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TRANSITION

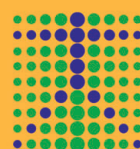


A BLUEPRINT FOR CHANGE:

Diversity as a Civic Asset



A local leader's guide to
Asian American awareness and opportunity



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A Blueprint for Change: Diversity as a Civic Asset

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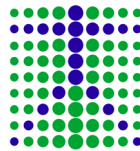
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Starting in 2004, Partners for Livable Communities partnered with the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APAICS) and the City of Houston to better understand the impact of the growing number of Asian Americans in cities across the nation and the multi-layered and complex issues facing this group. Together, under the initiative “Cities in Transition,” this partnership asked how cities can prepare their leadership and infrastructure for their changing communities. This group researched available data, including reports documenting the trends in Asian American communities and other ethnic groups, conferences and forums, newspaper articles, academic papers, U.S. Census data, and other original source materials, and had discussions with a sample group of community leaders to discuss topics of relevance to Asian Americans.

“A Blueprint for Change: Diversity as a Civic Asset” is a framework for a general understanding of Asian American concerns and opportunities to include them in broader civic dialogue.



Asian Pacific American
Institute for
Congressional Studies



Partners for
Livable Communities



City of
Houston

Table of Contents	Page
Introduction	6
Executive Summary	7
I. Why Now?	8
II. Two Key Opportunities	9
III. The Issues	10
A. Economic Assistance	10
B. Civic Participation	11
C. Cultural Preservation	13
D. Health	15
E. Housing	17
F. Youth and Education	18
G. Civil Rights	20
IV. The City of Houston: A Model in Practice	20
V. Next Steps: What Can I Do?	23
Additional Resources	24

Note on terminology: This document uses the term “Asian Americans” to refer to those peoples living in the United States who are of Asian ancestry — whether they are first, second or of multiple generations. The issues specific to Pacific Islanders are not included in this report. The organizations involved in this report did not feel they had adequate information and familiarity with the Pacific Islander community to offer appropriate representation of this population’s issues. Americans of Asian ancestry are also referred to as Asian Pacific American (APA) or Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) or Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA).

Introduction

A livable community is a place for everyone — one with affordable housing, a strong job market, recreational activities, safe neighborhoods, and opportunities for civic participation. To create a livable community in a multicultural and multiethnic country means addressing a variety of needs. Using diversity as a civic asset taps into the strengths and opportunities of America’s diverse population to enhance the quality of life of the city. Some community leaders believe that diversity jumpstarts the livability of American cities that are stagnating culturally and economically. An eclectic mix of neighborhoods, ethnic restaurants, shops, and sites for gathering brings vitality and excitement, making the area an attractive place to visit and live for all people. Cities such as Pittsburgh and Cleveland invite new immigrants while old and new immigrant gateways such as Atlanta, Dallas, Las Vegas, New York, Houston, and Charlotte continue to welcome newcomers.

Attracting and fostering diversity for livability, however, is a tricky business. One of the primary difficulties in using “Diversity as a Civic Asset” is a lack of understanding of the groups being

served. Of these groups, Asian Americans are often the most misunderstood. As the second-fastest¹ growing demographic in the nation, and the only minority group whose majority population still consists of immigrants², they are expected to represent nearly 6% of the population by the year 2020. No longer found only in the coastal regions of California and in New York, they are beginning to reside, grow, and develop communities in all states and cities across the United States.

“A Blueprint for Change: Diversity as a Civic Asset” calls for action and awareness. It reaches out to local elected officials, civic and community leaders, and institutions at all levels of planning, whether it be in neighborhoods, cities, or statewide, so that Asian Americans can be fully included in civic conversation. The responsibility of creating an America that ensures equal opportunity is in the hands of all our leaders and citizens, who together can enhance the livability of our communities.



Executive Summary

The “model minority” stereotype is synonymous with Asian Americans. This stereotype leads many to assume that Asian Americans need little assistance when it comes to issues such as education, housing and healthcare, but a closer look reveals the realities of a population whose needs may go unaddressed because of such stereotypes. Combined with the vast diversity of the population, Asian American communities sometimes find it hard to present a unified voice.

If one walks into a classroom today and asks a student who in the class is most likely to excel in math or science, the chances are good that he or she will point to an Asian American classmate. Over a fifth of the undergraduate population at MIT and at Cal-tech is Asian American. But in reality, over 50% of Cambodian, Laotian and Hmong students never even receive a high school diploma.

Asian Americans are often perceived as successful business owners and entrepreneurs. Indira Nooyi is President and CFO of PepsiCo, the tycoon of the soft drink industry; Jerry Yang went from student to billionaire after co-founding Yahoo, Inc. But these success stories are a small part of the picture. For many in this group, self-employment and entrepreneurship is the only option left when faced with language barriers and limited job opportunities. In reality, Asian American-owned businesses generate \$100,000 less than the average business. One in four Asian Americans in New York City live in poverty. Little is done to document or address the particular needs of Asian Americans at the low end of

the economic spectrum.

In the political arena, Asian American elected officials are beginning to run for office mostly in non-Asian American districts and win as cross-over candidates who appeal to Caucasians, African Americans, and Hispanics alike. At the same time, however, Asian Americans have the lowest rate of voter registration – lower than Hispanics and African Americans. Elected officials and political parties do not court the Asian American vote, and Asian Americans are just starting to flex their political might.

Being an Asian American woman brings another set of particular issues to the forefront. About thirty thousand Asian women are brought into the United States each year under false pretenses and forced into low-wage work and poor living conditions. For Asian American women, many suffer high rates of domestic violence and many are unaware of the assistance that is available for victims of abuse.

Popular culture portrays Asian Americans as super-achieving doctors, business leaders, and high tech wizards. This myth of the model minority is far from the reality. The eight million Asian Americans who are foreign-born are twice as likely as the general population to live without health insurance. Only 59% of Asian Americans own their own homes – lower than the national average of 69%. Asian Americans received only .3 to .5% of foundation giving and their average grant was the lowest of all minority groups.

The complexity of Asian American concerns is compounded by the diversity within the community itself. Someone of Vietnamese heritage may be mistaken for Japanese even though the two cultures share little in common. The

term “Asian American” encompasses people with roots from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, China, Mongolia, Japan, Korea, Philippines and other nations. They are the most diverse minority, in terms of number of countries represented.

As a result of this growth in the Asian American population, civic leaders, city governments, and concerned citizens will be called upon to do more with and for their Asian American constituents and neighbors. The starting point is recognizing the need for **disaggregated** data on this diverse community – who they are, where they come from, where they live, and what their needs are. Being culturally competent – including breaking language barriers – is just as important in providing adequate services.

The purpose of this report is to brief civic leaders, elected officials, city governments and interested citizens on several major issues facing their diverse and growing Asian American population.

This report is divided into five sections. Section I describes the urgent need to plan for an explosive growth in the Asian American population. Section II highlights the two issues that run through all Asian American concerns: lack of data and the need for cultural competence. Section III outlines some Asian American concerns in essential areas of life as well as opportunities for action and successful models in practice. Section IV looks at Houston as a model for integrating Asian Americans into a city’s multi-cultural landscape. Section V provides next steps for use of this Blueprint, including hosting community discussions on Asian American affairs and finding ways for Asian and non-Asian groups to work together around shared goals and interests.

I. Why Now?

While Asians first started immigrating to the U.S. as early as the 1700s (i.e. Filipinos to Louisiana), a significant percent of the Asian American population arrived after the 1965 immigration reforms. Now, as these groups raise families and as Asians continue to immigrate, America is in the midst of an explosive growth of this population. Asian Americans are the second fastest-growing minority group in the country. From 1.4 million in 1970 to 11.9 million in 2000, the group that now comprises 4% of the U.S. population will become 8% by the year 2050.³

One way to approach this growing number is to look at the difference between California and North Carolina. California has historically been the key location for Asian Americans to reside. In cities like Cupertino in Silicon Valley, Asian Americans consist of nearly half the population. What many may not realize is that in North Carolina, Asian Americans are settling and raising families as well. Raleigh, North Carolina already has over 10,000 Asian Americans, a small but significant number — enough to interest the White House Commission on Asian American Affairs when it visited the city to examine and assist one of the newer Asian American communities in America.

Raleigh may never be like Cupertino, but both are trying to understand how to support and grow an effective and sustainable infrastructure that can support a growing diverse population. What both cities realize is that Asian Americans can no longer be ignored. And these are not isolated cases;

what is happening in Raleigh is happening across the United States.

The most diverse minority group

Most Americans may not know the differences between the Asian American groups. Someone of Vietnamese heritage may be called “Japanese,” even though the two cultures may be very different. In truth, the term “Asian American” refers to groups that span the eastern portion of the globe, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, China, Mongolia, Japan, Korea, and Philippines to name a few. Americans of Asian ancestry have hundreds of languages, religions, customs, as well as multiple generations in the United States.

Many Asian American immigrants today are not professionals. The majority of those who arrived in the early waves of immigration prior to 1965 were well educated and had already attained professional degrees. Later waves of Asian American immigrants, for the most part, came to America for different reasons; sometimes, they arrive with little education and seek political refuge, such as the Cambodian population in Illinois that fled from Khmer Rouge’s Killing Fields. Such a gap places Asian Americans in a double-bind: they are culturally misunderstood by non-Asian Americans and are disengaged from other Asian Americans who do not share the same background.

Buried underneath the “model minority” myth are those who live in poverty. The 2000 Census show that 1.25 million Asian Americans live in poverty. Although Asian Americans had the highest median income, the percentage of Asian

American families (10.7%) who lived in poverty is higher than for non-Hispanic Whites (7.8%). The vast differences in income, nationality, reasons for immigration, etc., create a level of complexity likely to be misunderstood.

Support is yet to be found

The assumption that Asian Americans do not need assistance because of their likelihood to succeed on their own is simply misguided. In 2005 Hurricane Katrina shattered the lives of 25,000 Asian Americans, particularly Vietnamese Americans, who lived in the New Orleans/Gulf Area.⁴

Many of these Asian Americans were not even aware that a Hurricane was on its way because the radio and news broadcasts were only in English. Those who survived continued to face service access issues, as FEMA and American Red Cross workers did not have translators on hand. Many are still without the aid and insurance promised by government agencies.

Katrina exposed the kind of infrastructure that was lacking for the Asian American community in the Gulf Region. Although family-based networks helped to provide some support, these groups are still in need of aid from community leaders outside these networks, in order to rebuild their lives.

Looking for the impact

Many Asian Americans are more likely to live in suburbs than metropolitan downtown areas. Each city will have to examine the best strategies to ensure inclusion of all its residents. What kind of transportation system needs to be in effect? Zoning patterns? Will schools in suburban municipalities

need bilingual counselors and teachers? Will unplanned growth segregate a city even further?

In the case of Hartford, Connecticut, the Hispanic population boomed, particularly in the suburbs. However, the city failed to fully integrate its Hispanic, African American, and Caucasian populations to create a regional strategy for diversity. Hartford's inflexibility proved fatal as the suburban areas grew into isolated ethnic regions. Schools were ethnically divided, leading to increased racial tension between groups. Hartford had lost nearly one-half of its property-tax base since 1980. Their homeownership rate was the nation's second lowest.⁵

In some places the Asian American population will grow exponentially, just as it did for the City of Las Vegas. From 1980 to 2000, Las Vegas experienced a boom of Asian Americans, whose numbers increased from 11,000 to nearly 100,000. Now Asian American local businessmen like James Chih-Cheng Chen have constructed a master-planned Chinatown Las Vegas, where an authentic home-cooked meal and groceries can be bought and sold. Chen observed in *The Wall Street Journal*, "Do you want population before you build, or do you build to attract population? You don't want to be late. You want to be early. That's the game."⁶

II. Two Key Opportunities

With the countless issues that Asian Americans face, where can a community start? At the crux of all the issues stated in this report are two common problems: the lack of data and need for cultural competence.

Lack of Data

Every community can start by examining who their residents are, where they live, what their needs are and how they can be fulfilled. As previously noted, grouping Asian Americans under one category does not provide sufficient data because they represent such a diverse group of extremes. Indian Americans may be the most affluent minority group in America, but Bangladeshi Americans are extremely underserved. So having an Asian American population composed of South Asians and Cambodians will result in a far different set of issues than those that the Korean American community faces. Gathering accurate data on who lives in the community will increase opportunities for proper aid to be provided for these residents.

Cultural Competence

Misgivings about other ways of living create frustration and miscommunication between different peoples that if remain unresolved, lead to isolation of certain peoples. For example, without translated health care guides, mortgage loan information, maps, news, etc. Asian Americans are forced to congregate among themselves and their family and friend support networks. Bilingual staff members and translation services are of great importance to any community.

Training in cultural competence does not only apply to offices in local governance, but to public and private schools, learning institutions, clubs, police and service establishments. Local news should be broadcasted, written or heard in multiple languages to meet the citizens' needs. The city's responsibility of serving its residents will bear a different set of priorities as demographics shift in America's cities.



III. The Issues

At the conclusion of our data search and analysis, we surmise that the following categories are a few of the key issues Asian Americans face today. The issues in this report are not inclusive and have not been prioritized in terms of importance because of the number and depth of the issues present. Rather, the following concerns should assist leaders to begin dialogues with Asian Americans about their challenges and how best to meet them.

A. ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE

“A Blueprint for Change” seeks to ensure that Asian Americans are provided financial support to obtain welfare, grow out of

poverty and create small businesses that provide fair wages for their workers and are protected against discriminatory practices.

Background: In 2004, the Census published the latest data showing that Asian Americans had the highest median household income of all groups. However, the Census also noted that 1) Asian American households are larger than non-Hispanic Whites’ 2) Asian Americans were more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to live in poverty. In terms of income, Asian Americans represent two sides of the spectrum. Seventeen percent of Asian American families have incomes less than \$25,000, compared to 15% of non-Hispanic Whites. In 2000, the poverty rate of Hmong Americans and Cambodian

Americans exceeded that of African Americans and Hispanic Americans.⁷

In New York City, the Asian American Federation’s 2003 report noted that an estimated 1 in 4 Asian Americans live in poverty. They are poorer than non-Hispanic white populations of the same group, and there is less documentation on their needs.

Asian American women in particular are at an extreme disadvantage. Sixty-four percent of Southeast Asian women earned wages below the poverty level in comparison to 54% of Latina and 53% of African American women.⁸

Many new Americans arrive with limited education and with limited English skills. The scarcity of job options and opportunities forces them to start their own businesses to

Model in Practice: Asian Pacific Islander Small Business Program (API SBA)

In 1999, an analysis of the minority businesses in Los Angeles revealed that although 38% of them were Asian owned, there were no business assistance programs that served them in their own communities. Hence, the Asian Pacific Islander Small Business Program (API SBA) began to serve these communities with an understanding of languages and cultures. Through the collaborative efforts of five of the oldest and most respected Asian American organizations in LA, including Chinatown Service Center, Koreatown Youth and Community Center, Little Tokyo Service Center CDC, Search to Involve Filipino Americans and Thai CDC, the API SBA has grown and flourished.

The program delivers assistance to entrepreneurs in the form of classes, workshops and individual counseling in five Asian languages, English and Spanish. The program’s primary client base includes low income Asian immigrants, with a focus on Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and Thai entrepreneurs, and the program delivers in the neighborhoods where clients live, primarily in Koreatown, Little Tokyo, Chinatown, Historic Filipino Town, Thai Town, and parts of the San Gabriel Valley. In a number of instances, services are literally an elevator ride away for low income tenants in mixed use apartment buildings where partner agencies have developed.

Nine full-time staff members and many pro bono professionals add their expertise to this project, the majority of which are bilingual, and a single team leader works with business counselors in all of the five partner organizations. The business counselors often work with one another to share their individual expertise. Programs are publicized through word of mouth, door to door, print media, a website, fliers, electronic media and mass emails.

API SBA has had enormous success, earning several awards including the National Program Innovation Award by Association for Enterprise Opportunity (2004), the Minority Business Advocate Award by U.S. Small Business Administration (2003), the Technical Assistance Advocate Award by LA Mayor’s Office MBOC & SBA (2002), and Best Practice award by California Small Business Development Center (2000).

survive. For some, being an entrepreneur is the only option left.

Anthony Tri Tran, formerly of the Union of Pan Asian Communities, quoted in *A People Looking Forward*, that “Over two-thirds of Asian-owned businesses are self-employed businesses with no employees... [because] self-employment or entrepreneurship is a prevalent and often a necessary and only means to achieve quality of life and sufficiency for many of the Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the community...”⁹

Although many Asian American small businesses have been able to sustain their businesses, the majority have average revenues far beneath the national average. In 1997 Vietnamese American-owned businesses generated an average income of only \$95,361, less than one-fourth of the national average income generated by small businesses.¹⁰ Asian-owned businesses in general generated \$100,000 less than the national average income.

Both external and internal factors keep many Asian American small businesses from growing into profitable industries for workers and entrepreneurs alike. Racial tensions plague small businesses, particularly in communities where no one makes the effort to cease hostile race relations. Caucasian-owned distribution chains may use Asian Americans as the “middle-man” to face racial hostilities. The threat of such disagreements leads many Asian Americans to start businesses in ethnic enclaves if the community already has one available.

Internally, the competition among the Asian American ethnic communities is fierce and isolating. Some Asian American small businesses that do very well often do

not serve minority groups, nor do they hire minorities as employees.¹¹ In fact, each ethnic group dominates their own particular markets: 3/4 of all Asian-owned hotels are owned by Asian Indians; 2/3 of all Asian-owned fishing industries are owned by Vietnamese; and half of all apparel and accessory stores are owned by Koreans.¹²

The Opportunity: In order to understand **diversity as a civic asset**, a community should recognize that Asian Americans represent the economic cornerstone of many neighborhoods, from laundromats to small convenience stores, from nail salons to restaurants. Asian American small businesses can serve as a role model and become the foundation for economic and community development.

George Yap, a first-generation immigrant, took a risk on the bean-sprout industry in Miami, Florida. In 1977 he began LEASA, a food distributor specializing in bean-sprouts. Since LEASA industries’ founding, Yap made a cognizant decision to hire an uncommon crowd of employees: ex-convicts, former substance abusers, and school dropouts. Criticism and tensions raged over such hires, but Yap stood by his employees because

as an immigrant himself, he understood the value of a second chance. Now, LEASA industries employs over 60 workers and is the leading distributor for Asian specialty food items in Florida, with annual sales of \$7.5 million in 2004.¹³

Minorities successful in business affairs can often offer underserved and disadvantaged populations services and resources for upward economic mobility. They can inspire all new Americans to contribute to the well being of their city, as well as add diversity to the staple products offered in a typical neighborhood.

B. CIVIC PARTICIPATION
“A Blueprint for Change”
requests that all Americans have the resources to vote and to be politically active in civic affairs.

Background: In 2000, the minority group with the lowest rate of voter registration was Asian Americans. Nearly half of the Asian American eligible voting population did not register to vote compared to the 43% of eligible Hispanic voters and 32% of African American voters.¹⁴

Many assume that this inactivity





is part of Asian Americans’ quiescent nature. But several examples tell a different story of a community ready to engage in the civic process. For example, 30,000 + Korean Americans demanded assistance after the LA Riots. When Michael Woo ran for Mayor in Los Angeles, he received support from Asian Americans across the country. Stereotypes also fail to explain why Asian Americans are showing significant increases in voting and other forms of civic

engagement.

What keeps the Asian American community from being more involved in civic activities is not apathy, but rather too few elected and government leaders who choose to nurture their participation.

“Politicians and the political parties don’t know how to court the Asian vote and many in the community do not know enough about the political process,” said Cao K. O, Executive Director of the Asian American Federation in

New York.¹⁵

In Alexandria, Virginia, a suburb with approximately 6% Asian Americans, Human Rights Commission member Susan Higashi Rumsberg noted that only one out of 280 persons on city boards was Asian American in 1998. At a leadership conference she recommended that more Asian Americans become politically active on the local level so that they can be represented at the higher levels. At the same time Asian Americans also need to be recognized as leaders and managers by other non-Asian American groups.

The Opportunity: In order to involve minorities in the civic process to guarantee a healthy democracy, a community must recognize **diversity as a civic asset**.

Asian American political candidates are often elected to office from districts where Asian Americans represent much less than 50% of the population. As “crossover” candidates they have been successful at meeting all the

Model in Practice: Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APAICS)

Founded in 1995, APAICS was created to promote, support and conduct non-partisan education and informational activities, research and programs designed to effectively enhance and increase the participation of the Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) community in the democratic process at the national, state and local levels.

APAICS’ Leadership Academy began in 1998 to bring eight to ten APIA elected officials to Washington, D.C. for three days to meet and learn from national APIA elected leaders and APIA community leaders about federal issues that are affecting the APIA community. The Congressional Fellowship is another program for a state or municipal APIA elected official to shadow a Member of Congress up to three weeks in Washington, D.C. The APIA elected official is able to attend meetings, committee hearings, and events with the Member of Congress in order for them to see what a day is like for the Member of Congress.

As more APIAs participate in all facets of government life as elected and appointed officials, APAICS’s vision for a full and equal presence for our community in public life continues to gain momentum. The APIA community is advancing up the political ladder. Ready to lead the APIA community into the 21st century, APAICS is the torchbearer for an ambitious agenda of political empowerment, candidate training and coalition building.

For more information: www.apaics.org

Model in Practice: The Cambodian Association of Illinois (CAI)

The Cambodian Association of Illinois (CAI) is a non-profit, social service organization founded in 1976 by a group of Cambodian refugee volunteers in order to respond to the need of Cambodians fleeing the tyranny, brutality and torture of the Khmer Rouge regime and resettling in Chicago, IL. In 1980, CAI was formally incorporated as an independent non-profit organization.

The two main units at CAI comprise of a community center and museum/memorial. CAI purchased its own building and established the first Cambodian Community Center in the Midwest in 1999 that houses a number of different educational and social services. They also work with local and national mental health groups as well as community health advocates around the country. Additionally, the association has collaborated with artists and Northern Illinois University in the creation of their museum that highlights the “Killing Fields” in a memorial. Both are integral components in assisting clients who have a two-fold need. One is receiving social services and the other is healing the wounds left from the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge’s “Killing Fields” in which two million people perished. All Cambodian clients are refugees or the children of refugees who escaped, and CAI is the only service provider in the Chicago Metropolitan area which provides bilingual programming to address the interrelated social and economic needs of the Cambodian American population.

CAI primarily services the 7,000 Cambodians in Illinois, 5,000 of whom live in Chicago. The organization has 13 full-time staff members, including a full-time museum director, 38 part-time staffers and about 150 volunteers. They continue to build bridges and are now working with the North Side Prep school in development of a curriculum to include the history of genocide. CAI advocated for such a curriculum to the state senate and the mandate was recently passed.

Different groups from around the country and world use the space as a meeting ground, and about 150 visitors/month come to tour the museum. Their biggest accomplishment and success relies on connecting with the community and always listening and learning to better accommodate their needs.

For more information: www.cambodian-association.org/

different constituencies and addressing their needs.¹⁶ In doing so, they focus on broader issues and communicate with Caucasians, African Americans, and Latinos. Once involved, Asian Americans also are more likely to work on community problems, write and contact government officials, sign petitions, or attend political gatherings rather than participate in more passive forms of civic participation.¹⁷

The potential impact of Asian American civic participation increases as elections are continually won by a marginal number of ballots. In the 2000 election, the number of Asian American eligible voters in Washington, Oregon, Nevada, New Mexico, California, New Jersey, Florida and New Hampshire were

each enough to turn the tide of the electoral votes cast by the state.¹⁸

Asian Americans do not heavily favor one political party, making them a true swing vote. The earlier they become engaged and informed of the American political process the more likely it is that they will vote and support candidates who understand their needs. Political candidates will have to focus the proper resources and ensure the protection of voting rights to benefit from Asian American civic participation.

C. CULTURAL PRESERVATION
“Blueprint for Change” seeks to keep Asian American culture alive both inside and outside learning institutions to support

community sharing and appreciation of all rich heritages.

Background: America’s culture has been more than influenced by Asian Americans; they have left an indelible mark on culture and the arts: Yo-Yo Ma’s famed performances, Ang Lee’s vision on the big screen, Vera Wang’s simple elegance in fashion and Salman Rushdie’s narratives that cross generations and continents. Not only that, but can a person imagine an America that didn’t have a single Chinatown? That didn’t have dragon dances and boat festivals during the month of May?

In the history books in public schools today, few mention the Japanese internment camps during World War II; the story of Angel Island Immigration Station and



Chinese Exclusion laws; the wave of Southeast Asian refugees fleeing persecution; or the history of Hinduism in the United States. Most of the time, curriculums address the history of East Asia, focusing on the other-worldliness of Asians when in fact, they have played a crucial role in the history-making of America.

The heritage of Asian Americans is slowly fading as generation after generation becomes increasingly drawn into the American “melting pot,” where the newness of forward thinking and success often pressures them to forgo the preservation of their cultures’ traditions. Many of the cultural programs and organizations needed to advance cultural preservation rely on grant-making institutions. In 2001, the Applied Research Center reported that of the \$16.8 billion grants given, only 7% applied to minorities — hardly a comparable percentage to the minority population in America at the time. Asian Americans received only .3 to .5 percent of all giving; their average grant received was the lowest of all the minority groups.¹⁹

Asian Americans also find it difficult to move into higher positions at cultural institutions, where they might influence or steer initiatives towards Asian American

issues. In 1956, John D. Rockefeller III established the Asia Society to increase understanding between Asians and Americans. After 5 presidents and 40 + years, an Asian American was finally asked to lead the institution as its sixth president. Having an Asian American as **the** face of this organization reflects the Asian American leadership that should be fostered at institutions of Asian American heritage and culture.

Without retaining their heritage, people easily lose a sense of self. Ethnic groups of lesser size such as the Indonesians, Laotians, and Burmese are often overlooked by mainstream society. Few public high schools, if any, teach Asian American languages, and few colleges accept the less common Asian American languages for credit. This lack of identity and connection with one’s culture quickly undermines other aspects of a healthy community.

The Opportunity: Cities who believe in **diversity as a civic asset** support cultural organizations and cultural education programs to share traditions, end discrimination, and help pass knowledge to future generations.

The cultural organizations that have survived to pass on such

traditions to Asian Americans and non-Asian Americans have proven their success in the field. Great Leap, a Los Angeles-based performance group founded by Nobuko Miyamoto initially began to “promote positive images of Asian Americans,” but soon transcended minority boundaries. Dance performances such as “Slice of Frijoles, Rice and Beans,” featured Asian American, African American, Latino American, and deaf experiences in America.

The Asian Arts Initiative in Philadelphia was founded in response to the racial tension in the area and now provides the Asian American community a political and cultural voice.

The Wing Luke Museum in Seattle uses the exhibition of culture as an opportunity to engage all the community’s Asian American peoples in a discussion of Asian heritage.

In all the above organizations, culture brought the varying sub-groups of Asian Americans together to build a sustainable and harmonious community that bettered the quality of life for those underserved groups. They also maintained a sense of culture and brought the student or participant back to their roots.

Additionally, after-school programs that teach the culture and languages of Asian Americans are available to any interested party. The local Asian American community of Houston, for example, holds weekend courses hosted at schools or churches with parent or professional teachers. New York’s public school 184, “Shuang Wen” offers a less traditional bilingual method of teaching – educating students in both English and Mandarin at the

same time.²⁰ It is the first public school in the nation to do so. In comparison, there are nearly 200 dual Spanish-English language programs — still a small number when realizing that by 2020 America will be a minority majority nation.

Asian Americans enhance the cultural expression of a community by employing the methods and traditions they have learned from their own histories. Tapping into this resource and supporting its growth presents an opportunity for growth.

D. HEALTH
“A Blueprint for Change”
demands accessible resources for Asian Americans to receive adequate health care. It appreciates and accepts multiple viewpoints from both Eastern and Western medical practices.

Background: When it comes to health, the difference between Eastern and Western medicine and health practices vary so greatly that no one understands what the other is saying. Acupuncture versus Benadryl; animism versus epilepsy; herbal medicines versus painkillers. These are just a few of the difficulties that Asian Americans

face when trying to understand western medical practices (and vice versa). Such misunderstandings lead to a lack of trust for many Asian Americans who neglect the yearly checkups, mammograms and typical procedures undertaken regularly by the general population.

In 2003, the percentage of Asian Americans who were uninsured was nearly the same as African Americans. Also, those eight million Asian Americans who are foreign-born are twice as likely as the average population to be uninsured.²¹ According to a study conducted by the Commonwealth Fund, Asian Americans are actually less likely than the general

Model in Practice:
Asian American Health Coalition (AAHC) of Greater Houston, Inc.

The Asian American Health Coalition (AAHC) is a grassroots organization created in 1994. The mission of AAHC is to improve the health of Asian Americans in the greater Houston metropolitan area through tailored health promotion and health education projects and through activities that enable the provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate health care services.

Each of AAHC’s programs work with community partners; they are key to the projects. Project Phoenix, which provides free mammograms to low income, uninsured Asian women, combines the energies of the AAHC with VN TeamWork, Vietnamese Culture and Science Association (VCSA), The Rose Breast Diagnostics Center, the Alliance for Multicultural Services, Chinese Community Center, NCI Cancer Information Services, Women Working for Women, M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, and the American Cancer Society Asian Cancer Council. The DAEC (Diabetes Awareness and Education in the Community) project for the Chinese and Vietnamese communities, partnered with the Harris County Hospital District, the Chinese Community Center, and VN TeamWork. The CHIA (Consumer Health Information for Asians) project is conducted with the Houston Academy of Medicine-Texas Medical Center Library. Also, AAHC is a member of Gateway to Care, a 136-member organization dedicated to improving access to health care in Harris County.

Being aware of the community’s needs and addressing them in a culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate manner are major lessons that AAHC has learned over the years. Bringing community members, policymakers, and funders to the table to design and implement effective and sustainable programs are of great importance when developing projects. AAHC always strives to provide scientifically sound data on its client population to justify funding for programs.

The AAHC has been successful in meeting their goals as they have generated almost \$1 million in grants to support health care and health education for Asian Americans in the Houston area. These programs have had a significant impact not only on the Asian community, but on the community at large in that Asians are now included or at least considered in health program planning.

The AAHC is a model program because it started as a grassroots, volunteer effort with the major goal of establishing a federally qualified health center that would provide culturally and linguistically appropriate health services to Asians and other medically underserved populations in Southwest Houston. After more than 10 years and many hours of volunteer service spent on grant writing, meeting with the decision makers, and increasing public awareness of the unique health needs of Asian Americans, the AAHC is fulfilling the dream of applying for Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) status and building a sustainable center for providing quality and affordable health care to the community.

For more information: www.asianhealthhouston.org



population to rate “their health care highly” and are “less confident about their care, and more likely to indicate having a communication problem with their doctor.”

For example, Long Dinh, a resident of Los Angeles’ Fountain Valley, recognized something was wrong far before the physical symptoms of testicular cancer appeared. But according to his brother, Long “didn’t want to go through the medical stuff,” and passed away from an illness that could have been treated if diagnosed early enough.²² The excuse Long gave is one expressed by many Asian Americans when confronting health issues.

Moreover, so many are fearful of the stigma attached to mental health issues that they shy away from treatment.

In health, the stereotype of Asian Americans is that of someone who has a sleek physique and youthful appearance. Though these stereotypes exist, it is no substitute for actual overall health and mental well-being of the population. In a study conducted by the Vietnamese Community Health Promotion Project, 70% of Laotian and Cambodian men in some communities smoke tobacco, in

comparison to 22% of African Americans and 16% of Hispanic Americans.^{23 24} The differences in health issues faced by various Asian American ethnicities are many.

The issues that Asian American older adults face is even more severe, particularly those who entered the country as adults and who are less likely to adapt to a new environment. Older Asian American adults are less likely to use formal health care services such as Medicare because of distrust and misunderstanding of the government and health care bureaucracies, even though they are more susceptible to certain cancers, hypertension, osteoporosis and tuberculosis. In fact 1/3 of Asian Americans 65 and older do not receive Medicare or Medicaid benefits, nor do they have insurance in general.

In the past, it was normal practice for the children to provide care for their parents; however, in America many Asian Americans are also choosing other alternatives that may not include having the responsibility of a parent living in the home. Guilt on both sides of the generational spectrum creates an uncomfortable distance between families, and often these older adults move out. This

new situation for older Asian American adults poses serious challenges to medical and health facilities that do not have adequate translators or the readiness of someone to serve as navigators of the health care bureaucracy.

The Opportunity: Institutions can train more doctors and health providers to be bilingual and culturally competent so that all residents of a city can be served. Approaching **diversity as a civic asset** taps into the various minority cultures in America to increase cultural competence for the 22 million plus minorities who are uninsured. Cities should prioritize to fund health agencies aiming for cultural competence to ensure that they are playing their role in supporting a diverse community.

The Korean Service Center in Minneapolis was first organized in 1988 to provide Korean immigrants, many of them older adults, with translation services. Eventually, with the growth of the older adult population, the service center started its own assisted living program. Here Korean older adults live together and have services delivered to them in their native languages; they can even take calligraphy classes and cook together. In such an environment, residents can maintain a healthy style of living and keep their traditions alive.

E. HOUSING

“A Blueprint for Change” seeks to ensure that people, regardless of their backgrounds, are given equal access to homeownership opportunities in order for families to build equity and to build safe and sustainable communities where they can raise their families.

Owning a home provides the opportunity and justification for an individual to become a part of their neighborhood, take part in local meetings, and have a significant voice in civic issues. According to the 2000 Census, only 59% of Asian Americans own homes, in comparison to the national average

of 69%. Additionally many Asian Americans live in tight spaces, with 18% residing in buildings that house 20 units or more, far above the national average of 6%.²⁵

The reasons for such low homeownership rates vary. In a survey conducted by the Urban Institute for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, a study on minority discrimination in the housing market showed that Asian American renters and homebuyers face “consistent adverse treatment” 21% of the time, the same level of discrimination faced by Hispanics and African Americans. Additionally, the language and cultural barriers frequently stymie the

homeownership process.

Christopher Kui, Asian Americans for Equality’s (AAFE) Executive Director noted: “Many of our clients are families that make subsistence incomes, which makes it difficult to rent, let alone to purchase a home. Frequently, they work in cash-based industries such as restaurants and the garment industry, where deficiencies in English language skills are not such a hurdle. Workers paid in cash may not receive documentation from their employer.”

With a general aversion to debt, and without a credit report, Asian Americans find that purchasing a home may be a privilege they can do without, for the time being. These

Model in Practice: Seattle Chinatown International District Preservation and Development Authority (SCIDPDA)

SCIDPDA was chartered in 1975 by the City of Seattle with the mission to “preserve, promote, and develop the Seattle Chinatown International District as a vibrant community and unique ethnic neighborhood.” As Puget Sound Region’s cultural, residential, and social hub for Asian Pacific Islanders, the community includes a large population of low-income immigrants and refugees with limited access to traditional resources. The organization provides, develops, and increases access to the resources and services the traditionally underserved community needs to remain healthy and productive. All of the community-based programs are in direct response to the needs of the community’s 3,000 residents and 5,000 workers.

Some of SCIDPDA’s programs and developments include:

- The International District Village Square has the neighborhood’s first public community center with a gym and public library, an early child care learning center, a health clinic, and a number of additional service providers
- Affordable housing
- Nutrition Services providing healthy and fresh Asian meals each weekday
- Management of the state’s only 100% Medicaid senior assisted-living facility that responds to the unique needs of a multi-Asian clientele
- A Community Action Partnership public safety program that works with the community and the police department to develop and implement long-term and culturally-appropriate solutions to crime issues

SCIDPDA programs are publicized through their website, e-newsletters, fundraising events and activities, as well as direct mail. The relationships established through the SCIDPDA’s work in private, government, and community sectors are crucial to the programs’ success, as well as their staff of 69 and 20 regular volunteers that reflect the diversity of the community they serve.

Over the past 30 years SCIDPDA has invested nearly \$65 million in neighborhood revitalization projects to significantly increase the community’s economic vitality. SCIDPDA currently manages nine neighborhood properties with more than 450 low-income housing units, including the award-winning International District Village Square which includes the first affordable, large-family housing project built in the neighborhood in over 50 years which increased affordable housing in the neighborhood by 400 percent.

For more information please go to: www.scidpda.org



issues compound the issues all Americans face in the homeownership process including skyrocketing prices, confusion over mortgage rates and lending, extensive paperwork — all of which are made more difficult by the language barrier.

The Opportunity:

Organizations and cities that uphold **diversity as a civic asset** use this untapped market as a resource to build neighborhoods and communities.

The people who take notice of the importance of Asian American homeownership include a handful of Asian American community development corporations and advocacy groups, some supported by federal and city agencies. Many rely on funds raised from management fees, local and corporate foundations, private donations and fundraising efforts. Although few in numbers, those organizations have been enormously successful. For example, Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE) provides hundreds of affordable housing units for New York residents and the Seattle Chinatown International District Preservation and Development Authority (SCIDPDA) increased affordable housing in their multiethnic neighborhood by 400

percent.

Around 1990, the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation, which primarily serves Asian Americans, and the San Antonio Community Development Council, which serves African, Latino, and Native Americans, began a unique venture to help build Hismen Hin-Nu Terrace, a mixed income, mixed housing unit in Oakland, California. The design and detail reflects the multiethnic groups it houses and serves. What resulted was a complex of homes and gathering places enriched with culture. It has since been commended by a number of institutions including the Rudy Bruner Foundation and the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials.

According to Harvard University’s Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2.3 million Asian Americans will become homeowners in the next two decades. With the Asian American population growing by 7-10 million in that time frame, the potential for more homeowners and sustainable communities is far greater.

F. YOUTH & EDUCATION

“A Blueprint for Change” demands better support structures for all youths to enhance individual skills and capacity to achieve his/her potential.

On the first day of school, if you asked a student who you think would be the best in math and science, they would probably point to the Asian American student in the classroom. Assumptions from educators and general student bodies often result in poor education when those who are imagined to be doing well are actually fairing the poorest. Comments often include “Asian American students don’t need assistance” or “Bilingual tutors and culturally sensitive counselors aren’t needed because Asians always succeed.” Asian American youth often have no where to turn for guidance, as their parents may be non-native, of limited English proficiency and understand only a snippet of the American education system.²⁶

While data shows that Asian Americans have the highest percentage of educational attainment, Asian Americans are also twice as likely to have less than a 9th grade education in comparison to non-Hispanic Whites.²⁷ Over 50% of Cambodians, Laotians, and Hmongs have never received a high school education.²⁸

Youth who struggle within the school system, and who have been marginalized and uprooted from their homes are more likely to fall into other miscreant behaviors. Gangs, substance abuse, and criminal activity are a few of the outlets that draw Asian American youth away from contributing to

Model in Practice: South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow (SAALT)

Founded in 2000, South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow (SAALT) is a national non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the full and equal participation by South Asians in the civic and political life of the United States. SAALT's goals are to provide a uniform and informed voice on issues affecting South Asians that relate to equality and civil rights; develop South Asian coalitions that transcend religious, ethnic, or linguistic differences to facilitate collective action and broader community change; create opportunities for leadership, service, and volunteerism by South Asians in order to foster civic engagement.

In building coalitions, SAALT launched SAALT Exchange, a series of half-day dialogues with community leaders in 10 cities around the country to discuss emerging local and national issues affecting South Asians and to develop effective strategies around coalition-building. The program was created in 2005 as a vehicle to understand the emerging needs and trends that South Asians are facing. Four years after 9/11, what is the state of discrimination against South Asians? What are the internal challenges – generational, class-based – that are affecting the community? What external issues – immigration policy, barriers to benefits, distrust of authority or government – are shaping the community?

The outcomes of the program, that is currently ongoing, include the beginning of working groups such as:

- The New Jersey South Asian Working Group developed after the SAALT Exchange convened a meeting for South Asians in New Jersey to discuss issues affected their community. The Working Group communicates through a listserv and through monthly conference calls. Members of the Working Group have developed a policy agenda that was presented to NJ State Assemblyman Upendra Chivukala.
- The Pennsylvania South Asian Working Group is an outgrowth of the SAALT Exchange convened in Philadelphia in April 2005. The group consists of individuals in Pennsylvania, Southern New Jersey and Delaware Valley. Two staff members, interns, and volunteers coordinate the activities of SAALT, and programs are publicized through leaders in the South Asian Communities where the SAALT Exchange occurs. Thus far, the program has served to bring community organizations and leaders together for the first time in many areas.

For more information: www.saalt.org

their families and obtaining self-confidence for their goals.

Additionally the intergenerational tensions at home leave youth feeling even more isolated. From 1998 to 2001, a series of youth suicides in California's Fresno Unified School District dealt a blow to the community. In this area, Hmongs comprise one-fourth of the student body and made up half the suicides. Even though these students were born in America they still felt detached because, as noted in several suicide letters, the generation and culture gap in their homes and at schools was too large for them to bridge. Only after this tragedy did the school district take action to create a suicide prevention program for Hmong teens.

Nationally, education systems

often do not have adequate or culturally sensitive services to address the challenges faced by Asian American teens.

At the opposite extreme are Asian American youth who are driven hard to succeed. Realizing that their daughter, in a strong public high school, would not stand out among college applicants, an Asian American mother and father moved 10 miles north from New Jersey's Holmdel High to Keyport and had their daughter attend a high school where she graduated as class valedictorian and won the Miss Teen competition. The extreme measures worked, and she was accepted into a top level college. However, that pressure to succeed often forces youth in positions where friends and social well-being become sacrifices

for "success."²⁹

The Opportunity: Using diversity as a civic asset improve s Asian American youth relations with the surrounding community and increases the community's ability to cope with a more diverse environment.

In November 1992, Vira Douangmany, a Laotian American student, pulled together the student body and organized a walkout to call attention to the harassment and racial discrimination taking place at her Boston high school. The school failed to acknowledge the treatment of Asian Americans and ignored the call for educators and counselors to be trained in cultural sensitivity and Asian American issues.

This small walkout then expanded into a larger coalition, who, with the

support of other local community activists and teachers, began to build a network that is now known as CAPAY, the Coalition for Asian Pacific American Youth. This student-run organization has annual conferences, workshops, and campaigns to inform the greater public of Asian American youth and provide leadership opportunities.

G. CIVIL RIGHTS

“A Blueprint for Change” seeks to ensure the civil rights of all Americans. Communities should work to end discriminatory practices ranging from hate crimes to labor abuses.

Background: In the three months following 9/11, 243 incidents relating to hate crimes were reported, primarily against South Asians who were mistaken for Muslim and/or Arab Americans. Airports became mine fields for South Asians, some of whom were taken into police custody without sufficient reason. The Pakistani community of Brooklyn dwindled as 15,000 left for Canada, Pakistan, or Europe after 9/11, according to Pakistani government estimates.³⁰

Hate crimes are nothing new to the Asian American community. One of the cited cases is that of Vincent Chin, who was sitting at a bar in 1982 when two Detroit men pointed him out and called him a “Jap.” They blamed him for the current recession because Japanese automakers were eliminating jobs in the United States. The quarrel turned into a brawl, and when Chin attempted to escape, the men bludgeoned and killed him. After trial, the men were each sentenced to pay only a \$3,700 fine and probation. Ironically, Chin was not

even a Japanese American. Because Asian Americans are not easily differentiated by ethnic group, all Asian Americans, and not just one ethnicity, are targets for haranguing and discrimination.

The Opportunity: In order to encourage Asian Americans to create programs with the legal and political backing that support equal treatment and cross racial divides, **diversity** should be treated as a **civic asset**.

The historical experiences that Asian Americans have undergone serve to educate Americans for generations on civil rights. What happened post 9/11 is part of a larger context in which the same grievances suffered by Asian Americans in the past are not a part of America’s future.

After 9/11, the Japanese American Citizen’s League built an anti hate-crime curriculum. They used their own historical experience of the World War II internment camps to create the bridge between their experiences and those of the Muslim community. This educational curriculum was spread to over 200 chapters across the United States. What resulted was an exchanged learning experience where Muslims received the tools and knowledge of how to combat such hate crimes from Asian Americans who immigrated to America generations ago.

Additionally, culturally sensitive programming for the police force in the City of Houston exposed police officers to Houston’s Chinatown where they interacted with residents and experienced a part of Asian American culture. Chicago’s police force undertook similar measures. Addressing the civil rights of all Americans provides the opportunity to experience other cultures, propelling a stronger understanding

of the people in the city and how they live.

IV. The City of Houston: A Model in Practice

How can cities support their Asian American community as they continue to grow?

When Partners for Livable Communities examined several of these questions, Houston stood out as a model of growth. The City of Houston’s population is comprised of 7% Asian Americans, 31% Caucasians, 25% African Americans and 37% Hispanic.³¹ It is a city that managed the diverse growth in an extraordinarily short time, for it took only twenty years — less than a generation — for Caucasians to go from majority to minority.

Asian Americans have built businesses, networks, community centers, and marketplaces from the downtown area to the suburbs. The support structure for their growth comes from the local to the state level. The City of Houston is one of the cities that had recognized the burgeoning growth of Asian Americans and had already taken steps to embrace this group.

Laying the Foundation

One of the best pieces of evidence showcasing the diversity in Houston and the people’s opinions of race is the story of Proposition A. Proposition A was an anti-affirmative action clause that would have eliminated Houston’s affirmative action contracting program that states “city

governments set aside a fixed percentage of city contracts for minority-owned companies.” Proposition A was created after a similar anti-affirmative action proposition passed in California. Both initiatives drew scrutiny across America. Was America still in need of affirmative action?

When Proposition A went to a vote, Houstonians turned out to the polls in droves. They defeated the proposition. Their message was clear: that unfair inequality still existed and that programs to ensure equal opportunity were still needed. Houston recognized that diversity was essential for the city’s growth and vibrance.

Since Proposition A was considered, the contracting program has been clarified to include Caucasian women and persons with disabilities. Additionally, established firms are cycled out of the program to build upon their own successes. Thus the program adapted with the changing times and public opinion.

Perhaps the most famous feature of Houston, and the most controversial, is its no-zoning feature that allows churches and strip malls, 19th century hotels and gas stations, to grow side-by-side. Arguments for aestheticism aside,

this nurtures mixed-used development and free enterprise. The market, rather than the city’s interest, controls how to make the best use of land. No one sues a Vietnamese land developer who is building a restaurant by the African American church. Rather, the two begin to co-mingle against a backdrop of cultural respect and appreciation.

Nearly 70% of Houstonians believe that growing diversity in Houston is a good thing. Each of Houston’s various minority groups’ opinions of one another have only improved in the last twenty years.³²

The Importance of Leadership

When Martha Wong considered running for City Council in 1993, she received a curious response. “An Asian American on City Council?” No one thought to believe. But her profile and background were enough proof of her ability to lead and address ongoing issues. As a Houston native she became dedicated to education reform early on, and was president of the Meyerland Community Improvement Association and had been principal of Kolter Elementary for six years. Although her district was only 4% Asian American, she easily won her seat to City Council.

In 1994, Martha Wong became the first Asian American Council Member in the City of Houston, the same year that the city had its first minority-majority council. In 2002, she became the first Asian American Texas State representative.

Martha Wong’s example spurred a host of other Asian Americans to strive for leadership positions. In 2002, Council Member Gordon Quan became the first Asian American Mayor Pro-Tem, and he was also elected as the first Asian American Council Member at Large. Now there are ten elected Asian Americans from the Houston area whose positions range from the local to state level. These include the Houston Council Member MJ Khan and State Representative Hubert Vo. Vo was elected as the first Vietnamese American representative to the Texas State House. With the Asian American community’s support, Vo defeated a long-time incumbent in an election that surprised long-time political observers as he ultimately won by 32 votes.

Additionally, the city’s Asian American leaders often take an interest in Asian American issues and advocate policy and programs to address them. As civic leaders, they raise the resources to develop translated materials and distribute

A sample of programs in Houston, TX

Asian American Health Coalition (AAHC) of Greater Houston, Inc
 Asian Pacific American Heritage Association (APAHA)
 Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA)
 Chinese Community Center (CCC)
 Chinatown Community Development Corporation
 Indo-American Chamber of Commerce
 Vietnamese Culture and Science Association (VCSA)
 Taiwanese Heritage Society of Houston (THSH)

Asians Against Domestic Abuse (AADA)
 Burmese American Association of Texas (BAAT)
 Chinese Civic Center
 The Information Group for Asian American Rights (TIGAAR)
 Great Wall China Adoption
 Houston APIA Legal Clinic (housed from OCA)
 Youth Leadership Council (YLC)



them to all social service centers around the city. The City of Houston developed a Chinese translation of a Crime Prevention Handbook to address increasing violence in an Asian American populated area. They also developed electronic voting ballots in Vietnamese.

The Places of Support

Strong leadership and effective programs cannot work without the support of residents, and in the City of Houston, Asian Americans have used the foundation of diversity to their advantage.

The City of Houston has two Chinatowns that represent how Asian Americans have evolved along with the dynamic city. The first, in the heart of downtown, represents a stronghold for core businesses that have remained. The second is located closer to Southwest Houston and runs for several miles, with Vietnamese, Thai, Chinese, Korean, Indian and Taiwanese shops, along with bubble tea houses, faith-based retreats, educational facilities, a Tai-Chi instructional center and Asian American-based community centers. Both the old and new Chinatowns of Houston are under constant development and growth — the

former reinventing its historic roots into a vibrant urban setting, and the newer with plans to expand. This link of gathering places provides a number of opportunities for business growth, residential housing, and community development.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, this network of Asian American businesses, social service agencies and amenities in the region collaborated in an unprecedented moment in history. In August 2005, thousands of Vietnamese evacuees fled to the City of Houston seeking refuge. However, upon arrival, they were lost, confused and barraged with a storm of messages from FEMA and Red Cross that they could not understand due to language barriers. They knew of one place to find some sense of solace and security — the local Chinatown.

What they discovered was that Chinatown had already transformed to serve the needs of these new Houstonians. Houston’s Hong Kong City Mall — the largest indoor Asian American grocery store in America to date — turned into a service center fully equipped with First Aid, immunizations, food, clothing, and also information in several languages on where evacuees

needed to head first. Radio Saigon, a Vietnamese-radio station, also joined in to provide pertinent news and translation.

In an interview with the Vietnamese newspaper, *Viet Bao*, Ms. Sinh Vu, who has a family of 20, expressed her amazement, “Coming to Houston, we were so well treated, it was hard to believe our eyes. Like this afternoon, we received clothing for our children from Hong Kong Mall IV, and received Food Stamps. When coming to a Vietnamese restaurant, all we need is to show our Louisiana ID, and we get to eat for free.”

Some of the other unique organizations in Houston that provide a network of support include the Chinese Civic Center with a library of over 35,000 Chinese language titles; the Information Group for Asian American Rights that educates the historically underserved and underrepresented Asian American population on the federal laws that protect them; an annual youth leadership camp for Vietnamese American youth; and the only congressionally mandated center for research on minority health .

V. NEXT STEPS: What can I do?

To use **diversity as a civic asset** is a goal that all American communities must strive for. In communities where there is a growing Asian American population, this document offers suggestions and examples so that the conversations and work can begin to ensure all communities are included in the planning and development of neighborhoods, cities and states. The following are possible action steps that can be taken to contribute to this movement of inclusion of all communities.

Checklist for Action

___ **Send this document to local leader(s) with a letter requesting that Asian American issues be discussed and addressed.**

___ **Use this document as a guideline for a more thorough examination of the community’s needs — whether they are Vietnamese, Filipino, Hmong, South Asian, etc.**

___ **Hold a small forum on Asian American issues organized by both Asian American and non-Asian American groups.**

___ **Host a series of community meetings with Asian American and non-Asian American groups to discuss how these two groups can work together.**

___ **Start local initiatives around Asian American issues and opportunities that increase language access, support education and welfare reform to aid disadvantaged Asian Americans, or begin extracurricular programs to celebrate Asian American heritage and culture. Local governance and/or community-based organizations could take the lead on starting such programs.**

___ **Contact organizations of reference (noted in the following pages) and seek out models in practice to understand how similar programs have been developed.**

___ **Request that local leaders gather accurate data about the Asian American community in the local neighborhoods, including the specific country of ethnicity, languages spoken, age, and generation.**

___ **Start building the infrastructure for translation services. Have documents available in a variety of languages.**

For assistance with any of the above, please contact
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 1429 21st Street, NW
 Washington, DC 20036
 202-887-5990
 livability@livable.com

To download: www.citiesintransition.org

Additional copies are available through Partners for Livable Communities. Please contact Laura Tan, ltan@livable.com, for pricing inquiries.

ORGANIZATIONS FOR RESOURCE AND REFERENCE

Americans for the Arts (www.americansforthearts.org)
Asia Society (www.asiasociety.org)
Asian American Justice Center (www.advancingequality.org)
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO (www.apalanet.org)
Asian Pacific American Municipal Officials (www.nlc.org/inside_nlc/constituency_groups/apamo/495.cfm)
Asian Pacific Islander American Health Forum (www.apiahf.org)
Asian Pacific Islander School Board Members Association (www.apisbma.org)
Asian American Institute (www.aaichicago.org)
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (www.aapcho.org/site/aapcho)
Center for Community Change (www.communitychange.org)
Committee of 100 (www.committee100.org)
Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (honda.house.gov/CAPACHome.shtml)
International City/County Management Association (www.icma.org)
International Downtown Association (www.ida-downtown.org)
Japanese American Citizens League (www.jacl.org)
Korean American Coalition (www.kacdc.org)
Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics (www.leap.org)
Maryland Governor's Office of Asian Pacific American Affairs (www.marylandasian.org)
National Alliance of Vietnamese American Service Agencies (www.navasa.org)
National Asian Pacific American Caucus of State Legislators
National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse (www.napafasa.org)
National Asian Pacific Islander Mental Health Association (www.naapimha.org)
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (www.napaba.org)
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (www.napca.org)
National Association for the Education and Advancement of Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese Americans
(eden.clmer.csulb.edu/netshare/kclam/apa/nafea.htm)
National Association for Multicultural Education (www.nameorg.org)
National Civic League (www.ncl.org)
National Coalition of Asian Pacific American Community Development (www.nationalcapacd.org)
National Congress of Vietnamese Americans (www.ncvaonline.org)
National Congress for Community Economic Development (www.ncced.org)
National Federation of Filipino American Associations (www.naffaa.org)
National Immigration Forum (www.immigrationforum.org)
National Korean American Service and Education Consortium (www.nakasec.org)
National League of Cities (www.nlc.org)
National Trust for Historic Preservation (www.nationaltrust.org)
North American Taiwanese Women's Association (www.natwa.com)
OCA (www.ocanatl.org)
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (www.saldef.org)
South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow (www.saalt.org)
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (www.searac.org)

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING:

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ENDNOTES

1 This report is based on U.S. Census data. It does not include the population growth of Pacific Islanders in America, who when included, may make Asian Pacific Americans and Pacific Islanders the fastest growing minority group in America.

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