are set up to fail because they are expected to do a lot of things in very little time with little to no strategic direction. To prevent this set-up, organizations can work to front-load communications planning into staff meetings and program meetings. This can be as simple as adding a few strategic questions to the agenda of each meeting, including: What is the most important opportunity to move our narrative this month? What has happened in the news that we can hook our stories to? Who is the most important audience or target to reach at this moment in the campaign? This can help organizations prioritize communications work and build an organizational culture that centers communications as a core change strategy as opposed to a production-based afterthought. It can also help organizational leaders realize that communications work can take a long time as it moves at the pace of communicating with people.

### **Incorporate cultural communications**

Do not underestimate the power of incorporating cultural communications into your strategy and tactics. Know your audiences' and constituents' cultures deeply, and highlight the culture to connect and engage and move forward key parts of your mission. For example, antigentrification work done by SOMA Pilipinas and SOMCAN has been strengthened through the medium of food in San Francisco. By highlighting local Filipino restaurants and food vendors, the organizations prop up the visibility and rich heritage of the long-time Filipino community in the South of Market district of San Francisco and strengthen the resistance of the cultural district against downtown gentrification. Cultural communications also gives you another angle to position yourself as a resource with media makers and influencers—you can make it a collaborative relationship where you understand that you may have something that [media/influencers] need, like the fact that you have a vibrant angle like a story about food.

### **Know the lived experiences of AAPI**

For organizations seeking to collaborate with other entities, make sure that these partners come with or are oriented with a specific cultural awareness about the lived experiences of the communities you work with. Be prepared to share basic data, case studies, and, where relevant, issue backgrounders to ensure that collaborators develop an informed strategy and activities that are relevant to AAPI communities.

## **Be creative to present an issue**

The media and especially online media these days have a short attention span, and generating media coverage on an issue that is “no longer news” is about being creative and using the assets of an organization such as the ability to mobilize. For example, I worked with the Right to the City Alliance together with the United Workers Congress and the Center for Story-Based Strategy to stage a protest featuring a boxing match between Bank of America CEOs and foreclosed homeowners, fitting actors with huge inflated boxing gloves, which was “candy for photographers.” This creative visual along with great direct action organizing and a lot of hustling around presswork and social media put the issue of foreclosure back on the map. This story became the second-most popular news story nationwide after Obama’s declaration of support for gay marriage.

## **Keep a story alive with dedicated follow-through**

Critical mass can make content matter, but it takes dedicated follow-through. Contacting and following up with target journalists on Twitter, working Instagram stories, organizing ongoing digital actions, and making sure that your organization and partners continue to mobilize on the ground are some of the components of dedicated follow-through that will continue to develop and keep your story alive.

## **Be thoughtful about your definition of success**

There is a tendency to see success through numbers of hits and likes, which can be a false metric. Instead, gauge success by whether your organization’s spokespeople are being represented and their voices highlighted as influencers on the issue—whether the messages that you want to share and convey appear in stories and mentions, or how often the article or post has been shared. And of course, for issue-based campaigns, the most important metric of success is whether or not you achieve your campaign goals, including communications goals such as narrative reach and numbers of new spokespeople trained.

## Social Media Tips

Compiled from Interviews with Jenn Fang, Taz Ahmed, Kenyon Mayeda, Dan Mayeda, & Yu Gu

### Be intentional and authentic

We all aspire to have what we create become viral but may mistakenly look for a formula. The work has to be approached with intentionality. This means avoiding the use of a stock template but rather leaning toward being current and responsive in an organic way. Buying a generic theme and using generic elements turn people off.

Coding on your own can be valuable in the long run. Your organization's social media platforms should be recognizable to your members and supporters. For organizations that may not have the staff and technical skills but that are trying to build their digital presence and website, this might mean establishing ideas for a look, feel, and style before approaching a web developer.

### Have a plan

Communication about goals and vision is key—make sure that those are clear and make sure that you have a timeline where you can monitor milestones.

### Do your research

For organizations just getting started, follow everyone on Twitter, scan Instagram and Facebook pages, read blogs, and get to know the landscape. Match your campaign or organization's goals with the target audience, and determine where you want to situate your organization's presence.

## **Collaborate with influencers**

Tap into the network of preexisting influencers, and let them do the promoting. They are hungry for content. Working online never replaces the value of building relationships. Reach out to those in the AAPI social media realm because relationships are essential.

## **Help influencers understand your organization's work**

There are influencers everywhere—they come large and small; the challenge is in how to talk about your organization with them. Everyone needs to be able to make their case and talk about the organization and its work—it's truly an empowerment opportunity. Influencers are interested in working with community-based organizations and they're not going to get it right all the way, but you can teach them about the organization and the mission.

## **Make social media toolkits**

Make it easy for influencers and others to adapt and boost your campaign. Content creators don't have a lot of time, and they are likely donating their time. So do as much work as you can beforehand. Compile a simple kit that includes as much relevant information on your organization and campaign as possible, including stories, data, highlights, logos, brand colors, media lists, images, draft tweets, hashtags, and links.

## **Tap into the knowledge of young people**

Young people are more likely to be social media natives, and the pace of their consumption might be faster. They know their audience well and are already plugged into folks who are on social media. They are well positioned and know how to figure it out. They can act as fresh eyes on your campaign or issues, bring a new take to it, and innovate content and tactics. It is important to note, however, that there is a distinction between personal users

and those who are representing the organization's cause. These elements can work together, and coordination can help with maintaining the organization's identity and reaching audiences in creative ways.

### **Involve your organization's stakeholders**

Social media is free to use. Promoting your organization's activities or campaigns should not be limited to an assigned staff member but should involve other staff, board, and volunteers. Having a group or committee for thought leadership is a great social strategy. Additionally, organizations can create a dedicated group of folks who are encouraged to boost coverage through coordinated retweeting and sharing. When a wider group of individuals is involved, consistency in messaging is important to emphasize. Creating a set of customized, curated, and shareable images and text for the group can help ensure a cohesive and consistent message.

### **Be adaptable**

Just because you see a viral Twitter hashtag does not mean it's for your organization. Instead, recognize what's the best for your campaign and where your audience really is. Maybe Instagram is the best format for a selfie campaign, or Instagram may be the top platform for your targeted audience. Don't marry yourself to a tactic because you've seen it be successful or it's what you know. Instead, think about what you're really trying to accomplish here and make a goal-oriented action. If it's to raise awareness, what is an impactful and creative way that you could bring attention to your issue? Once you determine that, start to think about the social media spaces that will facilitate and amplify it.

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*THERE'S A LONG HISTORY OF GRASSROOTS AND RADICAL FILMMAKING THAT DEMOCRATIZES THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION...BUT IT'S A MATTER OF TRAINING AND, BETTER YET, COLLABORATION.*

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## **Renee Tajima-Peña on Collaborations between Community-Based Organizations and Filmmakers**

### **The first step in exploring content creation with filmmakers**

There's a wealth of information out there on filmmaker-CBO [community-based organization] alliances—I'd start with Asian American media organizations, many of which have been supporting and producing collaborative projects for decades. A-Doc, the Asian American Documentary Network, has been really proactive in connecting filmmakers to CBOs, and we've sent contingents to conferences of Advancing Justice, OCA, the Association of Asian American Studies, and others. It has hundreds of members, many of whom do this kind of work, and we've created tools and programs intended to build capacity of CBO-filmmaker collaborations. Other important organizations include the Center for Asian American Media, which has been doing a lot of work with filmmakers in the south and Midwest, and Visual Communications in Los Angeles. Other documentary field resources you can check out are the International Documentary Association's magazine Documentary, the Center for Asian American Media, the Center for Media and Social Impact at American University, and others. The Active Voice Lab, which consults to organizations, philanthropy, and the like on working with social change filmmakers, [has] useful tools for collaborations online: <https://www.activevoice.net/>.



## Ways to collaborate

Filmmaking practice encompasses a variety of social and aesthetic goals, content, stylistic approaches, audiences, and platforms. Sometimes that work overlaps with that of CBOs. Here are a few ways filmmakers and organizations have worked together:

**1. Independent filmmaker–controlled and initiated productions.** For example, my films such as *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*, *My America*, and *No Más Bebés* are independent projects for which I have editorial control. I sometimes consult with organizations about the content, target audiences, and impact engagement for the films.

In the case of a film with a journalist approach such as *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*, I remain independent of advocacy groups, even those I would have a preexisting affinity to or relationship with. For those films, I want to be able to approach the content critically, and my audience would have the expectation that they can trust the veracity and independence of the perspective—of course, understanding the implicit subjectivity of the form. In the production of *No Más Bebés*, which followed journalistic norms but also has a point of view that is sympathetic to immigrant mothers who were sterilized, we consulted with and researched the work of reproductive justice organizations to work out the analyses of the film. So, even within a filmmaker-originated project, there is a variation of approach.

**2. Independent filmmaker dissemination and impact engagement.** I separate this from production because after a film is produced, there is an impact engagement campaign to use the film as a tool for raising awareness of the subject matter and further social change goals. Filmmakers work with organizations on planning and implementing these campaigns—and there's also quite a cottage industry of businesses and organizations that specialize in impact campaigns.

**3. Commissioned projects.** Sometimes a CBO will commission a filmmaker to make a film. In those cases, the organization would have final editorial control, and the two parties would work together on project goals, target audience, and dissemination, which would determine the content, creative style, length, and distribution platform.

**4. Collaborations.** When filmmakers and organizations collaborate on a project, hopefully there is much communication and transparency from the start, including decision-making, division of labor, revenue and compensation.

### The value of collaboration

I personally think CBO film projects are most effective when they engage a filmmaker to take on the project. The accessibility and ease of digital video can be deceptive—there is a range of visual storytelling, technical, craft, [and] legal and industry-related skills and knowledge that goes into filmmaking. By the same token, if you want to file a lawsuit, you would work with attorneys; if you want to provide health care services, you'd work with trained medical professionals.

With that being said, there are ways that powerful film projects can be produced by non-filmmakers. There's a long history of grassroots and radical filmmaking that democratizes the means of production—(Getino and Solanas's essay "Toward a Third Cinema" is still relevant). But it's a matter of training and, better yet, collaboration. The UCLA Center for EthnoCommunications, Visual Communications, Little Tokyo Service Center, Downtown Community TV, and many other organizations around the country in many different communities have done this kind of work and are useful resources.

## **Ways to distribute the final product**

Documentary filmmaking—even the subcategory of social change documentaries—is a huge industry with different tiers of dissemination, and any single film would involve all or several of these tiers. Documentary budgets for production and dissemination can range from high-budget multimillion-dollar projects to very low-budget, mostly volunteer projects.

### **THEATRICAL DISTRIBUTION**

This distribution platform is primarily geared toward feature-length films that typically have a festival release, then theatrical runs, followed by broadcast, cable and/or streaming, and foreign markets. It involves distributors, publicists, sometimes an expensive Oscar campaign, and impact engagement campaigns with organizations. There is a domestic and a foreign market for distribution.

### **STREAMING AND VIDEO ON DEMAND (VOD)**

This includes services like Netflix, Amazon, iTunes, HBO, Showtime, Hulu, Kanopy, and Alexander Street.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEB**

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and a website for your project are some of the major social media/web spaces.

### **BROADCAST, CABLECAST**

Among others and depending on the subject matter, broadcast/cablecast can include PBS, CNN, HBO, Discovery, Showtime in domestic markets, and the same in foreign markets. Typically the largest audiences for this platform are in Canada, Europe, Australia, Japan, and China.

### **COMMUNITY SCREENINGS AND IMPACT ENGAGEMENT**

Filmmakers have organized these on their own, but generally work in partnerships with organizations to distribute their work in the community engagement space. If there's a budget, an impact company may run the campaign.

### **EDUCATIONAL MARKET**

Distribution in this market, involves sales to schools, libraries, and nonprofits. DVD/Blu-ray sales can happen through educational distributors like New Day Films, CAAM, Good Docs, Women Make Movies, and Third World Newsreel. They can also happen through video on demand services like Kanopy and Alexander Street.

### **HOME VIDEO**

This is a diminishing market; most likely streaming would happen on platforms like iTunes, Amazon, or Netflix.

## Ethnic Media Tips

Developed with SangMok Kim and Portia Li

### Build a relationship with ethnic media outlets

- **Recognize that ethnic media knows the local community it covers**  
Ethnic media outlets are established to inform a specific constituency about events and issues important to that community. Reporters may not serve as experts on specific policies, but they can be a vital source in assessing ally organizations, leaders, and community sentiments.
- **Maintain regular communication with the editor-in-chief or owner**  
Most ethnic media outlets do not have an editorial board, and decisions are often made by the owners or the editors-in-chief. Having a relationship with the decision makers goes a long way in strengthening access to the media outlet. Acknowledge when the media coverage is good and raise concerns on questionable or inaccurate coverage.
- **Develop the same level of relationship and contact with all media outlets**  
Competition among media outlets within one community can be great. Outlets will notice if one paper covers an issue that another did not know about. Sharing a news tip with one outlet exclusively or consistently placing ads in just one paper will alienate other outlets. Reporters can be much more willing to cover an issue/story when information is shared, and may call to complain if they feel that is not happening.
- **Pursue sponsorship opportunities carefully**  
There are tremendous benefits in seeking sponsorships with ethnic media outlets for community events or forming partnerships on campaigns or projects. Examples include inserting voter registration forms in dailies or coordinating a citizenship fair. Careful consideration should be made around working too closely

with one media outlet over others; free publicity that jeopardizes relationships with other outlets may not be worth it. Try to find ways to maintain a balance and avoid the perception of “closeness” to one media outlet only.

- **Purchase advertisements—affordable with a high return on investment**

The rates for placing an advertisement for an event or on an issue can be inexpensive compared with the generally high costs for ad placement in mainstream media outlets. Moreover, community rates that can be further negotiated if you have a relationship with the outlet are available. Rates usually include costs for design and layout or for studio recordings in the case of radio or television ads. Purchase ads from multiple outlets, not just one. If there are two dailies in your area, a good tactical choice for a variety of reasons, from relationship building to the generation of additional earned media coverage, is to purchase ads in both papers. Finally, for many local AAPI community-based organizations, purchasing advertisements in ethnic media outlets periodically is a way to support local media.

### **Build a relationship with the ethnic media reporter**

- **Get to know the reporter that covers your organization**

Seek to build a relationship that is both friendly and professional. The reporter may be new to both the job and possibly the city. The time you spend will go a long way in developing a mutually beneficial relationship. If it makes sense, go out for coffee or lunch on occasion. There is often a high turnover with reporters, so keep in mind that there will always be a need to dedicate time to orienting new reporters.

- **Be responsive**

Make yourself available for reporters if they call you for a comment or interview requests. The more reporters can rely on you to return their phone call before their print deadlines, get back to them with case stories

or data when they request it, or prepare yourself to speak informatively on the topic will go a long way in developing a mutually beneficial relationship.

- **Understand that reporters are assigned an organizational “beat,” not an issue “beat”**

Ethnic media outlets have comparatively fewer resources than mainstream media outlets. There are fewer reporters, and these reporters are generally assigned to cover an organization and not a specific issue. Whether your organization works on a single issue or multiple issues, the same reporter will cover all your events.

- **Dedicate time to providing detailed policy updates**

Reporters do not have the same resources as mainstream reporters to research, analyze, or report on policy issues that may pop up. Be prepared to explain in detail the process and content of a policy or issue. Send additional information and materials that may be of interest to the reporter periodically so they can stay on top of developments. When possible, organize periodic in-language policy briefings.

- **Send translated materials whenever possible**

Virtually all the reporters are first-generation reporters—English is a second language. When resources allow, provide translations of relevant materials including the press release. If you are on a deadline and translated materials are not possible, provide a brief summary or a few sentences in the appropriate Asian language along with the materials you do have.

## **Achieve optimum coverage**

- **Focus on community and personal stories**

Organizations seeking media coverage for a campaign or event should develop an individual, detailed, and

community-relevant story. Even the release of new data or research should be based on the impact to individuals and a community.

- **Frame issues at the neighborhood level**

Political news in and of itself is not what people read. However, readers can be deeply interested when issues are framed as a neighborhood or family concern, for example, talking about the economy or health care with a focus on rising home prices and rent or individual wellness and the high cost of health care. People want most to read about what is happening around them.

- **Read and provide regular feedback on the coverage**

If a particular ethnic media outlet seems to develop a habit of either not quoting or mentioning your organization, or worse, negatively portrays your work, act immediately and contact the reporter. If it continues, talk to the editor-in-chief or owner. If there is not a resolution, take serious action. For example, temporarily boycott the ethnic media outlet and withhold sending them press releases or inviting them to press events.

- **Don't send more than one organizational press release on a single day (if possible)**

Because ethnic media reporters cover multiple issues of the same organization, they will not be able to provide adequate coverage on more than one issue in a day. This means your organization needs to make internal decisions on what press release to prioritize.

- **Contribute pieces for enhanced coverage**

You can directly maximize the type and level of coverage you generate on your organization's work and views by contributing your own staff resources. Propose to air regular radio or television commentaries or write commentaries for dailies on current events and issues. Seek opportunities to air special public



service announcements (PSAs) on important campaigns and events. For events outside the city such as an advocacy day in Washington, DC, offer to send pictures and draft text via email or call reporters so that your achievements are more likely to be covered.

- **Hold specialized/in-language press events or webinars**

Most reporters are not fluent in English and less willing to participate in press events organized via teleconferencing unless it is in-language.

- **Remember that ethnic media reporters generally cover events in their specific communities**

It is rare that an ethnic media reporter covers an event from another ethnic community except for pan-AAPI events. On occasion, if the issue is of vital interest and importance to other ethnic groups, ethnic media reporters may have covered events in other communities.

- **Know the regular deadline of the ethnic media outlets**

Because ethnic media outlets operate with fewer or limited resources and reporters must multitask, they may have an earlier deadline than a mainstream media reporter. Deadlines are different for each city and medium. Knowing the regular deadline that reporters work to can help you plan and share information that gets the attention of the outlet and allows reporters to generate content.

## Capacity Building Initiatives and Collaborations Directory as of October 2019

### **18MR.org** | [18mr.org](http://18mr.org)

18MillionRising.org brings Asian American communities together online and offline to reimagine Asian American identity with nuance, specificity, and power. Using technology and popular culture, 18MR.org develops new ways for Asian Americans and allies to collaborate, create new ways of being, and transform the world around us. The organization utilizes digital-first advocacy tactics to elevate the voices of and mobilize over 120,000 members to take action on issues that matter to them.

### **A-Doc** | [a-doc.org](http://a-doc.org)

Asian American Documentary Network, also called A-Doc, is a national network of documentary filmmakers that works to increase the visibility and support of Asian Americans in the field by helping enhance career sustainability, social engagement, and the impact of Asian American documentary filmmaking. A-Doc Film Database and A-Doc Crew Database are two resources to help other Asian American documentarians partner with community organizations and educators, and foster collaboration among the filmmaker community.

### **Array** | [arraynow.com](http://arraynow.com)

Array is the rebirth of the African American Film Festival Releasing Movement (AAFRM) founded by filmmaker Ava DuVernay in 2010. It is an independent film distribution and resource collective composed of arts advocacy organizations, maverick volunteers, and rebel member donors worldwide. Array's work is dedicated to the amplification of independent films by people of color and women filmmakers globally.

### Center for Story-based Strategy | [storybasedstrategy.org](http://storybasedstrategy.org)

The Center for Story-based Strategy (CSS) is a national movement-building organization dedicated to harnessing the power of narrative for social change. CSS offers social justice networks, alliances and organizations the analysis, training and strategic support to change the story on the issues that matter most. Through collaboration consulting, and direct partnership CSS has supported over 200 innovative social change organizations to win on critical campaigns.

### Equality Labs | [equalitylabs.org](http://equalitylabs.org)

Equality Labs is a South Asian organization that uses community research, socially engaged art, and technology to end the oppression of caste apartheid, Islamophobia, white supremacy, and religious intolerance. The organization's vision is to center the leadership of South Asian caste and religion-oppressed communities in the ongoing redefinition of South Asian identity in the United States, across the diaspora, and in our home countries, from India to Tamil Eelam, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and Pakistan. Equality Labs' programs include community-based research, internet freedom and digital security, socially engaged art, to name a few. Equality Labs also offers rapid-response support in doxxing or trolling and hacking. Organizations can also request support for digital security training and security audits.

### Imminent Collision

Launched in the summer of 2019 and founded by *Fresh off the Boat* star Randall Park and creative partners Michael Golamc and Hieu Ho, Imminent Collision is aimed at developing "comedy-forward stories from Asian American perspectives for all audiences." The production company is aimed at developing and telling Asian American Stories.

**POV** | [pbs.org/pov](https://pbs.org/pov)

POV (a cinema term for “point of view”) is television’s longest-running showcase for independent nonfiction films. POV premieres fourteen to sixteen of the best, boldest, and most innovative programs every year on PBS. Since 1988, POV has presented over 500 films to public television audiences across the country. POV films are known for their intimacy, unforgettable storytelling, and timeliness, putting a human face on contemporary social issues.

**ReFrame** | [reframementorship.org](https://reframementorship.org)

ReFrame was established to build a narrative infrastructure grounded in power-building organizing that will create a liberatory society. It pursues two distinct yet intertwined strategies of field building and narrative interventions. Field building emerges from ReFrame’s foundational and flagship mentorship program coupled with the SPIN Academy and related training and development programs—all designed to grow the next generation of strategic communicators. ReFrame seeks to develop a multiracial field that prioritizes the leadership of women, people of color, and queer and trans people. Narrative interventions deploy relationships, networks, leadership, infrastructure (including key technology), and resources to take advantage of narrative tipping points that are opportunities to shape culture, policy, and common sense for generations to come. ReFrame is establishing a narrative shop that builds power through targeted projects and campaigns. These projects and campaigns utilize narrative monitoring, disruption, and creation both in collaboration with existing movement infrastructure and as an independent entity.

**ReThink Media** | [rethinkmedia.org](http://rethinkmedia.org)

ReThink Media was launched in July 2007 as the first nonprofit, strategic media organization focused on progressive foreign policy and national security issues. The RISE Together Fund began funding ReThink Media in early 2009 to provide strategic communications tools and services to a field of organizations addressing issues including surveillance, profiling, discrimination, torture, and detention. The Rights & Inclusion project at ReThink now exclusively focuses on supporting the communications work of the Muslim, Arab, and South Asian advocacy field.



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## Conclusion

The demographic makeup of the AAPI community means that specific considerations must be made by organizations seeking to reach this population and by funders who want to make an impact on such efforts. Studies have shown that AAPI media usage has been changing with the growing reliance on digital forms. However, a review of existing literature also reveals areas where further and deeper study on AAPI is needed. While it is known that groups may vary in need by ethnicity, language ability, and years in the United States, without more nuanced and detailed studies it is difficult to identify deeper patterns or quantitative differences, which in turn can support improvements in raising the consciousness, dialoguing, and activating AAPI communities.

The survey of the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund Cohort reinforces the fact that, due to the diversity of needs and distinct challenges, communications work in the AAPI community requires specialized skills in language and cultural competency and can place a greater demand on staff and resources. The insights shared by practitioners, be they ethnic media reporters, social media communicators, or cultural artists, underline the need for a specialized approach and set of skills, especially for reaching the range of AAPI audiences. While there was no audit on funding toward AAPI communications infrastructure or activities, given what is known, namely that AAPI groups overall are disproportionately underfunded,<sup>8</sup> the experience of the Fund's cohort can serve as a sample to underline further how AAPI groups across the country are sorely underfunded.

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<sup>8</sup> In their 1992 report *Invisible and in Need, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP)* found that giving to AAPI communities during a 7-year period amounted to only 0.2% of total foundation giving. AAPIP found that about the same was true in 2015, where giving to Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities was found to be about 0.3% of total giving over the past 25 years.

Media choice and communications work are critical for educating the public, shaping the narrative about AAPI, and influencing viewpoints. The absence of AAPI stories and insights hinders the ability of the social justice movement to promote tolerance and alliance building, fosters prejudice and stereotypes, and discourages efforts to change the low participation and engagement levels of AAPI in mainstream society and politics.

In recent years, AAPI groups are becoming proficient in civic engagement. As a cohort, groups supported by the AAPI Civic Engagement Fund have expanded and deepened their base; engagement and outreach activities; and alliances with communities of color. As immigrants and refugee populations, there is also an effort to do this work bi-/multilingually, intergenerationally, and multiracially. Tied to this work is the recognition that the power of storytelling or media and communications is not and should not be limited to traditional/mainstream approaches. Effective community-led storytelling and communications is about integrating messaging, tactics, and platforms that resonate in the community. Today, more than ever, with the explosion of democratizing technology and media platforms AAPI groups could be well positioned to influence and control the narratives told about them if more investments were made in this area.

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## **Appendix A: Literature Review Methodology**

The review is based on the materials that were identified primarily by searching Google Scholar (scholar.google.com) for academic studies, searching Google (google.com) for nonacademic studies, and soliciting input from experts. Key search terms included but were not limited to combinations of the following: “Asian Americans,” “Pacific Islanders,” and/or “AAPI,” with “social media,” “internet,” “mass media,” “ethnic media,” “nonprofits,” “civic engagement,” “advocacy,” and “political participation.” The initial search results were then filtered by reviewing the abstracts when available. When possible, we reviewed the references within a publication and subsequent sources that cited that publication. We also searched for publications that are not specifically focused on AAPIs but may contain information that would be relevant to AAPIs. One of the advantages of academic publications compared with other publications is that the former are often peer reviewed. This does not imply that nonacademic publications are less reliable or rigorous, but most have not been systematically assessed by neutral third parties. It should be noted that the literature search is not comprehensive because of limited resources but is sufficiently comprehensive for identifying the most visible and readily available sources.

## Appendix B. Supplemental Documentation for Survey

The general approach in analyzing open-ended survey responses was:

- Each answer may fall into multiple buckets and was double counted by bucket. Each answer may NOT fall into multiple subbuckets, and was NOT double counted and was placed in the first applicable category since each was later added to produce a total.
- Redundant and semiredundant (“funding for training,” “training for staff”) was counted for each answer because it reflects interest.
- An answer that expresses a need as a means to an end (“funding for training”) was counted for both the expressed need and the need it was needed for.

Results were tabulated in two ways:

- One reflects interest in certain topics and represents the proportion of the aggregated answers that expressed an interest in a topic as defined above.
- The other reflects interest by groups in certain topics, and represents the proportion of organizations that expressed interest in certain topics in at least one of their answers.

### **Q27. What are the top three strategic communications goals and/or products for your organization?**

The surveyed organizations expressed three goals/products: (1) organizing, (2) being a voice, and (3) fundraising:

- Organizing. The answer included base building activities or mobilization (including rallies).
- Voice. The answer included voice, storytelling, tried to directly influence political discourse, or message on behalf of or give a platform for a population.
- Fundraising. The answer included fundraising activities.

Complementary categories

- Educating/informing. The answer included communications with the goal of educating or informing.
- Communications capacity. The answer included improving communications capacity (ability to produce/engage in media, translations, websites, newsletters, staff for this, etc.)

**Q28. What does your organization need to make this happen? (Please list three.)**

The surveyed organizations expressed that they needed (1) funding, (2) increased organizational capacity, and (3) effective tactics to carry out their communications goals.

**1. Funding.** An answer was considered to be in the funding bucket if it fit at least one of the following subcategories:

- Money: The answer expressed a need for money (funds, budget, stipends, etc.).
- Equipment: The answer expressed a need for equipment (software, physical equipment, etc.) that could be readily purchased, and thus money was the limiting factor.

*Exclusions:*

- “Paid staff” was not considered funding because it may be interpreted that funding may not be the limiting factor to achieve strategic communications goals.
- “Resources” or “tools” was not considered funding because it may be interpreted that these resources or tools cannot be simply purchased with money.
- Communications category specifies “general funding,” but the survey implicitly asked about needs in relation to communications goals, and such costs would normally be able to be covered by general funding if those funds were available.

**2. Strategic planning/organizational capacity.** An answer was considered to be in the strategic planning/organizational capacity buckets if it fit at least one of the following subcategories:



- **Strategy.** The answer expressed a need for strategy, plans, or planning. “Funds for communications plan” did not count toward planning because funding may not be a requisite condition for planning, and the plan may already exist.
- **Personnel.** The answer expressed a need for staff or training. Funding for staff was counted toward this category because it was interpreted that funding limits the ability to train or hire and the need is personnel as well as funding. Technical support was interpreted to be personnel/technical capacity. Systems related to organization of staff are interpreted to be personnel/technical capacity.
- **Mission.** The answer expressed the need to promote a specific topic, which was interpreted to require organizational capacity or strategic planning.
- **Tools/resources.** The answer expressed a need for unspecified tools or resources, which was interpreted to increase organizational capacity. Personnel was included in this category because communications specify “technical capacity” and it was interpreted as the staff and training needed in the context of this survey being those with the special and practical skills and knowledge for “technical capacity.”

**3. Effective tactics.** An answer was considered to be in the funding bucket if it expressed a need for the implementation of a specific tactic or reviewing efficacy of tactics.





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