

# MISSED OPPORTUNITIES:

How Organized Philanthropy Can Help Meet the Needs of LGBTQ Asian American, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander Communities



# Executive Summary

*Missed Opportunities: How Organized Philanthropy Can Help Meet the Needs of LGBTQ Asian American, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander Communities*, explores the deep disparities in funding to LGBTQ AAPI communities. It extends the findings of AAPIP's 2007 report, *Growing Opportunities: Will Funding Follow the Rise in Foundation Assets and Growth of AAPI Populations?*, which found that funding to AAPI communities for the period from 1990–2002 amounted to no more than 0.4% from national foundations. More recent analysis reveals that this figure has not significantly changed, and is even smaller in many regions where there are significant AAPI populations. *Missed Opportunities* draws this data into more granular detail, surfacing the opportunities and challenges to investing in LGBTQ AAPI communities.

## Who are LGBTQ AAPIs?

LGBTQ Asian American, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities and their issues, needs, and assets are not well known nor are they well resourced. AAPI communities make up the fastest growing racial group in the United States. In stride with the growth in the general population, more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) AAPIs are coming out, building community, and creating organizations to support their needs. In 2007 the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF)

conducted a national survey of LGBTQ AAPI individuals in the United States, and found that:

- The top five states with the largest concentration of LGBTQ AAPIs are California (37%), New York (18%), Illinois (5%), Massachusetts (5%), and District of Columbia (4%).
- More than a dozen ethnic identities are represented in LGBTQ AAPI communities including

Chinese (40%), Filipino (19%), Japanese (11%), Asian Indian (10%), Vietnamese (8%), and Korean (7%).

- 55% were U.S. born citizens, 27% naturalized citizens, 19% non-citizens.
- 50% identified English as their native language. Other frequently cited native languages include:

Mandarin (11%); Cantonese (8%); Tagalog (6%); and Vietnamese (5%).

- 53% identified as men, 41% as women, 10% transgender.
- 47% identified as gay, 19% as lesbian, 9% as bisexual, 20% as queer.

## Key Issues Facing LGBTQ AAPI Communities

- **Discrimination and Harassment.** Discrimination and harassment are common and daily occurrences for LGBTQ AAPI people. LGBTQ people often encounter a heterosexist work culture and lack of employment protections based on sexual orientation.
- **LGBTQ AAPI Youth at High Risk.** Both LGBTQ and AAPI youth experience harassment and physical violence at school at much higher rates than other groups. A recent study found that 84.6% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed, 40.1% reported being physically harassed and 18.8% reported being physically assaulted at school because of their sexual orientation. AAPI youth are 20% more likely than other racial groups to be bullied in the classroom.
- **Social and Cultural Stigma.** There are strong cultural and religious barriers to coming out within AAPI communities and families that create feelings of shame and the belief that one's sexual orientation will reflect negatively on their family or ethnic community.
- **Immigration Challenges.** Two-thirds of all Asian Americans are foreign-born, one third of Asians in the U.S. are not citizens and approximately one million are undocumented. Undocumented LGBTQ AAPIs are affected by immigration policies. Immigrants, particularly South Asian immigrants and Southeast Asian refugees, have been targets of racial profiling, detentions, and deportations.
- **Poverty and Economic Insecurity.** Hmong, Bangladeshi, and Cambodian Americans have



poverty rates similar to African Americans and Latinos, with Hmong Americans having the lowest per capita income of any racial or ethnic group. Hmong, Laotian, and Cambodian Americans have unemployment rates higher than the national average.

- **Health Disparities.** Factors that contribute to health disparities of LGBTQ people include reduced access to health insurance, social stigma, and lack of cultural competency in the health care system. Among LGB people, LGB AAPIs are more likely to experience psychological distress than any other racial group.
- **Homophobia in Religious and Faith-based Communities.** AAPI communities are comprised of diverse religious and faith-based traditions, some of which view homosexuality negatively and interpret religious teachings in ways that denigrate the moral integrity of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in order to justify denying them equal rights and acceptance.

## LGBTQ AAPI Organizations and the Current Level of Philanthropic Investment

LGBTQ AAPI organizations exist because individuals face racism and anti-immigrant bias in LGBTQ communities and homophobia in AAPI communities. LGBTQ AAPI groups vary greatly in terms of infrastructure, budget, and leadership structures. Less than one quarter of the groups have 501(c)3 status and more than one-third are fiscally sponsored. The majority of LGBTQ AAPI groups are volunteer-led. Groups with paid staff are actually part of larger AAPI organizations. Many groups are informal or even virtual, while others serve as vehicles for grassroots organizing and political advocacy.

In 2009, grants to all LGBTQ organizations and projects represented slightly more than 0.2 percent of all foundation giving in the United States. Funding for LGBTQ organizations in general doubled between

2002 and 2009, from \$50 million in 2002 to a high of \$107 million in 2008. Investment in LGBTQ AAPI organizations was \$81,950 in 2002, representing 0.3% of the funding to LGBTQ organizations. For a number of years after 2003, LGBTQ AAPI funding increased to at or near 1% of total funding to LGBTQ organizations and projects, and reached a high of \$980,050 in 2008. In 2009, possibly reflecting the impact of the economic crisis that began in late 2008, the amount of funding granted to LGBTQ AAPI organizations fell to \$648,939 or 0.7% of the total granted to LGBTQ organizations. Many LGBTQ AAPI groups survive financially on individual donations, in-kind support, and fundraising events. Groups wishing to launch large-scale campaigns or programs may be hampered by the lack of support from organized philanthropy.

## Recommendations for Philanthropic Investment

LGBTQ AAPI groups have identified a pressing need to share best practices among groups and connect organizations working in diverse communities across the country. Grantmakers can help create these spaces for strategic discussions to create solutions to the needs and challenges of LGBTQ AAPI communities. AAPIP offers the following funding strategies to address this need for connection and to help build a stronger network of organizations.

- **Strengthening LGBTQ AAPI organizations' capacity and civic engagement.** Capacity building and core operating support are needed to build the infrastructure, civic engagement, and leadership of autonomous LGBTQ AAPI organizations. Capacity building investments should be geared not only to organizational development but also to building skill sets related to community organizing and policy advocacy.
- **Building links to allies.** This grantmaking strategy supports alliance-building work between heterosexual AAPI organizations and LGBTQ AAPI

groups, as well as alliance building between LGBTQ AAPI organizations and other queer communities of color. Examples of alliance-building funding strategies include bringing together ally organizations to share best practices on successfully integrating LGBTQ AAPI issues and populations into organizations' missions, priorities, and programs; and supporting more convenings that bring together LGBTQ People of Color organizations for peer learning and strategy discussions.

- **Building links to mainstream LGBTQ organizations.** Funders can help strengthen and diversify the LGBTQ movement by creating opportunities for queer people of color organizations to be "at the table" with mainstream LGBTQ organizations. Through convenings and grants to organizations, leaders from LGBTQ AAPI and other communities of color can engage more frequently in sharing information about the issues and perspectives of queer people of color and strategizing with mainstream LGBTQ organizations.

■ **Support to build strong relationships between secular organizations and interfaith groups** to develop strategies to welcome LGBTQ people and issues into religious and faith-based AAPI communities. This funding strategy seeks to integrate LGBTQ AAPI issues and populations into faith-based communities as reflected in their leadership, membership, outreach activities, ministries, and programs.

■ **More community-based and quantitative research.** For example, there exists very little documentation about Muslim, Pacific Islander, South Asian, and Southeast Asian LGBTQ groups and issues, as well as about groups working on LGBTQ AAPI issues and communities in different geographic areas, specifically the Midwest, New England states, Pacific Northwest, and the South. Language issues pose a barrier because most materials are in English and are not accessible to those who speak and read other languages. Translation and materials in different languages are needed for AAPI communities.

