



**Building Democratic  
Philanthropy**

## **Building Community Philanthropy:**

Reflecting on the National Giving Circle Campaign and the  
Future of Collective Giving for Asian Americans and Pacific  
Islanders in Philanthropy

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## Foreword

In 2004, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP) began its exploration of giving circles quite by accident, in response to a request from a small group of donors who wanted to pool their funds in order to give back to the community. Over the course of several years that followed, AAPIP's experience with this work slowly grew, leading to a major 5-year National Giving Circle Campaign from 2011 to 2015 that created 54 AAPIP Giving Circles that have raised \$3.3 million to date from more than 5,000 donors to support some 500 AAPI organizations and causes around the country. While these numbers exceeded our initial expectations, what was most remarkable was how AAPIP's Giving Circles embodied the idea that by working together in common cause, with social justice values and a shared commitment to serve community needs, even small donors can make a very big difference.

In 2017, we released a first report by Special Service for Groups (SSG) Research & Evaluation Team that examined the models and approach to AAPIP's giving circles, and AAPIP's unique role as a facilitator and capacity builder for that work. In this 2018 report, also commissioned through SSG, we are setting the context for giving circle work by examining the nature and needs of fast-growing Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) communities. We are also taking a closer look at the underlying dynamics of AAPIP Giving Circles, including donor motivations, impacts on donors and grantees, and the lessons we are learning about what can help, or hinder, successful giving circle work.

As a national philanthropic membership organization dedicated to expanding and mobilizing resources for underserved AAPI communities, we also believe we have a role to play as an advocate for more foundations to invest in this line of work. We have thus ended this report by identifying what we see are compelling opportunities for funders to leverage impactful investments in community-based giving circles, including those that serve AAPIs. There is great potential here and we have only scratched the surface.

AAPIP's fifteen-year journey exploring the nature and impact of giving circles could not have happened without the support and dedication of many. I want to express my appreciation to Peggy Saika, Noelle Ito, Alex Wong and Huong Nguyen who initiated the ground-breaking campaign work at AAPIP; Rebecca Ratzkin, MUP, Erica Shehane, MPH, LCSW, and Erica Jung, MA, MPH who served as our Research & Evaluation Team from Special Service for Groups; the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Wallace H. Coulter Foundation for being visionary lead funders, and most importantly the thousands of community donors who operationalized AAPIP's belief that democratic philanthropy can, and will, build a more just and equitable society.

My thanks to all,



Cora Mirikitani, President and CEO  
AAPIP

## The Unacknowledged and Growing Need in AANHPI Communities

Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (AANHPI) are some of the most diverse and fastest growing communities in the nation. Although AANHPI populations are often grouped together and mistakenly viewed as a monolithic entity, there are considerable differences in ethnicities, languages, cultures, religions, political orientations, migration histories, and refugee/immigration status.

Asian Americans include those with ethnic backgrounds as diverse as Afghani, Bangladeshi, Burmese, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Nepalese, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Thai, and Vietnamese. Spiritual practices and religious traditions practiced among Asian Americans include Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Catholicism, Confucianism, Hindu, Islam, Judaism, Shamanism, Sikh and other spiritual traditions.

Between 2000 and 2010, the Asian American population in the U.S. grew 46%.<sup>1</sup> This growth exceeds that of any other racial group nationwide, including Latinos. Recent projections about demographic changes in the U.S. suggest that by 2055 Asians will become the largest immigrant group, surpassing the Hispanic population. By 2065, Asians will make up approximately 38% of all U.S. immigrants.<sup>4</sup>

Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are also a diverse population, comprising a myriad of languages and cultures. Their backgrounds are Polynesian, Micronesian and Melanesian, and include those who identify with Chamorro, Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, Palauan, Pohnpeian, Chuukese, Yapese, Kosraen and/or other ethnicities. Native Hawaiians, whose ancestral roots trace back to the aboriginal Polynesian people of the Hawaiian Islands, are one of the largest Pacific Islander groups in the U.S.<sup>10</sup> In homes across the U.S., there are at least 39 different Pacific Islander languages spoken.<sup>10</sup> Many Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are multiracial and eight out of ten Pacific Islanders in the U.S. are native to the United States.<sup>10</sup>

### Key Data Points about Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders

#### Population Growth

From 2000-2010 the Asian American population grew 46% and the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander population grew 40%.<sup>1, 2</sup>

In 2016, AANHPI individuals made up 5.9% of the population.<sup>3</sup>

Asians are the fastest growing racial/ethnic group in the U.S.<sup>3</sup>

By 2065, Asians are expected to be 14% of the U.S. population, making up approximately 38% of all U.S. immigrants.<sup>4</sup>

#### Undocumented Immigrants

Asian immigrants make up about 13% of the estimated 11.1 million unauthorized immigrants who live in the U.S.<sup>5</sup>

#### Poverty

A 2011 study found that 16.1% of Asian Americans were living in poverty, compared to 10.4% of Whites, when cost of living was accounted for.<sup>6</sup> National poverty rates for some Southeast Asian communities include are especially startling. An estimated 39.4% of Burmese Americans were in poverty between 2012-2016<sup>7</sup>, 37.8% of Hmong Americans, and 29.3% of Cambodian Americans in 2011.<sup>8</sup>

#### Unemployment

The AAPI community has the second highest share of unemployed workers who are long-term unemployed (30.2%), next to the Black Non-Hispanic community (34.7%). The Vietnamese community has the highest share of long-term unemployed workers (41.5%).<sup>9</sup>

Between 2000 and 2010, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander populations in the U.S. grew 40%.<sup>2</sup> The NHPI population is expected to continue growing, with 46% increase in population expected between 2016 and 2060.<sup>3</sup> The NHPI population is much younger than the U.S. population as a whole. The median age for NHPI in 2016 was 30.8 years, compared to 37.7 years for the total U.S. population, and 36.5 years for Asians.<sup>11</sup>

As the AANHPI populations continue to grow, so do their needs. Many AANHPI communities experience the same social and economic disparities as other communities of color. For example, of the estimated 11.1 million unauthorized immigrants who live in the U.S., Asian immigrants make up about 13%.<sup>5</sup> AAPIP's own study found that Southeast Asian and Pacific Islanders boys and young men in California were routinely profiled by police and national security personnel.<sup>12</sup> Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders experience challenges accessing higher-education, with only 18% of NHPI holding a Bachelor's degree.<sup>2</sup> A 2011 study found that 16.1% of Asian Americans were living in poverty, compared to 10.4% of Whites, when cost of living was accounted for.<sup>6</sup> National poverty rates for some Southeast Asian communities include are especially startling. An estimated 39.4% of Burmese Americans were in poverty between 2012-2016<sup>7</sup>; 37.8% of Hmong Americans and 29.3% of Cambodian Americans in were in poverty in 2011.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the growth of populations and the increasing amount and complexity of needs, philanthropic attention and financial support continues to lag behind. One potential reason why is that philanthropy on the whole doesn't view AANHPI communities as "in need," ascribing to the 'model minority' myth that Asian American communities are well assimilated and highly successful (and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities are often lumped in with these stereotypes).

The reason the model minority myth is so disingenuous is because it posits that Asian Americans are the success story, having overcome issues other immigrants and communities of color experience due to their diligent their diligent work ethic, traditional family values, and focus on education. According to historian Ellen Wu, Asian Americans sought to promote themselves as upstanding citizens able to assimilate into American culture and contribute meaningfully to society in order to combat racism.<sup>13</sup> This was common for other minority and immigrant groups; African Americans also made similar appeals. However in the post-World War II political climate, it was only convenient for politicians to elevate Asian Americans. "Stories about Asian American success were turned into propaganda" for political gain.<sup>13</sup> Thus the model minority myth was an unintended outcome of an effort by Asian Americans to humanize their experience and be seen as an integral part of American culture.

Since the model minority narrative has taken hold in mainstream American media, a lack of disaggregated data about AANHPI communities has exacerbated the problem, disguising the realities of how some Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander groups experience significant disparities.<sup>14</sup> For example, Asian Americans have a higher median education level than non-Asian Americans and their average unemployment rates are lower. But these aggregated data points cover up large variances in the economic and social situations of many Asians in the U.S.<sup>14</sup> Although started in part to combat racism, the stereotype of a "model minority" has been harmful

to AANHPI communities as it has masked many of the real challenges that these communities experience.

Despite continued growth in AANHPI populations nationally, the field of traditional philanthropy as a whole has not responded with equitable funding investments for these communities. In 2007, AAPIP published *Growing Opportunities*, a report that examined the state of funding in Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities in comparison to population growth. The findings, although not especially surprising, were alarming. Funding for AAPI communities by the top United States foundations equaled less than 1% (0.4%) of the total amount given overall, even though Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders made up more than 4% of the total United States population during the same time period (1992-2004).<sup>15</sup>

This illuminates the reality that philanthropic trends have not reflected the changing demographics of the nation and fall short of meeting the needs of some of the nation's most diverse communities. While some foundations have put forth initiatives to address giving in communities of color,<sup>16</sup> there is still considerable need in AANHPI communities that has not been addressed by traditional philanthropy.

One strategy to address some of the disparity in giving to AANHPI communities has been giving circles. Giving circles are a time-tested grassroots strategy that tap into the traditions of collective giving common in many cultures. In recent years, giving circles have gained increased visibility and there is more information about the giving circle landscape in the U.S.<sup>17</sup> The growing visibility of giving circles has generated enthusiasm as they are one manifestation of "new philanthropy" that involves donors who want to be more engaged in giving back.<sup>18</sup>

**Despite the growth of populations and the increasing amount and complexity of needs, philanthropic attention and financial support continues to lag behind.**

In the 11 years since AAPIP first published the *Growing Opportunity* report that called attention to the lack of funding for AAPI communities, the estimated number of giving circles in the U.S. has grown exponentially with 1,313 active giving circles documented in 2017.<sup>a</sup> The available literature on giving circles suggests that they are a steadfast component of current and future philanthropy. The grassroots nature of giving circles are a promising strategy to increase giving for AANHPIs as they are inherently flexible and capable of being structured in ways that can align with the very

diverse cultures, traditions and needs among AANHPI communities. In light of the growing population of AANHPI, the growing social and economic needs within these communities, combined with the lack of traditional philanthropic resources entering these communities, giving circles are a viable and effective strategy to increase resources and raise awareness for AANHPI issues and peoples.

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<sup>a</sup> A 2004 study documented 220 active Giving Circles in the United States. A 2006 study duplicating the original methodology confirmed 400 Giving Circles. The most recent nationwide study in 2017 using similar methods documented 1,313 Giving Circles (plus 525 chapters). [Bearman, J., et al. (2017). *The State of Giving Circles Today: Overview of New Research Findings from a Three-Part Study*, Collective Giving Research Group.]

## AAPIP Giving Circle National Campaign Goals, Model and Donors

As a membership organization, AAPIP sought to leverage its unique position between community and philanthropy to promote community engagement and collective giving in AANHPI<sup>b</sup> communities and close the funding disparities in traditional philanthropic practice. AAPIP wanted to spearhead and support initiatives that challenged mainstream philanthropy to be more inclusive and equitable in their giving to AANHPI communities and jumpstart a national conversation about who gets to participate in philanthropy. Aware of the gap in funding for AANHPI communities, AAPIP built on the cultural tradition of pooling resources to create greater impact through the giving circle model. A larger aim of AAPIP's giving circle work has been to *democratize philanthropy* by building a larger movement in which individuals, regardless of their experience with philanthropy, could come together to address issues they cared about in their communities. AAPIP also sought to incentivize and encourage new giving for AANHPI communities by cultivating new donors, raising awareness among philanthropic foundations and creating a groundswell of support through the AANHPI communities themselves.

*"The Giving Circle Campaign was an intent to get everyday people involved. Our traditional membership of chapters and a lot of affinity groups only work with foundations. But AAPIP bridges the two, bringing all the pieces together: funding, philanthropy, community organizations, nonprofits, and those not working with nonprofits."*

AAPIP's five-year National Giving Circle Campaign was born out of an idea whereby the collective power of giving circles and AAPIP's position in the philanthropic field would begin to turn the tide to ensure that philanthropic investment was reflective of the growing AANHPI populations and their needs. There were three overarching goals driving the conceptualization and implementation of AAPIP's campaign, as follows:

- 1) **Increase philanthropic resources to AANHPI causes and community** in order to reduce the gap in funding as measured through 2007 *Growing Opportunities* report and experienced by AANHPI nonprofits and communities.

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<sup>b</sup> It is important to note that AAPIP has been working with underserved Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities for years. The term "Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI)" is used throughout this report to reflect AAPIP's current Giving Circle Network, which includes a Native Hawaiian giving circle focused on addressing specific needs of Native Hawaiian youth.

- 2) **Build an AANHPI philanthropic network** to change perceptions about who can be a philanthropist and build a base of donors willing to support AANHPI communities. AAPIP's giving circle work actively challenged the practice common in traditional philanthropy of only focusing on wealthy individual donors. Rather, AAPIP's approach involved identifying, cultivating and championing a new network of donors within AANHPI communities.
  
- 3) **Incubate new ideas and explore different funding support mechanisms** to provide financial support and infrastructure for community giving. Innovation was important for exploring various ways to support AANHPI communities and sustain giving circle work. Successful examples of this included AAPIP's Queer Justice Fund, Coalition of Asian American Community Leaders, and the National Giving Circle Campaign.

Through its efforts, AAPIP helped found and support 54 giving circles in Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities nationwide. Building this network provided AAPIP and its partners with the opportunity to explore and formalize a culture of giving, where everyone could be part of the movement for democratized philanthropy. The work was successful in increasing engagement, raising dollars to support AANHPI organizations and address community needs, but there is much more that needs to be done.<sup>c</sup>

### **AAPIP's Giving Circle Implementation Timeline**

#### Idea Incubation and Pilot Phase – 2004 to 2010

Through exploration of different programming ideas to build awareness and philanthropic practice in the AANHPI communities, AAPIP looked to giving circles as a strategy to widen their reach and impact. Through their own network, they established official relationships with a few key giving circles who were looking for a home. AAPIP provided that home through fiscal sponsorship and membership benefits. As giving circles slowly grew, AAPIP realized the potential of these networks to accomplish their larger organizational and community goals.

#### Five-Year Campaign – 2011 to 2015

Seed funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation provided AAPIP with the needed financial support to fully launch a five-year initiative to build a movement of community philanthropists, working within AANHPI communities, and leveraging AAPIP and individuals' financial investments. This funding allowed AAPIP to support internal staff to build the network, provide ongoing mentorship and professional development to giving circle donors, organize national convenings for networking and peer-based learning, and offer matching funds to each giving circle to help increase their individual impact.

AAPIP re-assessed its giving circle program, and amended its blanket matching donation program to a "Give, Get, Grow" match. This initiative challenged community foundations or other philanthropic institutions to give a \$10,000 gift to one giving circle, and AAPIP would match that gift for a total giving potential of \$20,000 for one giving circle. AAPIP also incorporated ongoing strategic training and support for fundraising activities for all giving circles in the network.

#### Post Campaign – 2016 to Present

This work continues with the most recent recruitment phase focusing on Corporate Employee Giving Circles, ending in December 2017.

<sup>c</sup> Brian Ho's 2008 report to the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Actions Conference pointed out that Asian American Giving Circles "are effective for bridging philanthropy to the community," and that the need to do so is clear given demographic trends and general invisibility of Asian Americans in philanthropy sector, but that the potential is not fully realized, and more research is needed.



## AAPIP's Giving Circle Models

Giving circles are rooted in tradition and can take various forms. As Eikenberry's 2008 study indicate, there are three different forms giving circles typically take. **Small groups** are informal circles of friends, acquaintances, families, who pool their money to give to a certain cause or organization. **Loose networks** consist of a core group of decision-makers who take the lead on organizing donations and giving practices but are open to individuals who may join and participate on an ad hoc or activity-specific basis. **Formal organizations** are traditional membership-based nonprofit organizations with a full board and sub-committees to manage governance, fundraising and decision-making.<sup>19</sup>

Given the diverse populations with whom AAPIP works, and their varying capacities and needs, AAPIP decided to approach building its model from a place of strategic movement-building, based on principle rather than format and structure. This model allowed individual giving circles to define their own structure that best uplifted under-resourced issues and populations. The three key underlying principles driving AAPIP's giving circle approach were **1) social justice values, 2) a networked approach, 3) an investment in capacity building and sustainability, and 4) openness to different funding support models.**

**Social Justice Values:** The AAPIP Giving Circle Model mobilized the notion that "everyone can be a philanthropist" to support their community. Essential to AAPIP's model were values of social justice, community empowerment and giving as essential components of civic engagement. Beyond simply growing philanthropy, this model operationalized social justice values by funding and building the capacity of some of the most under-represented and disproportionately impacted communities in the nation.

**A Networked Approach:** AAPIP's model consisted of a networked model of individual giving circles across the country. AAPIP provided each giving circle with financial resources, capacity building support, mentorship and opportunities for peer learning. Regardless of their size or amount they have raised, the networked approach allowed giving circles and their donors to be responsive to needs on the ground while also being able to tap into the larger movement of giving circles.

**Building Capacity and Sustainability:** AAPIP's approach acknowledged that sustainability was grounded in what each community and each giving circle deemed was appropriate for its needs. AAPIP also recognized that community needs shifted over time and were intricately tied to historical, political, and cultural contexts. So AAPIP's giving circle model helped individuals and groups design, implement, and grow their giving circles in a manner that was responsive to their capacity and need on an individual and collective basis. They provided a range of resources, such as guidelines about starting and running giving circles, research reports on philanthropy, giving circles best practices, mentorship and networking opportunities. AAPIP also provided staff support to

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[Ho, A. T. (2008). Asian American giving circles: Building bridges between philanthropy and our communities. Annual meeting of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action. Philadelphia, PA.]

develop skills around leadership, collective decision-making, fundraising and community engagement. With these types of resources and support, AAPIP's giving circles built their own capacity and strengthened relationships within communities to ensure that giving was integrated into relevant local efforts.

Within the Giving Circle Network, AAPIP acted as a capacity builder, as well as a bridge and facilitator between individual giving circles, the larger giving circle network, and traditional philanthropic institutions. Beyond the network, AAPIP was an active bullhorn, educating and advocating within the larger philanthropic sector about the need to support AANHPI communities and collective giving.

**Openness to Different Funding Support Models:** "Intentional autonomy" was built into the model, allowing each giving circle the flexibility to determine its own governance structure and administrative process. There was no one way to plan, create or operate a giving circle within AAPIP's network, as participants were encouraged to select the structure that best worked for them and the communities they aimed to support. AAPIP started the Giving Circle Campaign embracing the organic development of different types of giving circles based on its leaders and donors. Different funding support models explored during the campaign included organic community-led structures with matching funds, community foundation support-driven partnerships, and corporation-based employee groups.

## AAPIP Giving Circles – By the Numbers

**54 active giving circles** spanning the United States (as of August 2018)

### Funds Raised and Distributed

- **\$3.35 million** total raised between 2004 and 2017
- **615 grants distributed** between 2004 and 2015
- **494 organizations** and individuals received grants
- Average size of contribution to any one organization ranged from \$3,666 in 2012 to \$5,454 in 2007
- Top causes supported (between 2004 and 2015):
  - Arts and culture (10%)
  - AMEMSA (Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim and South Asian) causes (5%)
  - Health (3%)

### Donors

- **5,040 individuals involved** as giving circle donors between 2011 and 2015
- Participation ranged from 2 to 166 people per giving circle, with average of 29 donors
- Key demographics of donors, based on 2015 participant survey (n=234)
  - **Over half are under 45 years old**
  - **Over 60% identified as female**, and almost three-quarters identify as heterosexual
  - Largest ethnic groups represented are Chinese (27%), Japanese (18%), Filipino (16%), Korean (11%), and Vietnamese (10%)
  - Just over 50% of less than \$100,000, with **35% earning less than \$75,000**
  - **Majority are college educated**, with 36% having attained a Bachelors' degree

## Giving Circle Donors' Motivations

Understanding motivations for participation in giving circles is essential to understanding the potential impact on individuals and can help to identify strategies for recruitment and engagement of donors in order to sustain giving circles. National and international studies about donor motivations<sup>20, 21</sup> point to the following as key drivers for donors' decisions around charitable giving:

- Passion for a certain cause or issue
- Interest or connection to a specific organization
- Values and/or religious beliefs
- First-hand experience
- Potential and proven impact of an organization
- Social connection

In the case of AAPIP's giving circles, motivations were complex and overlapping. Further analysis of data from a 2015 national survey of AAPIP's giving circle donors revealed five intersecting motivational dimensions (see Figure 1).

Humanitarian and altruistic values embodied a feeling of empathy and compassion for others, general enjoyment in helping others, the knowledge of one's ability to help as well as a sense responsibility to do so. Humanitarianism ran most deep within AAPIP giving circle donors, with almost half (49%) reporting strong associations with this dimension.

AANHPI identity connection involved a sense of concern and obligation to the AANHPI community. Those members associated with this dimension self-identify as an AANHPI advocate. Second to humanitarian values, 42% of giving circle donors had a strong association with this dimension.

AAPIP organization relationship and exchange pointed to a connection participants have to a specific organization as their reason to give. This was similar to other donor motivations studies in that some giving circle members were driven by an AAPIP connection related to a matching gift, as well as sense of obligation to give back because they have received help in the past or would want it if they needed it. Four in ten giving circle donors associated with this dimension.

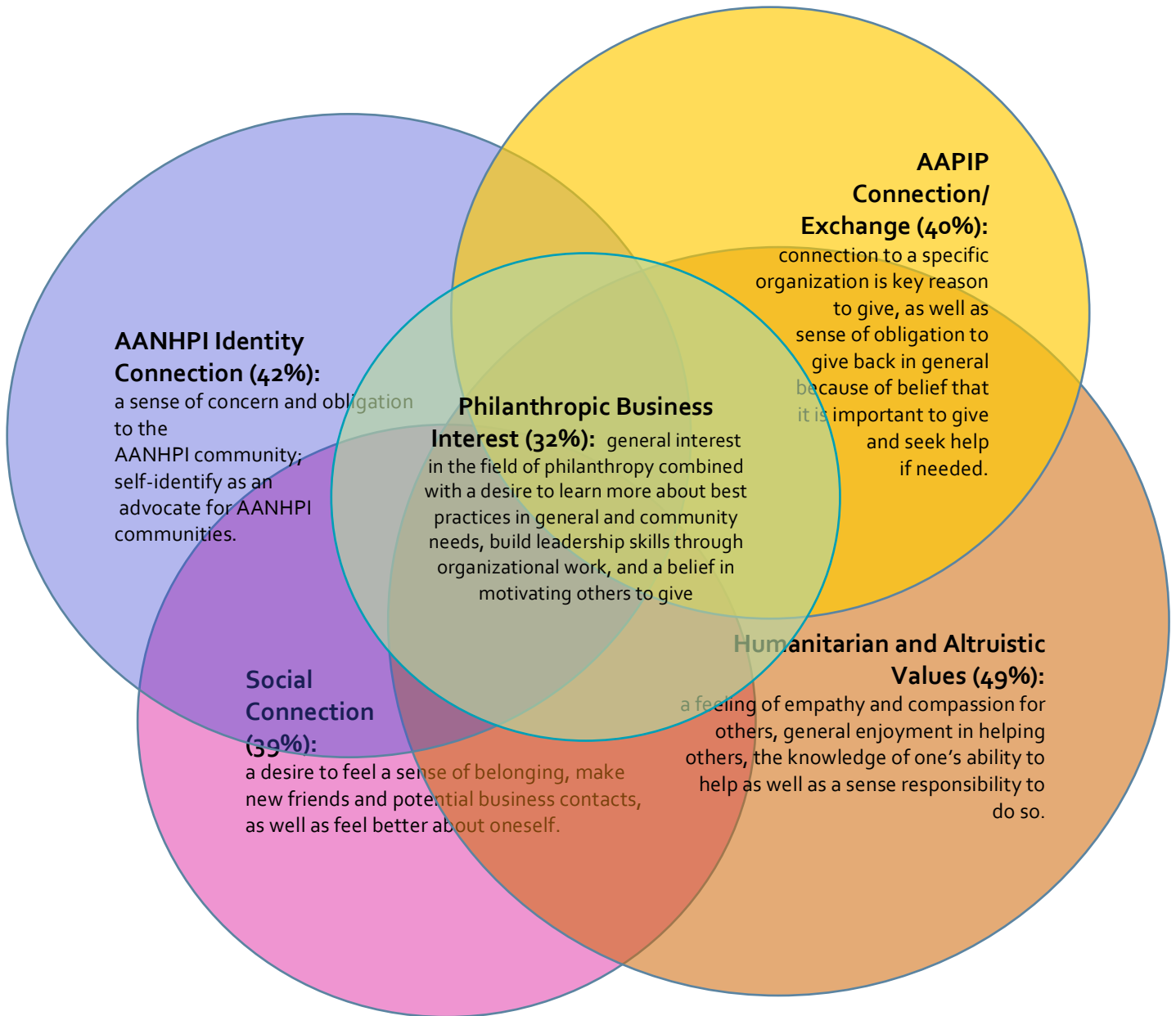
Social connection and self-affirmation was defined by a desire to feel a sense of belonging, make new friends and potential business contacts, as well as feel better about oneself. Giving circles were inherently interpersonal endeavors and many of AAPIP's giving circles started as a group of friends interested in joining forces to support their combined interests. Thirty-nine percent of giving circle donors strongly associated with this dimension. This dimension also skewed younger than other dimensions, in alignment with other research that younger donors are driven by peers interests and behaviors.

Philanthropic business and leadership skills acquisition involved a general interest in the field itself, combined with a desire to learn more about philanthropic practice and community needs, build leadership skills through organizational work, and a belief that one lead others to give (i.e., "I am good at networking"). For some, giving circles provided an opportunity to learn more about the

business of philanthropy. It comprised the smallest proportion of giving circle participants, with 32% who strongly associated with this dimension.

Giving circle donors' motivations were complex and overlapping. One participant may have strongly associated with multiple dimensions, driven by both a humanitarian goal as well as the opportunity to network and build social connections.

*Figure 1: Overlap among Motivational Dimensions of Giving Circle Donors*



*Figure 1 shows the overlapping nature of these dimensions as a group, in relation to their relative prevalence within AAPIP giving circle participant base.*

## Impact of Participation on Giving Circle Donors

Often, impact is measured through numbers, such as the amount of money raised and distributed, the number of participants and growth over time, the number of years served, the number of organizations and/or individuals receiving funds, or the types of funds distributed. There have been a few studies looking at more intangible benefits related to personal impact on donors. The research that does exist about these types of impacts identify the following arenas of impact on individuals associated with giving circle participation:<sup>22-24</sup>

- Deeper social connections and networks
- Greater awareness and knowledge of philanthropy and the philanthropic sector
- Personal empowerment in believing one person can make a difference regardless of means
- Increases sense of collaboration and democratic decision-making

All of the impacts listed above were reported by AAPIP giving circle participants, with a unique focus on AAPI community connection and empowerment. Giving circle participants reported feeling empowered and connected to a larger collective movement. In particular, participating in a giving circle helped them “share my truth,” “be a voice for AAPIs in my community,” and “build a stronger API community movement.” In addition, giving circles opened the possibility of philanthropy and its potential for impact in AANHPI communities. Participants shared that giving circles taught them how “giving truly matters,” and “the power of collective, collaborative, contributing communit[ies].” Participants walked away from their giving circle experience learning that there was “potential in individuals” and that “we all have unique gifts.”

Participating in AAPIP's giving circles also provided important educational experience in general and positive influence on donors' future giving behavior. Over three-quarters (79%) of giving circle donors who responded to the 2015 national survey agreed that participating in a giving circle increased their knowledge of philanthropy. Over 60% of survey respondents reported that the amount of their giving had increased since joining a giving circle.

This unique focus on cultural identity, personal connection, and donor education, in particular in promoting individual and community empowerment, is essential to developing philanthropic practices in historically under-funded, invisible communities.

## Impact on Giving Circle Grantees

There is little other research about the impact of giving circles' activities on grantees, aside from an accounting of dollars distributed. Select interviews with AAPIP giving circle grantee recipients provided a small window into another perspective of how giving circles create impact for organizations working in communities of color. Three key outcomes were identified:

**Gifts increased awareness and support for new organizations.** The giving circle contribution gave young organizations a sense of confidence in what they are doing and allowed them to scale up projects that would have been done anyway, but at much smaller scale or on different timeline. One grantee shared that it was sometimes hard to get funding for a niche project for a community with a relatively small local population (e.g., Nepalese art project). Giving circles with that focus

their funding for specific cultural/ethnic groups provide an avenue of rare opportunity for some grantees.

**Grantees benefited from greater network opportunities among AAPI organizations.** Beyond funding, the relationships formed through the grant period provided sense of connection to other groups interested in investing in the work of the grantee. This planted seeds for a larger network of support for AAPI organizations who might sometimes feel isolated from other community organizations or excluded from mainstream philanthropy.

**Smaller gifts were most impactful when coupled with additional support.** For at least one grantee, the amounts gifted by the giving circle were too small to make a significant impact. They were a nice addition to existing program but if the organization or program are large enough, and/or the funding amount was lower than expected or desired, the grantee may not have felt as much support. So, amount of funding in relation to size of receiving organization/grantee mattered. When coupled with other non-monetary support, giving circle gifts can begin to have greater meaning and impact for the grantee. For example, one grantee also received access to legal advice with a small grant from the South Asian Bar Association.

## Lessons Learned from AAPIP's Giving Circle Work

AANHPI communities continue to experience needs that aren't addressed or elevated by traditional philanthropy. Although some philanthropic institutions have taken leadership to actively address funding disparities in communities of color. For example, the Ford Foundation recently re-oriented its funding strategy around social justice, specifying gender, racial and ethnic justice as one of seven primary foci. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) launched its *Catalyzing Community Giving (CCG)* initiative in order to advance racial equity and strengthen philanthropy among donors of color with the ultimate aim of benefiting diverse communities of color.<sup>16</sup> In actively seeking to cultivate and engage donors of color, the WKKF initiative works to change the narrative about communities of color as contributing to philanthropy themselves, rather than only being recipients of donor funds. Some goals of the CCG initiative include "increased financial resources going to communities of color from communities of color" and "increased participation by communities of color in the distribution of community generated philanthropic resources."

AAPIP's Giving Circle Network is a model for how to realize these kind of philanthropic objectives with AANHPI communities. For those considering investing in or otherwise supporting giving circle work to achieve philanthropic equity in communities of color, AAPIP offers key insights on what should be taken into consideration when implementing giving circles with Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities.

### Financial support and matching funds

Start-up funds and matching funds were critically important in supporting the work of giving circles. A majority of giving circle participants surveyed (89%) said the matching funds were very useful, and 71% said that the \$500 in start-up funds were very useful. In some ways the impact of the matching funds was practical; it inherently increased the potential amount giving circles could

give to any given issue or organization. In other ways, the matching funds were symbolic and less about the actual dollar amount but rather a tangible sign of support from AAPIP and its funder that they valued the communities AAPIP giving circles represented. It is recommended that future support for giving circles consider matching fund programs at varying levels depending on dollar amount raised through other institutions.

### Technical assistance and capacity building

AAPIP also provided a great deal of technical assistance and capacity building to giving circles over the five-year campaign. The vast majority (96%) of giving circle participants surveyed reported that the staff support and technical assistance provided was either very or somewhat useful. AAPIP provided tailored capacity to the giving circles through resources and services such as new giving circle toolkits, documents with best practices, and coaching about handling leadership transitions. They also paired each giving circle with an AAPIP staff member and brought together giving circles from across the nation annually to share their experiences and lessons learned. Many giving circles were better able to maximize their impact because of this support. Support for giving circles should include consideration of dedicated staff for technical assistance, capacity building and facilitation.

### Giving circle participants and leaders

When asked to describe why their giving circles were successful, 64 out of 195 (33%) giving circle participants surveyed said that other participants and/or leadership were core components of success. Because AAPIP's approach to giving circles incorporated "intentional autonomy", giving circles were tasked with determining for themselves their goals related to donor recruitment and retention. Some giving circles formed as a group of friends and clearly stated their intention to keep the circle small and sunset when founding donors were no longer available. Other giving circles defined specific goals to grow their donor membership into highly formal entities with governance structures related to decision-making and giving practices. If a giving circle defined success as growing and persevering into the foreseeable future, then recruitment, retention and ongoing engagement of donors and giving circle leadership were key strategic issues critical to the success of the giving circle. Any future work with giving circle must directly address how giving circles recruit and retain donors. There must also be explicit intentions about growth, sustainability and leadership.

### Dynamics of volunteer-run projects

AAPIP giving circles experienced many of the opportunities and challenges common in other projects that rely on volunteers. AAPIP played an important role by preparing donors for what to expect given the volunteer-based nature of giving circles. AAPIP created a few resources for giving circle participants to normalize the natural ebb and flow inherent with many volunteer-run projects. For example, Giving Circle Best Practices for giving circles donors summarized years of collective wisdom held by long-time giving circle participants in the network. Future planning and promotion of giving circles should accommodate the needs and challenges of volunteer-led groups, considering constraints on time and capacity, as well as expectations for size, productivity and impact.



### Giving circle longevity

AAPIP also encouraged giving circles to be intentional about their goals for the long-term. Giving circles were encouraged to decide for themselves whether or not their goals included longevity beyond the founding donors, growth in donor participation, or funding priorities at local, regional, national or international levels. Qualitative data from the evaluation highlighted that some giving circles needed more support to take a break or sunset with intention and skillful planning. In addition to individualized TA to giving circles, AAPIP created a Giving Circle Life Cycle document that outlined typical phases giving circles might transition through in a non-linear manner. These resources helped participants normalize their experiences and also be more resilient to natural cycles of growth and dormancy common in giving circle work.

### Donor education

Through support provided by AAPIP and their experiences in the giving circles, donors learned about philanthropy and community giving. The majority of giving circle donors surveyed (79%) reported that they increased their knowledge of philanthropy by participating in a giving circle. Some gained concrete skills such as learning how to approach funders for additional dollars to support community projects they championed. Giving circles provided a mechanism to deepen connections among donors in AANHPI communities and educate them about how they can meaningfully contribute to causes that they care about.

## Future Opportunities for Investing in AAPI Giving Circles

Giving circles are one strategy to build momentum for civic engagement and encourage people to take action to address needs of their communities. Giving circles also play an important role in raising awareness about needs that diverse communities face and how they would like traditional philanthropy to support them. Based on what was learned through AAPIP's National Giving Circle Campaign, there are opportunities for the philanthropic sector to be more strategic in supporting giving circles.

### I. Giving circles provide opportunity to cultivate new AAPI donors

Demographic data about giving circle donors in AAPIP's network shed light on the potential for giving circles as a promising strategy to engage and cultivate new donors. AAPIP's giving circle donors tended to skew towards a younger demographic (over half of those surveyed were under 45 years of age) and 60% identified as female. This is especially promising as research indicates that those who give time and money before retirement are more likely to continue giving during retirement. Women are also important drivers of philanthropy, as they are more likely to give and give at higher levels than men.<sup>25</sup> Further, giving circles provide the opportunity for donors to have more interactions with peers and engage directly with community organizations that benefit from their work. This aligns with trends in "new philanthropy" where donors are seeking more engagement and connection to causes that they support.<sup>18</sup> While there is still much work to be done to close the funding disparities gap, AAPIP giving circle donors were able to bring in an additional \$3.35 million to communities that many traditional philanthropic foundations were not



funding. This indicates an untapped potential among giving circle donors who will likely continue to give.

## II. Giving circles strengthened by capacity building, fiscal sponsorship and facilitation support

One key lesson learned through the National Campaign was that AAPIP played an important role as convener, capacity builder and facilitator. While some giving circles benefited from corporate sponsorship or community foundation funds, they still depended on AAPIP to elevate best practices emerging from the network, manage fiscal sponsorships, provide coaching to giving circles in various phases of transition, and to leverage AAPIP's social capital within the field of philanthropy to ensure that individual giving circles were connected to a greater mission. Giving circle donors shared that they also benefited from annual convenings that allowed them to learn from their peers and experience being part of a larger movement. The networked approach has great potential to reach many diverse communities across the nation. However, an intermediary, such as AAPIP, is essential for helping the network to realize its full potential within the field of philanthropy.

## III. Giving circles can fill a gap in funding AANHPI community needs

As the field of philanthropy seeks innovative ways to address funding disparities in communities of color, giving circles provide great opportunities for high return on investment and potential for sustainability. Funding to provide cash matches and support intermediary organizations, such as AAPIP, for capacity building and infrastructure is relatively minimal. Yet, the potential rewards from such investments are high. Giving circles provide a vehicle for donors to engage in philanthropy at levels that are accessible for them. This is especially important in AANHPI communities as there are significant wealth and income disparities among and within these populations. The grassroots approach to giving brings the promise of additional funding to communities often ignored by traditional philanthropy. However the potential impact amounts to more than dollars given, as giving circles have shown success in engaging new donors, educating donors to be more discerning in giving, raising awareness about niche issues important to communities but likely not attractive to large funders, and increasing visibility about social needs in AANHPI communities. Further, because giving circles are born out of communities and have the ability to respond nimbly to community needs, there is high potential for sustainability.

## IV. More advocacy and movement building are needed to bridge traditional philanthropic institutions and collective community-based donor networks

Advocacy and movement building are essential if AANHPI communities are to effectively leverage democratized philanthropy and have an increased influence on how philanthropic dollars are distributed in their communities. Strategic communications from AAPIP and funding partners can help raise visibility about AANHPI giving practices within the larger philanthropic community, thereby also raising awareness around AANHPI community issues. In particular, expanding communications about giving circle practices, and community issues through online channels may

go a long way in increasing awareness. Strategies could include updating and expanding web profiles of giving circles, creating specific issue-based Facebook or other networked groups, and/or disseminating stories of impact within the field of philanthropy and to the general public.

AAPIP lent invaluable social capital to giving circle donors and their communities that could be leveraged to build more bridges between traditional philanthropy and AANHPI communities. The National Giving Circle Campaign had the backing of national organizations and funders, contributing to the sense of pride and agency among donors. They felt part of something larger and recognized the potential for giving circles to have significant positive impact in their communities. When asking for matching funds from community foundations, AAPIP's credibility within the philanthropic world was an important asset. Strategies to maintain and expand efforts to bridge these two worlds might align with capacity building efforts to educate donors about philanthropy.

## V. More systematic and rigorous research is needed

While there have been some important national scans to document the increased visibility and growth of giving circles in recent years, there is a dearth of systematic and rigorous research that can be replicated over time and within multiple diverse communities. Historically, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have suffered from a lack of disaggregated data about their communities. Unfortunately, the current body of giving circle research does little to shed light on the extraordinary diversity of AANHPI giving circles, their donors and the community needs giving circles address. Similarly, the existing research around cultural norms, values, practices related to giving and advocacy within the AANHPI communities is limited, and at best, out of date.

New research can help to support the ongoing education of giving circle donors, build the case for the importance of their work in specific communities, and contribute to larger awareness-building efforts about issues and needs in communities of color. It is recommended that organizations offering backbone support to giving circles be funded to create a standardized systems of tracking internal process data about their giving circles with indicators such as member demographics, size, growth, and longevity. Ideally, giving circle backbone organizations across the nation would collaborate to define common metrics so data could be shared across networks and better describe the landscape of giving circles in the U.S. There is little data in the literature about how giving circles make decisions about transitioning, folding into one another or ending. It is recommended that future initiatives further explore how to support giving circles to be intentional and specific about sustainability, donor recruitment and retention, and making decisions about transitions and sunseting.

There is also a need to capture more specific data on a regular basis from communities that are historically under-represented, under-funded, and under-counted, such as AANHPI communities. Possible research priorities include: (1) deep qualitative listening sessions with diverse AANHPI communities across the U.S. to better understand cultural giving practices, values and priority areas for collective giving; (2) national survey of AANHPI community based organizations about

their funding and challenges addressing community needs; (3) national survey of foundations about their giving practices and approaches working with AANHPI communities and organizations.

## **Future Opportunities for Investing in AAPI Giving Circles: A Promising Strategy**

1. Provide opportunities to cultivate new AAPI donors
2. Strengthen capacity building, fiscal sponsorship and facilitation support
3. Fill significant gap in funding AANHPI community needs
4. Increase advocacy and movement building to bridge traditional philanthropic institutions and collective community-based donor networks
5. Increase systematic and rigorous research to support field learning and donor education

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