



RESEARCH &
EVALUATION

AAPIP's National Giving Circle Network

**A Framework for
Democratized Philanthropy**

January 2017

AAPIP, A Mission-Driven Organization

Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP) is a national membership organization comprised of institutions and individuals in philanthropy who are dedicated to increasing charitable investments for underserved Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities. **AAPIP's mission is to expand and mobilize resources for AAPI communities to build a more just and equitable society, believing that democracy thrives when communities leverage individual action for collective good.** Its core members include staff and trustees of foundations and other grantmaking entities, as well as individual donors and philanthropists who support AAPI communities and causes.

AAPIP's mission is grounded in social justice values, reflecting its desire to shift the status quo in the field of philanthropy

In addition, AAPIP supports 10 regional chapters around the country that are centers for place-based advocacy, information sharing, and network building around AAPI issues and philanthropy.

AAPIP programs include a range of convenings, research and advocacy, community philanthropy, giving circles, and other incubation projects. These programs are designed to engage AAPI communities and philanthropy to address unmet needs; serve as a resource for and about AAPI communities; support informed, grassroots giving

within and to AAPI communities; and explore new ideas and approaches for social justice philanthropy.

Celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2015, AAPIP is grounded in social justice values, reflecting its desire to shift the status quo in the field of philanthropy to both respond more proactively to pressing AAPI community needs and to empower and activate those communities to become partners in achieving equity and lasting change.



A Look Back at the National Giving Circle Campaign

As a membership organization, AAPIP sought to leverage its unique position between community and philanthropy to promote community engagement and collective giving by looking at existing community practices of philanthropy that were different from those used in traditional philanthropy. One funder commented that the giving circle illustrated, **“new forces and forms of philanthropy that were taking place... different ways that philanthropy was taking place in communities that might not be through traditional channels.”**

Thus, AAPIP, through its 5-year National Giving Circle Campaign, spanning from 2011 to 2015, helped support the formation and growth of 50 distinct giving circles in Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AANHPI) communities nationwide. It is important to note that while AAPIP has worked in underserved Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities for years, “Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AANHPI)” is used here and subsequently in this document to reflect AAPIP’s current Giving Circle Network, which includes a Native Hawaiian giving circle focused on addressing specific needs encountered by Native Hawaiian youth.

This national campaign developed out of AAPIP’s work in challenging mainstream philanthropy to

be more inclusive and equitable in their giving to the AANHPI community, while stimulating a broader discussion about who gets to participate in philanthropy. Aware of the gap in funding for the many needs in AANHPI communities, AAPIP built on a cultural tradition of pooling resources to create greater impact through the giving circle model. This involves activating community members and foundations to expand knowledge and funding to AANHPI communities.

Building their national network of 50 giving circles was a key component in AAPIP’s plan to explore and formalize a culture of giving—one where everyone can participate in creating change in their community, forming a movement for democratized philanthropy.



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Contextualizing AAPIP's Giving Circle Framework

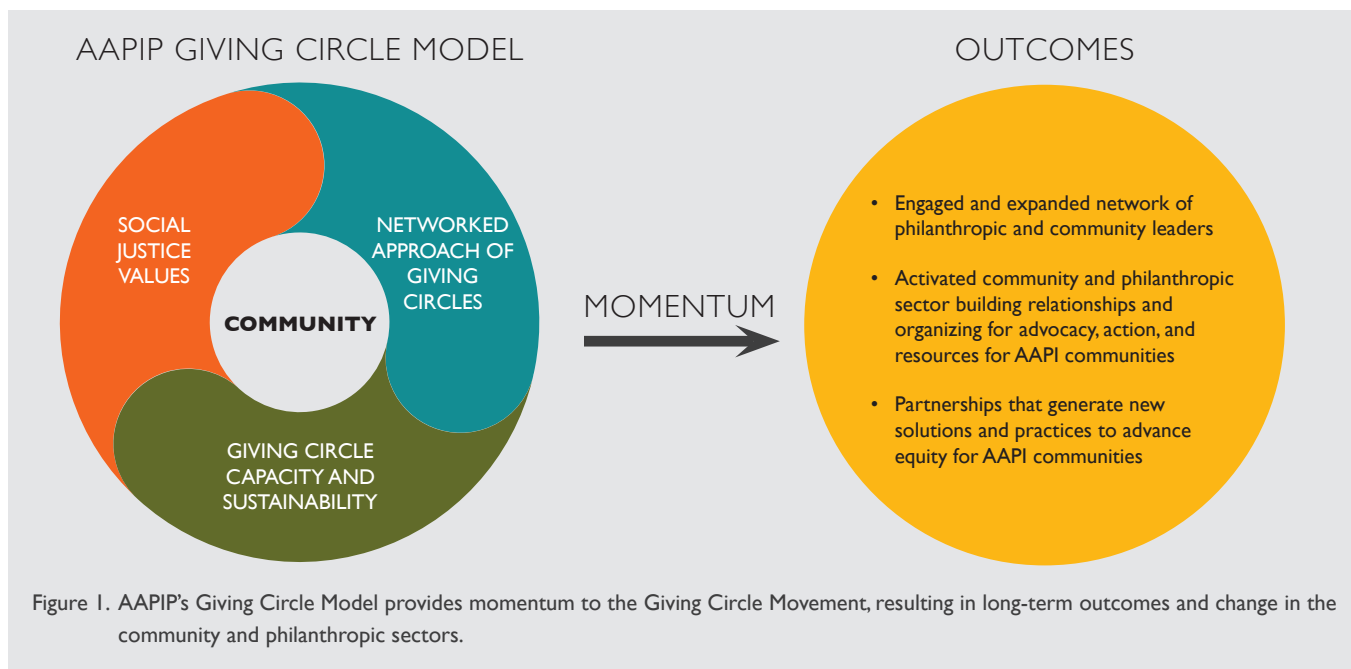
A giving circle is a highly participatory vehicle for philanthropy, in which a group of individuals combine their resources (such as money or volunteer time) to donate to a community cause or project. **Giving circles engage with the community to raise awareness of the needs and issues they face. Because of this unique approach, giving circles often have a larger collective impact than would be achieved by individuals alone.**

Giving circles are rooted in tradition. Communities around the world have long and deep traditions of supporting individuals, families, organizations, neighborhoods and communities through the giving circle model. While giving circles are a time-tested strategy, AAPIP's unique model has cultivated and scaled it in ways that provide the basis for movement building. The giving circle model allows under-resourced needs to be elevated and serves as the framework for democratized philanthropy. Three key components of the AAPIP Model are the organization's social justice values, its networked approach of giving

circles, and an investment in building giving circle capacity and sustainability.

Social justice values form the basis for the model, informing the empowerment approach behind it. The network of giving circles provides a fluid structure that gives it flexibility and adaptability to meet diverse and changing community needs. Investing in giving circle capacity and sustainability utilizes AAPIP's decade of experience working with giving circles. Each component does not operate in isolation, but rather, continuously works together to provide momentum for changing the status quo.





Social justice values: The AAPI Giving Circle Model operationalizes the belief that “everyone can be a philanthropist” to support their community. This is philanthropy for a specific purpose: to bring funding to the most underserved communities in terms of social service needs. Essential to AAPI’s model are values of social justice, community empowerment, and giving as an essential component of civic engagement. The Giving Circle Model has community at its core, addressing power dynamics in traditional philanthropy, building relationships across sectors and between community and funders, and creating a new culture of directed giving. The Giving Circle Model intentionally opens a door to giving for those who are new to philanthropy and allows giving circle members to reflect upon their own values, investment in their communities, and motivations for being involved in their communities. Beyond simply growing philanthropy, this model operationalizes social justice values by funding and building the capacity of some of the most under-represented and disproportionately impacted communities in the nation.

Networked approach of giving circles: AAPI’s Model consists of a national network of giving circles under AAPI, each giving circle with its own structure and operating process. Giving circles are not institutionalized, so there is no one type of giving circle, and many effective ways of implementing them, with “intentional autonomy” built into the Giving Circle Model. AAPI provides support in the form of resources and connections for the giving circle, yet each giving circle is encouraged to define a process and structure that is most responsive to its needs and the needs of its communities. This network approach allows giving circles and their members to be responsive to needs on the ground, while also being able to tap into the larger movement of giving circles, regardless of their size or the amount they have raised.

Giving circle capacity and sustainability: AAPI’s Giving Circle Model also seeks to build giving circle capacity and ensure local sustainability. However, contrary to traditional philanthropy, sustainability does not always mean larger amounts of funds raised over an infinite period of time. Rather, sustainability is grounded in what each community deems as appropriate for its needs. The model also recognizes that community needs shift over time and are intricately tied to historical, political, and cultural contexts. Therefore, AAPI helps giving circles build their own capacity and develop relationships within communities to ensure that giving can be integrated into relevant local efforts.

A Closer Look

In addition to the social justice values, networked approach of giving circles, and investment in giving circle capacity and sustainability that compose its Giving Circle Model, a key aspect of AAPIP's Giving Circle Framework is AAPIP itself. As an organization, AAPIP plays multiple crucial roles within its network, between its network and others, and beyond its network. Within its Giving Circle Network, AAPIP acts as a **capacity builder to its giving circles**. AAPIP also serves as a funding and capacity building **facilitator between giving circles in its network and philanthropic institutions**. Beyond its network, AAPIP provides a **voice for advocacy in the field of philanthropy** and is a **catalyst for movement building**.

Capacity builder to giving circles

AAPIP has varying approaches to supporting giving circles in its network, based on the giving circle's needs. AAPIP encourages giving circle members to be advocates for their communities, while also helping to build their capacity around leadership development, collective decision making, fundraising, and community engagement.



Since there is no one type of giving circle, AAPIP has the challenging role of providing this tailored technical assistance and capacity building support to each of its 50 giving circles, in addition to the group support provided for all the giving circles at the annual convening. For example, newer giving circles receive a toolkit with guidelines and tips on how to start up a giving

circle, based on lessons learned. Giving circles that have been around longer may receive support in handling challenges such as leadership transitions, burn out, recruitment, and member retention. Each giving circle is also paired with an AAPIP staff member, allowing it to take advantage of additional services and resources as is necessary.

Having developed a relationship with each giving circle, AAPIP is able to bring all these giving circles together to support each other within its network. Knowing that they are part of a larger network, and indeed, a larger movement, pushes giving circles and their members to consider their impact on the broader AANHPI community. With AAPIP's support, they are able to share and hear the stories of community impact to which giving circles contribute, whether it is a presentation about AAPIP's demonstration projects like the Queer Justice Fund or the hopeful words of a "dreamer" (undocumented youth) sharing how giving circle funds were used. As one giving circle member affirmed, "It's been an honor to be a part of AAPIP and the giving circles. We are making such an impact in our community." There is value added in being part of this Giving Circle Network.

In addition to the external reach AAPIP has through its national network of giving circles, it also provides the space and time for introspection and personal connection. Giving circle members are able to share their best practices and lessons learned at the annual AAPIP National Giving Circle Convening, providing each other with insights across shared and diverse experiences, communities, and issues. It is an opportunity for peer learning and to build relationships with those who are interested in supporting the AANHPI community.

Facilitator between giving circles and philanthropic institutions

AAPIP helps giving circles connect with community foundations, larger foundations, and other philanthropic institutions. When asked about AAPIP's role with the Giving Circle Network, one AAPIP staff member explained, "The Giving Circle Campaign aimed to get everyday people involved. Our traditional membership consisted of chapters and affinity groups, who only work with foundations. But AAPIP bridges the two, bringing all the pieces together: funding, philanthropy, community organizations/non-profits, and those not working with nonprofits." In this way, giving circles are able to build partnerships and leverage their resources to bring additional visibility to community needs. By providing opportunities for giving circle members to collaborate, not only with each other but with funders and other philanthropic institutions, AAPIP fosters philanthropy that is built on relationships and not simply transactions with the community.

In essence, AAPIP brings people together to have conversations about community. Whether directly at networking events at AAPIP's local chapters, at the annual National Giving Circle Convening, or indirectly through events sponsored by giving circles in its network, AAPIP connects people in different and diverse circles of philanthropy,

from its giving circle members to community organizations to community foundations and traditional funders, for the larger purpose of bringing more resources to AANHPI communities in need.



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Advocate in the field of philanthropy

AAPIP understands that its Giving Circle Model starts with the community, not simply as a recipient of philanthropy, but as an engaged participant and donor. AAPIP challenges community members in its Giving Circle Network to be more involved as stakeholders in their own community, investing where funders often do not. Through their involvement in their unique giving circles, these individual community members gain an awareness of the needs in their communities and how they can participate in addressing those needs. They feel empowered to make an impact through their collective giving and begin to see themselves as agents of change who can influence society. Through its Giving Circle Model, AAPIP shifts the power dynamic found in traditional philanthropy to one of community philanthropy. Giving circle members take on shared responsibility for their community and recognize their role as advocates in organizing their communities.

With a shift in awareness and power, individuals within AAPIP's Giving Circle Model are then able to engage others to help further AAPIP's goals

of democratized philanthropy. One giving circle member stated, "I see the giving circle movement as radically shifting perceptions of who is a philanthropist—AAPIP has done a good job of that. Changing the way philanthropy is done. It's democratic, participatory, inclusive."

AAPIP's social justice values of community engagement, empowerment, organizing, and advocacy help connect giving circle members to a larger purpose: philanthropy that is accessible to both donors in the community and the community organizations receiving their funds. This allows community members to decide where the funds are most needed and entrusts the community organization to best use those funds without so many restrictions or reporting requirements.

AAPIP uses its nationwide network, national visibility, and influence in the philanthropic sector to share these shifts in perspective and practice. With its name recognition, AAPIP then lends its significant value and visibility to affiliated organizations and giving circles in its network to advocate for changes in the field of philanthropy.

AAPIP shifts the power dynamic found in traditional philanthropy to one of community philanthropy





Catalyst for movement building

While these shifts in perspective and philanthropy practices may not by themselves be unique to AAPIP's Giving Circle Model, AAPIP's use of them to catalyze and operationalize a Giving Circle Movement is innovative.

Beyond its own network of giving circles, AAPIP has provided capacity building support to other communities of color. AAPIP has advised other giving circles and organizations looking to form Giving Circle Networks in the Latino, African American, and Jewish communities, because AAPIP is seen as a leader in the field of philanthropy, particularly in the area of building a Giving Circle Network and Movement.



**Giving Circle
leaders give in
addition to, and
not in place of
regular giving**

In all its roles as a capacity builder, facilitator, advocate, and catalyst, however, AAPIP is cognizant of the need and desire for partnership between community and traditional philanthropy. For this movement to succeed, for the benefit of all involved, there must be collaboration across sectors and between people, both within and beyond AAPIP's Giving Circle Network. In this way, as one giving circle member summed up, "the role that AAPIP can play is creating more of an ecosystem of similar organizations and, also with the giving circles, individuals who are exploring some of the same issues that we're exploring and creating that ecosystem that supports each other's work even though we're not getting funded." It is not about one role or one player, but about creating an ecosystem, of which AAPIP, its Giving Circle Network, the community organizations, and funders are all a part.

Beyond its own network of giving circles, AAPIP has provided capacity building support to other communities of color.

Recommendations for the Giving Circle Network

Facilitate peer learning within the Giving Circle Network

Being a part of a larger network has allowed giving circle members to experience the strength and power in collective giving, collaboration and community change. Because every giving circle is unique by design, it has been extremely beneficial for giving circles to have informal and formal spaces to share their learnings, mistakes and insights with one another. Peer learning opportunities also allow giving circles to re-connect with their values and missions and reflect on their strategies. These opportunities can help reinforce social justice values that often are not validated by traditional philanthropy, but are essential to the viability of giving circles. Many giving circle members reported that peer learning opportunities help them stay connected to their motivations for giving, as they can see their part in something larger. “Without AAPIP, we wouldn’t have lasted,” said one giving circle member. The member continued, “We have to include AAPIP to help get the giving circle started and continued. We want to see how our giving circles can learn more from each other on a regular basis.”

Specifically, it is recommended that peer learnings allow for on-going engagement with peers (such as quarterly meetings), tailor for specific cohorts that share affinity related to developmental phase or strategic goals, and consider cross-learning with local community organizations. Some giving circle members noted that true peer support would

mean that giving circles are able to connect with one another and support each other directly.

One giving circle member stated, “AAPIP is the glue keeping us together. I would like to see more exchange happening within the circles. I know that in LA we try to contact the other groups because there are so many. One of the ideas that was floating around was what if there was a way that all of the giving circles, at least here in LA, have the same grant application, to have the same process so that non-profit organizations can apply once to multiple giving circles. We are really dispersed here in LA. I would like to see more collaboration within giving circles, if I could go on the web and see what other giving circles are doing.”

This longer-term goal of self-sufficient peer learning is important for both intermediaries, such as AAPIP, and funders to keep in mind. While it may not be feasible in the short-term for giving circle members to directly support one another, this goal can be attained by programming that creates intentional mechanisms for on-going peer relationships and peer learning. The ability of giving circles to directly support one another in growing, learning and adapting together is the ultimate metric of success.





Highlight Giving Circle Network within context of larger movement

Many of the giving circles expressed how they have benefited from understanding the broad vision of AAPIP's Giving Circle Campaign and how the network aligns with strategies as part of a larger movement. Yet, it's often easy to lose sight of the goals of the movement when the giving circles are immersed in responding to on-the-ground needs in their local communities. Consistent and on-going communication about how giving circles are integrated into AAPIP's national policy platform allows giving circles to engage their local

communities. Giving circles can leverage impact of the larger movement as a strategy to engage donors and community foundations. AAPIP also benefits by establishing a feedback mechanism for giving circles to elevate campaign and policy issues that arise in real-time in their communities. With large bases of diverse community members across the nation, giving circles have the potential to play a critical role in keeping community foundations and the field of philanthropy at large responsive to the conditions affecting regional communities.

Opportunities for the Philanthropic Sector

Invest in giving circles to deepen community impact and improve the field of philanthropy

Giving circles are flexible and can often act quickly, in comparison to traditional funders in philanthropy, which are often constrained by historical structures and processes in their funding practices. Giving circles inherently have a “pulse” of the community that is deeply nuanced and grounded in local contexts, cultures and histories. This strategic position of giving circles provides a wealth of opportunities for diverse partnerships to grow and leverage community giving. For example, giving circles appear to inspire their members to contribute to other causes beyond the giving circle to which they belong. As AAPIP

staff pointed out, giving circles have “the ability to expose people so they become more aware of how they can participate.” This data points to the potential for collaborations that extend beyond the giving circle, which could galvanize a culture of giving around a specific issue or in a specific community. As one giving circle member stated, “We are working on our cause and this is truly a movement generated by AAPIP where there are 49 other groups like mine

working on Asian American causes.” It is more than just fundraising, as so many involved in this movement have pointed out.

The flexibility of support giving circles can provide also allows for considerable community innovation. One recipient of giving circle funds said, “[the funds] came at a time when we were still very new and trying to get visibility, the project had to gain visibility, and we really were able to reach populations that we wouldn’t have otherwise reached so that was very helpful.” Giving circles not only expose their members to new giving opportunities and causes in their communities, but they can provide much needed funds at critical times for smaller projects at community organizations that might

otherwise go unnoticed and unfunded by larger grantmaking institutions.

These characteristics of giving circles show that traditional funders can learn much about community engagement from giving circles. As one funder mentioned, “We were looking for opportunities to work with and learn from folks in community around their giving and their strategy of philanthropy and giving through new forms, new faces, and new forces that were happening. I think that particular framework really led us to looking at the giving circle movement that went large across the country and then more specifically, the work that AAPIP was doing with giving circles.”

In turn, giving circles can learn and benefit from experiences traditional funders have had. Giving circles can leverage their existing funds and connections to create collaborations with other funders to raise additional funds for causes. As one giving circle member explained, “Our second year in giving, a foundation... had a gala and we were one of the recipients. At the gala, they had a flash giving [circle] and we received half. These philanthropists were giving out thousands and my friends... couldn’t believe that just one ask could get that much money.” Giving circles members, especially those unfamiliar with philanthropy, can learn when and how to make an ask for funds. The giving circles can also talk about the impact in their communities as a result of their giving circle funds, using the stories as a way “to create that pull,” to get others interested and involved. As stated by one AAPIP staff member, “Every giving circle has a story. Those are the stories that move people; this is what we’re all about. There’s fundamentally something really deep and rich about the impact and how we talk about that.” Through these opportunities for shared learning and mutual investment, giving circles and foundations can create more impactful giving in the communities they serve.



64% of participants increased their giving after joining a giving circle

Support AAPIP and similar intermediaries to scale beyond providing technical assistance and capacity building to advocacy and movement building

AAPIP's role in the Giving Circle Network is critical. Scaling and replicating this model has the potential for even greater impact across the nation. Various stakeholders involved with the Giving Circle Network (e.g., giving circle members, community foundations, and community organizations) all cited the importance of AAPIP's Model that provides technical assistance and capacity building to the giving circles. Many giving circles have been able to maximize their impact because of AAPIP's support and the network

model. There may be more opportunity for AAPIP to directly link its advocacy platform to the technical assistance and capacity building it provides to giving circles. There was also a strong perception that AAPIP has become a nationally recognized advocate and has the potential to do even more for the movement of democratized philanthropy. Specifically, AAPIP lends credibility to local giving circles, which allows them to better flex their collective power and engage other partners in their region.





Conclusion

In summary, AAPIP's Giving Circle Model and its Giving Circle Movement are evidence that giving circles within AAPIP's network are thriving, and that giving circles, in general, are becoming an important component of philanthropy. They provide a different mechanism to give in ways that are rooted in local community. Giving circles are not meant to replace other, more traditional methods of philanthropy. Instead, they build on existing cultural practices in many communities to augment traditional methods of philanthropy. While AAPIP's National Giving Circle Campaign was launched in response to the need for increased resources in AANHPI communities, it is AAPIP's hope that as the Movement builds and continues, this need can be met with the continued support of AAPIP's partners.

Evaluation Methodology

In the final year of its 5-year AAPI National Giving Circle Campaign, AAPIP contracted Special Service for Groups (SSG) to help them evaluate the campaign and determine its effects on the AANHPI community and on the field of philanthropy as a whole. Through a collaborative participatory evaluation process, SSG and AAPIP identified five categories of stakeholders in the campaign: Giving Circle members, Giving Circle grantees, Community Foundations as Fiscal Hosts, Foundations as Funders, and AAPIP staff.

SSG collected evaluation data through a review of existing organizational data; a gallery walk of open-ended statements that giving circle members completed at the 2015 National Giving Circle Convening held in Los Angeles in October; facilitated discussion groups called World Café at the same convening; a Donor Survey completed by 279 current giving circle members, representing 36 of the 50 giving circles in AAPIP's Giving Circle Network; 2 focus groups with current and previous AAPIP staff; and a total of 10 phone interviews with grantees, fiscal hosts, and funders.

Due to the vast and varied amount of data collected for this evaluation, it is not possible to fully capture all the viewpoints captured in the above-listed data sources. This document, however, is an attempt at providing the salient points necessary to have a conversation on AAPIP's AAPI National Giving Circle Campaign and their vision of building democratic philanthropy. For more information on the full findings of the evaluation, please contact AAPIP.

Appendix

For additional information on AAPIP and their work, please refer to the following reports (links provided below):

1992: *Invisible & in Need: Philanthropic Giving to Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders.*

Access report at: <http://aapip.org/files/publication/files/invisibleinneed-aapipreport.pdf>.

2005: *A National Scan of Giving Circles and Shared Giving.*

Access report at: <https://www.givingforum.org/sites/default/files/resources/Giving%20Together%20-%20A%20National%20Scan%20of%20Giving%20Circles%20and%20Shared%20Giving.PDF>.

2007: *GROWING OPPORTUNITIES: Will Funding Follow the Rise in Foundation Assets and Growth of AAPI Populations?* Access report at <http://aapip.org/files/publication/files/aapip-gopps4www.pdf>.

2009: *The Impact of Giving Together: Giving Circles' Influence on Members' Philanthropic and Civic Behaviors, Knowledge, and Attitudes.* Access report at: <https://www.givingforum.org/resources/impact-giving-together-giving-circles%E2%80%99-influence-members%E2%80%99-philanthropic-and-civic>.

2010: *Queer Justice Fund launched.* Access LGBTQ AAPI Funding Infographic at: http://aapip.org/files/publication/files/lgbtq_aapi_funding_infographic_-_aapip.pdf.

2012: *MISSED OPPORTUNITIES: How Organized Philanthropy Can Help Meet the Needs of LGBTQ Asian American, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander Communities.* Access report at: http://aapip.org/files/publication/files/aapip-missdopp_final.pdf.



**Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy
expands and mobilizes resources for AAPI communities
to build a more just and equitable society.**

AAPIP

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From 2011 to 2015, AAPIP launched the 5-Year National Giving Circle Campaign, a program to increase community philanthropy which supported the formation and growth of giving circles in Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander communities nationwide.

In 2016, AAPIP commissioned Special Service for Groups to capture and evaluate the 5-year Campaign's successes and challenges in order to help AAPIP ensure proper program in community philanthropy. This report, published January 15, 2017, is the result of that evaluation. In addition to Special Service for Groups, a special thank you to Noelle Ito, our former Vice President of Programs, for her commitment, expertise, and assistance on completing this report and many thanks to Noam Freshman, Frank Liu, Matt See and Dan Sheehan of Siegelvision, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the 279 giving circle leaders that participated in this survey and study.

We hope this report serves as an inspiration and guide for the lessons learned in community philanthropy.

- AAPIP Community Philanthropy Team

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