



BALANCING ACT:

Asian American Organizations Respond to Community Crisis and Build Collective Power

March 2023



Building Movement Project



ASIAN AMERICANS
ADVANCING
JUSTICE

ASIAN LAW CAUCUS



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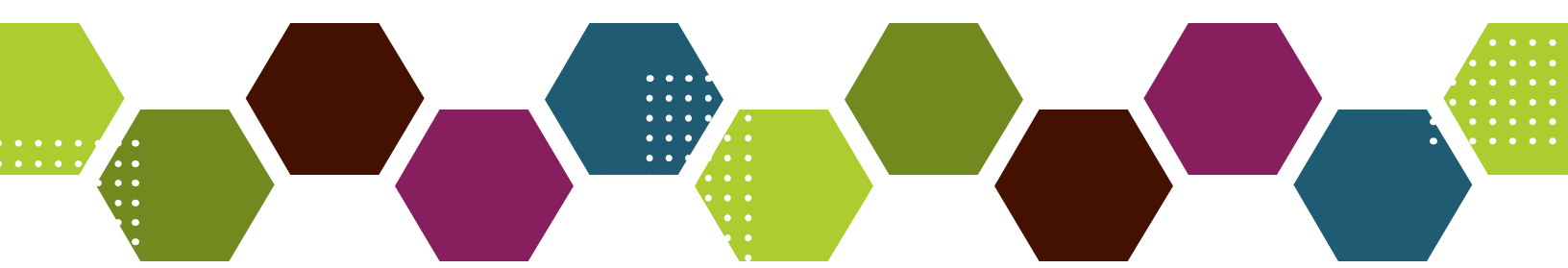
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About Building Movement Project and Asian Law Caucus

The Building Movement Project (BMP) supports and pushes the nonprofit sector by developing research, creating tools and training materials, and facilitating networks for social change. BMP’s movement building work provides tools, trainings, and narratives to foster cross-racial solidarity among movement leaders and social change organizations.

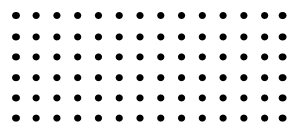
This report is part of BMP’s *Movement Infrastructure Series* which offers ideas, approaches, and practices to strengthen individual organizations and broader social movement ecosystems. *Balancing Act: Asian American Organizations Respond to Community Crises and Build Collective Power* is a collaboration between BMP and Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus (ALC). ALC brings together legal services, community empowerment, and policy advocacy to fight for immigrant justice, economic security, and a stronger democracy, with a specific focus on serving low-income, immigrant, and underserved Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the Bay Area. ALC coordinates the Asian American Leaders Table (AALT), a network of local and national organizations that came together in March 2020 to respond to the increase in bigotry and violence targeting Asian American communities during the pandemic through information sharing, narrative change, and advocacy. Since 2020, BMP has supported the AALT through strategic facilitation, guidance for frontline response, co-learning sessions, and solidarity workshops.

Acknowledgements

Deepa Iyer, Senior Director of Strategic Initiatives, and UyenThi Tran Myhre, Movement Building Coordinator, at BMP are the primary authors of this report, with contributions from Aarti Kohli (Executive Director of ALC), Niketa Kumar (Communications Director of ALC). Frances Kunreuther and Sean Thomas-Breitfeld, Co-Executive Directors of BMP, provided editorial guidance.

We are grateful to the individuals who shared their experiences with rapid response work over the past three years, including Phi Nguyen and Soyoung Yun (Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta), Jo-Ann Yoo (Asian American Federation), Alix Webb (Asian Americans United), Ben Wang (Asian Health Services), Sasha Wijeyeratne (CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities), Lai Wa Wu (Chinese Progressive Association), and Satjeet Kaur (Sikh Coalition). In addition, we consulted with Mike Ishii (Tsuru for Solidarity), Manju Kulkarni (AAPI Equity Alliance), and Sian Wu (Resource Media).





A Note from the Authors

As Asian Americans who work at an organization that supports diverse networks and movements, we considered deeply our own backgrounds, experiences, and biases as we navigated this project. We share the pain and grief reverberating through Asian American communities, and recognize that our own understanding and analyses are growing and shifting in real time, as we dialogue, learn, and build with partners. We offer the ideas and lessons in this report as a contribution to the robust and vibrant Asian American ecosystem that exists in communities around the country.



Ancestral traditions within many Asian communities uplift the balancing act of grieving and moving forward, together: chia buồn—a Vietnamese saying that means divide our sorrow—and chardi kala—a Sikh saying that means hope and optimism in the midst of difficulty.

Artist credit: UyenThi Tran Myhre





Introduction and Executive Summary

During the pandemic, Asian American communities have been subjected to an increasing and seemingly endless cycle of bigotry and targeted violence. As a result, organizations in Asian American communities have been operating in crisis mode in order to respond to physical violence, destruction of property, verbal harassment, workplace discrimination and bullying, as well as addressing divisive policy proposals and mass shootings affecting Asian Americans. This climate has been exacerbated by the inflammatory rhetoric of former President Donald Trump, the pandemic, and the ongoing attacks by white supremacist groups on institutions of democracy and communities of color.^{1, 2}

Between March 2020 and March 2022, Stop AAPI Hate reported nearly 11,500 incidents, the majority of which involved harassment, such as verbal or written hate speech or inappropriate gestures.³ The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)'s 2021 hate crime data, despite being incomplete, also shows an increase in anti-Asian hate crimes.^{4, 5} While most victims identify as Chinese American, individuals across many Asian ethnic groups self-reported incidents of harm to Stop AAPI Hate.⁶ Asian Americans were hardly safe anywhere, it seems, given that two in five reported incidents took place on streets, sidewalks, or at parks, and one in ten incidents occurred on public transit.⁷ While most reports originated in New York or California, community members experienced harassment, assaults, and the destruction of small businesses in the Midwest and South as well.⁸

In response, Asian American organizations sprang into action. Since 2020, new organizations have been created, while existing ones have buttressed their programs and strategies. It is important to acknowledge the multiple levels of crisis response that Asian American organizations are managing in the current moment. In addition to addressing targeted violence, Asian American groups have been on the frontlines of pandemic response, requiring them to establish or reshape programs that meet basic survival needs of their community members, from food insecurity to job and housing instability.⁹

Groups have also been responding to the epidemic of gun violence in the United States. During Lunar New Year in January 2023, Asian Americans were involved in two mass shootings in California. In Monterey Park, eleven people were killed and nine others were injured.¹⁰ Over the same weekend, in Half Moon Bay, seven Chinese and Mexican farmworkers were targeted and killed by a coworker, and an eighth person was critically injured.¹¹ In both cases, the shooter was an older Asian man. While neither of these incidents were characterized as hate violence, they elicited a similar crisis response from Asian American organizations who quickly sprang into action to support the victims and survivors in both cities.

And on the policy front, various policies and initiatives have been proposed or enacted at the local, state, and federal levels that reflect the current climate of bigotry targeting Asian Americans. For example, Asian American





Key Themes and Takeaways

1 Given the multiple crises affecting Asian American communities, rapid response is quickly becoming a mainstay program and strategy at many organizations. Effective rapid response requires effective infrastructure, which includes roles, practices, advance planning, and coordination. Rapid response infrastructure is a vital part of supporting the capacity of nonprofits to address the patchwork of immediate needs facing survivors, victims, family members, and the broader community, including but not limited to health and legal concerns, mental health and trauma care.

2 Many Asian American nonprofits are working at the intersection of addressing interpersonal harm while also contending with the systemic and generational inequities that enable targeted violence. The nonprofit leaders interviewed for this report have a clear understanding that “hate” does not happen in a vacuum. They pointed out how targeted violence is a symptom of the economic, educational, and social inequities that have long plagued our country. Groups acknowledged that it is not sufficient to address interpersonal violence alone. Instead, it is vital to shine a light on and uproot the systems and structures that enable targeted violence to happen in the first place.¹⁴

3 Asian American leaders are centering the needs and demands of community members seeking justice and accountability, while also identifying and advocating for community safety through the lens of transformative and healing justice and abolition. Nonprofit leaders are balancing calls for accountability and justice from victims, survivors, and community members, while also identifying strategies beyond carceral solutions that incarcerate, surveil, and criminalize people. Groups are at various points in their learning process to understand community safety alternatives, abolition, healing and transformative justice, and repeatedly identified the need for time, capacity and opportunities to learn from each other, experiment with different ideas and narratives, and practice being in generative conflict with one another.

4 Nonprofit groups believe deeply in the importance of meaningful solidarity, building community power, and being part of diverse and robust ecosystems. Leaders consistently placed solidarity as a key strategy and approach to bring about equity and justice. They identified the need to build internal solidarity among Asian communities as well as cross-racial solidarity through strategic conversations, co-learning, shared narratives, and collaboration on campaigns and policy demands. They also shared the importance of building internal community power through base building, popular education, organizing, and civic engagement efforts.

5 Funders must provide abundant support to Asian American organizations not only after a crisis occurs but for rapid response infrastructure and for long-term community building efforts. Philanthropic institutions often establish rapid response funds in the wake of crises, and many Asian American organizations have benefited from these investments over the past three years. At the same time, Asian American organizations require support for rapid response planning in advance of crises, and for solidarity and community building initiatives. Funders could also focus on supporting a robust and diverse ecosystem of Asian American groups in different parts of the country, including areas with emerging populations. Funders must extend their commitments by bringing in new philanthropic entities that can support Asian American communities.

What we found is that Asian American leaders and organizations are engaged in a precarious balancing act. Asian American organizations are creating, engaging in, advocating for, and restructuring crisis response mechanisms while simultaneously addressing systemic inequities, building community power, and practicing solidarity. In order for Asian American groups and nonprofit leaders to build sustainable and durable organizations, they require abundant and tailored resources, partnerships, and investments.



At the remembrance vigil in March 2022, marking one year since the Atlanta spa shootings, a community member places flowers by “The Young Girl Statue for Peace.”

Photo credit: Deepa Iyer

CASE STUDIES: Responding to Anti-Asian Bigotry and Targeted Violence

We interviewed leaders from seven organizations for this report: Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta, the Sikh Coalition (national), Asian Americans United (Philadelphia), Asian American Federation (New York City), CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities (New York City), Asian Health Services (Oakland), and Chinese Progressive Association (San Francisco). Below are brief summaries of the interviews conducted, including what happened in each city and the organizational responses.

INTERVIEW: Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta

On March 16, 2021, staff and volunteers connected to Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta (AAAJ-Atlanta) responded to the horrific news of murders occurring at three places of business—Young’s Asian Massage, Gold Spa, and Aromatherapy Spa—in the Atlanta area. Of the eight people who lost their lives, six were Asian migrant women who worked at the spas. The victims included Soon Chung Park, age 74; Hyun Jung Grant, age 51; Suncha Kim, age 69; Yong Ae Yue, age 63; Delaina Ashley Yaun, age 33; Paul Andre Michels, age 54; Xiaojie Tan, age 49; Daoyou Feng, age 44. A ninth person, Elcias Hernandez-Ortiz, was seriously injured but survived. The shooter, a 22-year-old white man, pled guilty to murder in the killings of Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Delaina Yaun, and Paul Andre Michels, and was sentenced to life in prison without

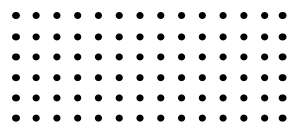
parole. As of this writing, he was indicted in a different county and faces the death penalty for the killings of Suncha Kim, Soon Chung Park, Hyun Jung Grant, and Yong Ae Yue.^{15, 16}



In response to the Atlanta spa shootings, San Francisco community members gather at a rally in March 2021.

Photo credit: Jason Leung, unsplash.com

AAAJ-Atlanta, a nonprofit legal advocacy organization dedicated to protecting the civil rights of Asian Americans in Georgia and the Southeast, worked with multiple organizations in Georgia and around the country to respond to the spa shootings. We spoke with Executive Director Phi Nguyen and Board Member Soyoung Yun who described coordinating local and national organizations, bringing community members and leaders together to identify the immediate needs of the survivors and families, attending funerals of the victims, and connecting survivors with financial resources.



INTERVIEW: The Sikh Coalition (National)

The Sikh American community has long faced violence and bigotry in many forms in the United States. On April 15, 2021, a mass shooting at an Indianapolis, Indiana, FedEx facility with a large Sikh American workforce left eight people dead. Four of the victims were Sikh Americans: Amarjeet Kaur Johal, age 66; Jasvinder Kaur, age 50; Amarjit Sekhon, age 48; and Jaswinder Singh, age 68. In addition, Matthew R. Alexander, age 32; Samaria Blackwell, age 19; Karli Smith, age 19, and John Weisert, age 74, were also killed in the attack. Several more individuals were injured by the gunman. The shooter, a 19-year-old white male and former employee at the facility, was found dead from a self-inflicted gunshot.¹⁷

We spoke with Satjeet Kaur, who was Executive Director at the Sikh Coalition at the time. At the request of Indianapolis community leaders, the Sikh Coalition sent some of its national staff to Indiana to provide on-the-ground support; drafted a statement from all the area gurdwaras (Sikh houses of worship); collected victim impact statements; liaised between victims and law enforcement; and helped survivors and families understand and navigate the benefits that were available to them, from worker’s compensation to funeral costs.

INTERVIEW: Asian Americans United (Philadelphia)

On November 17, 2021, Christina Lu, an Asian American high school student, was riding a local train in Philadelphia after school when she noticed three Asian students being harassed by four Black youth. Lu decided to intervene, and while attempting to de-escalate the situation, Lu was kicked and stomped. The attack was recorded, and the video quickly went viral on social media. Subsequently, there were calls for more police presence on public transit, and for the prosecution of the teenagers as adults. The four Black youth, who were between the ages of 13 and 16 at the time, were charged with aggravated assault and ethnic intimidation.¹⁸

We spoke with Alix Webb, who was Executive Director at Asian Americans United (AAU) at the time of the incident. AAU, a Philadelphia-based organization with a focus on youth leadership, supported the Asian American youth who were directly impacted and worked with partner organizations to coordinate a collective statement.



A community vigil in Greenwood, Indiana, brought together people across faiths to honor the lives lost in the Indianapolis FedEx shooting in April 2021.

Photo credit: The Sikh Coalition

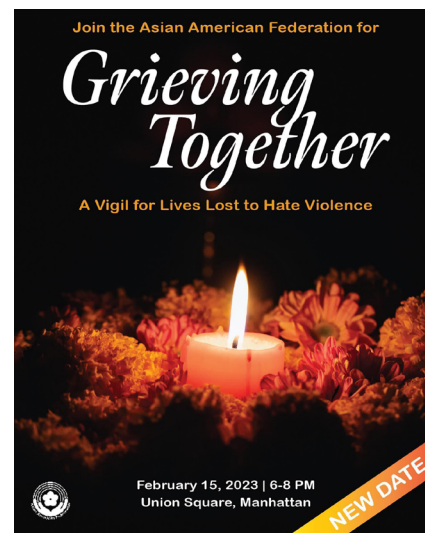


INTERVIEWS: Asian American Federation and CAAAV: Organizing Asian Americans (New York)

New York City is home to over a million people of Asian descent. According to the city's Commission on Human Rights, New York residents of Asian background, particularly the elderly, have experienced an increase in harassment and violence since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁹ Here are a few of the many reported incidents:

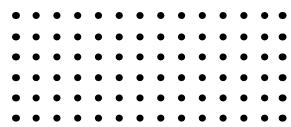
- » **2020 in Brooklyn:** An 89-year-old Asian woman is slapped in the face and her clothes are set on fire.²⁰
- » **December 2021 in East Harlem:** Yao Pan Ma, 61, dies after being attacked while collecting cans in April 2021.²¹
- » **January 2022 in Times Square:** Michelle Go, 40, is fatally shoved in front of a subway car.²²
- » **January 2022 in Brooklyn:** Hoa Nguyen, 68, is punched in the face while walking down the street.²³
- » **February 2022 in Chinatown:** Christina Yuna Lee, 35, is stalked and murdered in her apartment.²⁴
- » **March 2022 in Queens:** GuiYing Ma, 61, dies after being attacked in November 2021.²⁵

We interviewed Jo-Ann Yoo, Executive Director at Asian American Federation (AAF) and Sasha Wijeyeratne, Executive Director at CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities (CAAAV). AAF and CAAAV are both part of the rich, diverse, and long history of community organizing and advocacy in New York City. Yoo discussed how AAF pivoted in response to community needs by creating a central reporting space for Asian American community members, providing and creating in-language resource and referral services, and advocating for more proactive and concrete support from government officials. Wijeyeratne shared how the broader New York City ecosystem includes many groups playing the frontline responder role, leaving space open for organizations like CAAAV to focus on building neighborhood power, including their work organizing for housing justice with working class Asian immigrants in Chinatown and Queens.



The Asian American Federation organized a community vigil in February 2023 in response to the mass shootings in Monterey Park and Half Moon Bay, CA.

Image credit: Asian American Federation



INTERVIEWS: Asian Health Services and Chinese Progressive Association (Oakland and San Francisco)

According to the Bay Area Equity Atlas, 27% of Bay Area residents (just over two million people) identify as Asian American or Pacific Islander.²⁶ Like the rest of the country, the Bay Area has recorded a spike in anti-Asian violence since 2020. Stop AAPI Hate reported over 700 anti-Asian hate crimes and incidents in the Bay Area over the first two years of the pandemic. Among the many reported incidents:

- » **January 2021:** Vicha Ratanapakdee, 84, dies after being assaulted while on his morning walk.²⁸
- » **March 2021:** Danilo Yu Chang, 59, is assaulted while walking down the street.²⁹
- » **May 2021:** Chui Fong Eng, 85, and another elderly Asian woman are stabbed at a bus station.³⁰
- » **June 2021:** Anh Peng Taylor, 94, is stabbed on her daily morning walk.³¹
- » **June 2022:** At least 14 South Asian women are targeted, assaulted, and robbed in a series of attacks that took place over two months.³²
- » **August 2022:** Gregory Chew, 70, is assaulted while walking down the street.³³

We spoke with Ben Wang, Director of Special Initiatives at Oakland-based Asian Health Services (AHS) and Lai Wa Wu, Policy and Alliance Director at San Francisco-based Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) to learn about their overall work in response to anti-Asian violence since the beginning of the pandemic. In 2021, AHS launched its

Community Healing Initiative in response to patients, staff, and community partners experiencing increased hate and violence. When community members experience harm, AHS offers mental health support and culturally relevant healing practices, and also helps victims navigate the bureaucracy of law enforcement and government agencies. CPA is connected to various networks of communities of color in the Bay Area and emphasizes the value of cross-racial and intergenerational programs and resources. That work includes in-language services, victim support, and restorative programming, as well as preventative work that addresses root causes of violence. In the aftermath of the mass shootings in Monterey Park and Half Moon Bay in January 2023, we also spoke to Aarti Kohli, Executive Director at Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus, about the ongoing rapid response efforts in both those communities.



A community member holds a sign in memory of Vicha Ratanapakdee at a rally in San Francisco in March 2021. Ratanapakdee, an 84-year-old Thai American elder, died after being assaulted while on his morning walk two months earlier.

Photo credit: Jason Leung, unsplash.com



SECTION I RECOMMENDATIONS: Building Infrastructure in Advance of Crises

It's no longer a question of if, but rather when, an emergency might occur in the United States, whether that is targeted violence, a pandemic, climate disasters, or human-made systems breaking down, from unsafe drinking water to power grid failures. While nonprofit organizations strive to address unanticipated community needs, they are not always prepared or resourced to meet the demands. The current environment of cyclical and compounding crises means that nonprofit organizations are perpetually operating in emergency mode.

Over the last three years, many Asian American nonprofits have become frontline responders, engaging in a range of services and activities such as providing direct support to victims and survivors, liaising with government stakeholders, and advocating for in-language services. These organizations have often created scaffolding by piecing together parts of various existing programs, partnerships, and resources to temporarily support emerging needs. Yet, as nonprofit leaders shared in interviews for this report, such a scaffolding approach cannot be a permanent solution.

That is why it is vital to develop infrastructure inside organizations and across regional and national networks that can meet the needs that most often emerge during community crises. Rapid response and recovery infrastructure is a complex and interconnected patchwork that requires community-centered programs, skilled staff, abundant financial resources, effective

internal operations, solidarity narratives, and coordination and collaboration with external stakeholders ranging from government agencies to the private sector to philanthropy. While organizations will inevitably have to pivot to meet the unique needs of a crisis, having robust rapid response infrastructure already in place can provide a starting point.

On the following pages are suggested roles, recommended activities, and promising practices that can strengthen rapid response, with an emphasis on Asian American communities. These roles can be designated in advance both inside organizations and through a regional taskforce or a national table comprised of stakeholders from various sectors and communities. While this is not a comprehensive checklist that can meet every crisis, it can be a roadmap for organizations seeking to buttress or develop their capacity to engage in rapid response efforts.



"[When crisis happens] what are the things that individual people and/or groups of people on your team should be responsible for thinking through?"

—SATJEET KAUR
FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
SIKH COALITION





CRISIS COORDINATORS

Crisis Coordinators are the point persons who manage the entire infrastructure of rapid response within organizations or taskforces. They organize daily and weekly calls to share and exchange information, delegate tasks, and understand how the various parts of rapid response infrastructure are working together. They are the go-to person for others within the rapid response ecosystem, including victim and survivor advocates, liaisons, and pro bono legal and mental health providers, and serve as a link between government stakeholders and partner groups. In the context of a rapid response taskforce, crisis coordinators manage and oversee the process which is why they must be sensitive to the larger dynamics at play between various stakeholders.



PROMISING PRACTICE

- **Assess community comfort with rapid response.** When working with community members affected by a crisis, it is important to first understand whether rapid response support would be welcomed or necessary, particularly if affected community members do not have pre-existing relationships with the organizations that seek to provide rapid response. Showing up with humility, grace, and curiosity can build bridges to shared connection and understanding.



“The trusted experts are those little nonprofits on the corner and people to and say, you know what just happened to me? We need to create a network of how we get information out to the community.”

—JO-ANN YOO
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
ASIAN AMERICAN FEDERATION

“In the middle of a crisis, it’s hard to welcome outsiders. For some communities, there is a sense of pride in taking care of a situation with their own resources. So it’s important for rapid response groups to take time to understand cultural norms and practices, to get a sense of the political motives and dynamics, to build relationships with local community and faith leaders, and ask for permission, before jumping in to help. We should be clear about what we don’t know, and not assume that all situations are alike.”

—AARTI KOHLI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
ADVANCING JUSTICE-ASIAN LAW CAUCUS





VICTIM AND SURVIVOR ADVOCATES

Victim and Survivor Advocates conduct intake and ongoing case management that responds to the various needs of the families of victims, as well as survivors and witnesses. They connect victims, survivors, and family members with information and resources related to funeral and cremation services, legal and immigration concerns, physical health and mental health concerns, and financial expenses. They receive training in working with survivors and family members around these needs, and have relationships with appropriate government and community-based stakeholders. They also have access to sustainability and healing resources to address their own emotional needs.



PROMISING PRACTICES

- **Connect with affected community members within 12–24 hours after a community crisis, and center their needs.** While there is a sense of urgency to act quickly in the wake of an emergency, frontline responder nonprofits emphasized the importance of moving slowly in order to gather as much information as possible. This means that during the first 12 to 24 hours, staff and volunteers trained as Victim and Survivor Advocates should attempt to connect directly with victims, survivors, and family members, often via trusted community groups, faith leaders, and caregivers. In doing so, nonprofit leaders shared that it is critical to center the needs, perspectives, and demands of those directly affected by an act of targeted violence. At Asian Americans United in Philadelphia, for example, staff

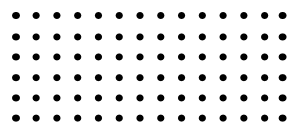
members working with young people ensured that the needs and demands of the Asian American youth member involved in the train incident were kept in sharp focus. Similarly, Soyoung Yun (AAAJ-Atlanta Board Member as well as a Licensed Professional Counselor) recalled that in the immediate aftermath of the spa shootings in Atlanta, community members approached survivors with humility and care: “I imagine many of the [victims and survivors] were feeling overwhelmed and overstimulated, both internally and externally, which is why you must be sensitive of their space while reminding them that you are there for them. Sometimes that’s enough for people.”



Flowers and candles at a peace vigil held by Asian American Federation at Union Square in New York, March 2021.

Photo credit: Andrew Ratto, Flickr, Creative Commons (CC BY 2.0)

- **Consider long-term support for victims and survivors.** Crisis recovery includes setting up long-term support mechanisms for survivors that can be relied upon after a crisis abates. This could range from creating a network of volunteers who remain connected with a survivor over the years to supporting an endowment that provides



consistent funds for health care, educational, and vocational purposes to organizing annual gatherings that remember and honor victims and survivors.

- **Consider the attitudes and experiences that affected community members have with law enforcement and the justice system.** Victims, witnesses, survivors, and family members may have various comfort levels in engaging with law enforcement or representatives of the justice system. Organizations engaging in rapid response should navigate these dynamics with clarity and transparency. For example, in Indianapolis, after the FedEx shootings, Satjeet Kaur of the Sikh Coalition recalled that “while some local community members had close relationships with law enforcement, we learned that some of those that had been injured had not actually even been interviewed by police early on. We had to push for those interviews.”

There are also times when law enforcement presence is undesirable and even detrimental, requiring rapid response organizations to engage in advocacy. For example, in collecting reports of targeted violence from community members, Jo-Ann Yoo from the Asian American Federation points to how victims would share that they did not want to be connected with law enforcement due to fear of immigration consequences: “[We often heard] ‘I’m undocumented so I can’t tell anybody.’” In these instances, nonprofit groups find themselves helping victims and survivors parse out their options. Victim and survivor advocates can prepare victims and survivors to navigate the many bureaucratic systems that are not often in communication with one another.



TRAINED INTERPRETERS AND TRANSLATORS

Trained Interpreters and Translators ensure that monolingual or limited English proficient victims, survivors, and community members can understand the array of resources available to them and can communicate fully with government agencies, law enforcement, media, and public officials. Caseworkers, advocates, and pro bono lawyers must work closely with trained, and when possible, certified interpreters. Given the diversity of Asian languages, organizations should identify, train, and maintain a bank of interpreters who speak the languages most spoken in a particular area.



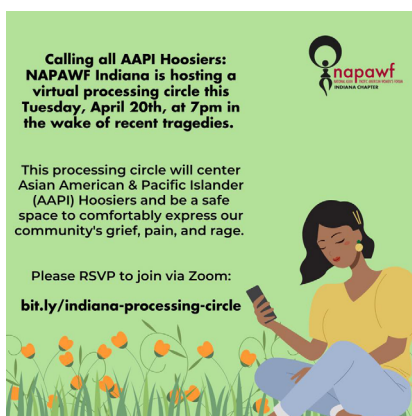
PROMISING PRACTICES

- **Develop translated materials in advance.** Examples of materials include a translated step-by-step guide and FAQ—written in accessible, everyday language—about what to expect if one is subjected to targeted violence and where one can turn in a particular locality. This can include information about basic resources and points of contact within government agencies, particularly offices working with victims of crime, as well as community-based organizations that are equipped to provide case management, and a list of interpreters, along with descriptions of what to expect from all these stakeholders. These materials can be shared virtually, incorporated into articles appearing in ethnic media, and distributed at community centers and small businesses.



- **Prepare in advance by understanding and translating commonly used forms.**

Interpreters could be prepared by developing proficiency with government forms and intake questions usually utilized after acts of targeted violence.



NAPAWF-Indiana held a virtual processing circle for community members in April 2021, in the wake of the Atlanta spa shootings and Indianapolis FedEx shooting.

Image credit: NAPAWF-Indiana



MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS, THERAPISTS, SOCIAL WORKERS, AND COMMUNITY HEALERS

In the wake of an act of targeted violence, victims, survivors, family members, witnesses, and community members are often dealing with a range of complex and multi-layered emotions, and may require grief counseling, assistance managing post-traumatic shock and stress, one-on-one therapy, alternative healing modalities, and age-appropriate support for children and young people directly or indirectly affected. *Mental Health Counselors, Therapists, Social Workers and Community Healers* can address these needs. For Asian communities,

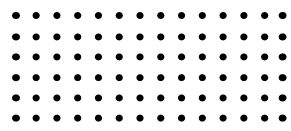
it is vital that mental health providers have skills and training to understand and respond to varied cultural and faith-based values, beliefs, attitudes, and communications approaches to trauma, loss, grief, and healing. Additionally, community members may be experiencing multiple layers of trauma associated with being connected to incidents that target members of their own racial group, and need access to resources and healers who can hold space for both individual and collective healing. Tailored resources should be developed for young Asian American children, as well as their caregivers and educators.



PROMISING PRACTICES

- **Support victims, survivors, and community members throughout the different stages of processing and healing.** In our interviews, nonprofit leaders noted several barriers to connecting victims and survivors with mental health support. First, there are not enough qualified and culturally relevant community therapists or social workers available. Moreover, many community members carry stigma or negative attitudes around mental illness and seeking care for it. Some may also be wary of accessing government mental health services due to their immigration status, language ability, or negative past experiences.

To overcome these barriers, organizations such as Asian Health Services (AHS) in the Bay Area decided to create their own mental health support program, and designed it to be accessible to survivors of trauma. “Because we are often responding to high trauma cases, we want to create a broad system of support, including mental health,



systems navigation, and cultural-based healing,” Ben Wang from AHS explained. As such, health insurance is not a requirement, and anyone can get connected to the program, even if they aren’t an existing patient.

More broadly, Asian mental health providers and healers are also working to connect community members with culturally relevant mental health support. For example, the Asian American Psychological Association Division on Practice recently launched a provider directory; the Asian Mental Health Collective organizes directories for providers based in the U.S. and Canada; and the Sikh Family Center runs a nationwide non-emergency helpline.^{34, 35, 36}



“Community health centers have an important role to play in providing linguistically and culturally relevant care to survivors of trauma. The Community Health Initiative at AHS is rooted in the value that public safety is critical to community health: everyone has a right to heal from trauma and to feel safe in their community.”

—BEN WANG
DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL INITIATIVES,
ASIAN HEALTH SERVICES

- **Address community and collective trauma.** Beyond direct trauma, many community members not directly attacked or present at the site of an attack might need counseling to deal with the vicarious trauma of being connected to the communities targeted. Even when an act is not classified legally as a hate incident or a hate crime, the

compounding impact of bearing witness can take a significant toll. That is why after incidents of violence, community members often gather for vigils, circles, and connection. In the wake of the Indianapolis FedEx shooting, for example, Sikh American activists and organizations put together a multiracial, interfaith solidarity vigil. After the mass shootings in Monterey Park and Half Moon Bay in California in January 2023, Chinese Progressive Association organized a “Fireside Chat on Restorative Justice” with an in-person and hybrid option for community members to connect and process together.



PRO BONO LAWYERS AND TRAINED LEGAL ADVOCATES

Pro Bono Lawyers and Legal Advocates can assist victims and survivors to navigate complex and bureaucratic legal processes and systems. They can guide victims and survivors through the criminal justice system as a whole, including managing communications with law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and court advocates. They can develop impact statements after interviewing survivors, witnesses, and victims on behalf of a community-based organization, and can explain and recommend options available in terms of prosecution, restorative justice, and hate crimes charges. Lawyers and legal advocates can assist the family members of victims with specific types of law including the probate process and the immigration system. They can help affected community members who may be undocumented or have precarious immigration statuses, bring family members from another country to the United States, or procure visas for family members of victims.





PROMISING PRACTICE

- Create and translate know-your-rights resources in the languages used by impacted community members.** In the days following the mass shooting in Half Moon Bay, workers’ rights and immigration attorneys at the Asian Law Caucus, California Rural Legal Assistance, and other legal aid organizations developed a series of know-your-rights FAQs to help local community groups, county officials and agencies, and community members understand farmworkers’ rights after violence in the workplace and equip them with trusted, vetted information in English, Spanish, and simplified and traditional Chinese.³⁷ If possible, some FAQs—particularly those that can help community members understand the legal process, systems, and options available if one is a victim of targeted violence—could be prepared and translated in advance.
- Develop partnerships with local bar associations before a crisis, and appoint an organizational point-of-contact to coordinate help from private attorneys and bar association members.** Geographic and identity-based bar associations are often able to support rapid response needs, including connecting private attorneys to local groups who need more capacity and expertise beyond their staff’s focal areas. As more information unfolds and impacted community members identify their near- and long-term needs, organizations should identify one person who can coordinate the help offered by private attorneys and align that outreach with the specific needs of victims and survivors.



Asian Law Caucus provides in-language “Know Your Rights” worker and voter resources at a community event in October 2022.

Photo credit: AAAJ-Asian Law Caucus



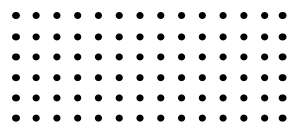
EMERGENCY FUNDS AND ADMINISTRATION COORDINATORS

In the wake a crisis, it is commonplace for GoFundMe links, large contributions from corporations, or rapid response funding from foundations to emerge. *Emergency Funds and Administration Coordinators* can set up a mechanism in advance with clear guidelines on how organizations will receive, allocate and administer funds, and oversee the process.



PROMISING PRACTICES

- Lay out the various options that arise for survivors and victims.** Affected community members may not be aware of the resources available to them, from workers’ compensation to state and federal



government victim assistance funds that may cover medical, funeral, or mental health treatment costs. Administrators of GoFundMe campaigns may need to ensure verification of victims and survivors along with government agencies before allocating funds. Emergency funds and administration coordinators may also wish to figure out the steps to take in the event of conflict among survivors and family members of victims.

- Develop understanding in advance of how to handle large donations.** Organizations may receive significant funding from foundations and corporations after an act of violence in their community. And as mass shootings have become a norm in the United States, national victim fund groups often reach out to local communities in the aftermath. Working with accountants and lawyers to understand tax and legal implications of receiving large amounts of funding might be required for many organizations, particularly those with smaller budgets.
- Include rapid response infrastructure as a line item in organizational budgets.** For organizations seeking to be frontline responders, consider including budget line items for various types of rapid response infrastructure in fundraising efforts. Doing so as a regular part of budgeting and fundraising will also send a clear message to philanthropic institutions that supporting rapid response must be part of general support funds.



“We had to create the [financial infrastructure] and learn it on the fly. It was a lot of administrative work and working closely with the families for the different things that might need to be ironed out from a legal standpoint, and being aware of any family conflicts.”

—PHI NGUYEN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ASIAN AMERICANS
ADVANCING JUSTICE-ATLANTA



MEDIA LIAISONS

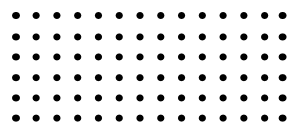
In the wake of a crisis, local and national media will likely turn to community-based organizations for context, background, and framing. *Media Liaisons* are the first point of contact in responding to media requests, ensuring that names are correctly pronounced, and sharing press releases. Media liaisons identify appropriate spokespersons and stay connected with regional and national communications staff at partner organizations. They are also responsible for developing a process to handle media intake, fact check statements, approve public communications, and monitor media stories.



PROMISING PRACTICES

- Develop talking points and a list of trusted spokespersons in advance.** While each incident is different, there are common questions that arise in the wake of targeted violence. Media liaisons can develop a set of pre-approved talking points that address





these questions. In addition, it is helpful to compile a list of trusted and media-trained spokespersons who understand and have connections with Asian communities in advance.

- **Set up and maintain communications infrastructure.** Sian Wu, Managing Director at Resource Media, who has assisted the Asian American Leaders Table with crisis communications, recommends that organizations seeking to play the role of a media liaison set in place several types of media infrastructure. This can include creating a dedicated email or phone line for media requests in advance. In the wake of a community emergency, organizations can share a brief “holding statement” on the organization’s website which communicates that they are aware of the situation, but don’t have concrete and detailed enough information to offer a formal statement.

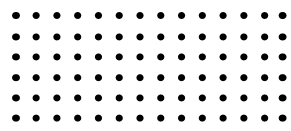


- **Hold off on talking to the media until it’s clear what to say.** Organizations often feel pressure to issue statements within the first 12–24 hours after an incident of targeted violence. These statements need not be

detailed and comprehensive. Groups can focus on the support that is required for directly affected community members, provide information about fundraising efforts and vigils, and amplify local organizations on the ground. Policy statements and demands may be better received a few days after the incident when more information is widely known, and organizations have had an opportunity to confer and consult one another.

- **Be sensitive to capacity needs of victims, survivors, and witnesses.** In uplifting the needs and demands of those directly affected by the crisis, media liaisons should be sensitive to the impact of being spotlighted in the media. Sometimes, asking survivors to speak at vigils or with the media could compound their trauma. In addition, survivors may have cultural perspectives or concerns about sharing personal information or their experiences publicly, and may not wish to draw additional attention. In some cases, survivors and families of victims may not want their full names to be released for fear of consequences in workplaces or the immigration context. Media liaisons should work closely with survivor and victim advocates to assess the capacity and comfort level of survivors, victims, and witnesses before inviting them to be media spokespersons or subjects of articles. In the event that survivors and victims express reluctance in being personally identified, media liaisons could consider drafting anonymous quotes or a collective statement that does not identify individuals by name.
- **Preempt inaccurate or divisive narratives with inclusive and comprehensive ones.** In the wake of targeted violence against





Asian Americans, there have been examples of divisive or inaccurate media narratives or simplified assumptions that tell a one-dimensional story about what occurred. In the wake of the spa shootings in Atlanta, for example, various organizations broadened the media story, which initially focused solely on race, to uplift the implications of gender, immigration status, and class. For example, Raksha, Inc., which provides support to South Asian survivors of gender violence in Atlanta, pointed out the importance of placing the shootings at the intersection of attacks on race and gender. “Structural racism and racialized misogyny breed a sense of privilege that justifies these acts of violence,” Raksha Inc.’s statement noted.³⁸ Red Canary Song, a grassroots collective of Asian and migrant sex workers and allies, cautioned against flattening the intersectional experiences of the victims in the spa shootings. “The women who were killed faced specific racialized gendered violence for being Asian women and massage workers,” their statement noted.³⁹

- **Consider how and when to make organizational statements that take policy positions or make demands.** In some cases, organizations may already have developed clear and well-thought out positions around the role of the criminal justice system, abolition, or transformative justice when violence happens in our communities. The timing of when to release statements about organizational positions, as well as their content, must be carefully balanced with the demands of affected community members, particularly when there may be contradictory asks. For example, in the wake of the spa shootings in Atlanta, AAJ-Atlanta tailored their own press releases and community statements to

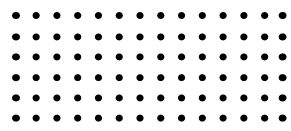
uplift both the impact on victims and survivors as well as the importance of utilizing a structural approach to address targeted violence.⁴⁰ Phi Nguyen from AAJ-Atlanta recalled: “Coming up with a response that was values-aligned was helpful in the moment, but also helpful as we moved forward and continued to address and confront the issue of anti-Asian violence.”



A community member delivers remarks at the remembrance vigil marking one year since the Atlanta spa shootings. Photo credit: Deepa Iyer

- **Understand and incorporate community history when uplifting media narratives.** In crafting media narratives around targeted violence, nonprofit leaders shared that it is important to incorporate a keen understanding of the past while also understanding how public conversations around community safety are taking shape in the present. Over the past three years, Asian American leaders have been intentionally placing the current crisis in the context of a long and painful history of bigotry in the United States, from the anti-Asian mobs at the turn of the twentieth century to the incarceration of Japanese Americans in World War II to the spread of Islamophobia after the September 11th





attacks. Organizations also uplift the connections between interpersonal bias and systemic inequities which fuel the conditions that lead to bigotry and targeted violence in the first place. These structural failures, according to nonprofit leaders, include past government policies and practices targeting Asian Americans such as the U.S. Supreme Court's historic refusal to provide Asians with citizenship rights, the profiling and surveillance of Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians after 9/11, and deportations of Southeast Asian refugees, as well as the ongoing failure of public institutions to rectify the unjust economic, health, and housing conditions faced by communities of color.^{41, 42, 43}

In addition to acknowledging this broader trajectory, it is important to contextualize current situations within local community histories. In Philadelphia, for example, Asian Americans United and partner organizations shared a collective statement which acknowledged the pain of the Asian youth who were harmed, while also shining a light on the decades of divestment from public education which fostered the conditions for inequity in the city.⁴⁴ This collaborative work was grounded and shaped by lessons learned a decade earlier, when over two dozen Asian students were brutally attacked by a group of mostly Black classmates at South Philadelphia High School on December 3, 2009. Asian students organized an eight-day student boycott, which eventually led to a federal consent decree against the school district.⁴⁵ In both the 2009 and 2021 incidents, organizers refused to utilize the narrative that the violence was simply the result of tension between Asian and Black communities. Rather, the messaging—and protest sign—from 2009 continued to guide the response in 2021:

“It’s not a question of who beat whom, but who let it happen,” young folks proclaimed, referring to the failing systems that cultivated the conditions for conflicts to emerge and grow, both then and now.



Photo credit: Jason Leung, unsplash.com

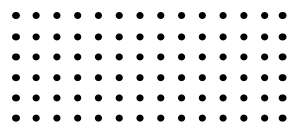


GOVERNMENT LIAISONS

A role often filled by someone in the organization's leadership, a *Government Liaison* interacts with government officials and elected leaders in order to share information and advocate for those affected by a crisis.

Navigating the bureaucracy of government agencies is daunting enough in ordinary circumstances, and even more so after a crisis when it often becomes apparent that emergency infrastructure is woefully inadequate. Several groups we interviewed noted the lack of coordination between government agencies, lack of timely information, and lack of culturally competent services in the wake of crises in their communities.





Government liaisons can advocate for appropriate responses from agencies and elected officials. Often, organizations have had to stop government agencies from taking steps that would not support community members. For example, in New York City, during the early days of the pandemic, the first shutdown coincided with waves of anti-Asian sentiment and attacks. Staff at the Asian American Federation learned that the city’s initial response was to launch a subway poster campaign. Jo-Ann Yoo remembers advocating for concrete strategies to help keep people safe—well beyond subway posters—with local government agencies and the city’s political leadership. “If you think about who’s going to work, it’s all the Asian health professionals. It’s people who cannot afford to take cabs everywhere. It’s the workers, the nannies, people who keep the grocery stores open. You can talk about lockdown, but there better be a plan for people.”



PROMISING PRACTICE

- **Build relationships with government agencies and elected leaders.** Before a crisis occurs, groups should build a connection with their local government’s victim advocate or victim ombudsperson office, city council members, and congressional offices. Additionally, groups may want to buttress their relationships with key people who will be involved when an act of targeted violence occurs, including those in law enforcement, prosecutions, and political leadership. By building these key relationships ahead of time, when a crisis occurs, groups may be able to connect impacted community members more quickly with publicly

members more quickly with publicly available resources as well as influence how government stakeholders react.



“I think that one of the takeaways, in my opinion, is to be proactive and intentional about seeking, creating, and maintaining relationships with community agencies, government agencies, nonprofits, and any other community support networks. God forbid that we ever need to use those connections, but if or when we do, it won’t feel so chaotic and frantic during an already emotionally heightened time.”

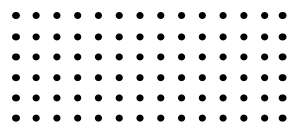
—SOYOUNG YUN
BOARD MEMBER, ASIAN AMERICANS
ADVANCING JUSTICE-ATLANTA



COMMUNITY LIAISONS

Community Liaisons are responsible for interfacing with the communities who are connected to victims and survivors as well as with organizational partners and allies. They curate the mutual flow of information among and between community groups. In some instances, introductions and connections are built and evolve in real time after a crisis occurs, especially in more isolated communities. As Aarti Kohli (Advancing Justice-ALC) shared: “What’s been sobering for me is that even in places where there is infrastructure, it’s been challenging to support local communities. There are even bigger challenges in areas with no pre-existing Asian American groups.”





PROMISING PRACTICE

- **Be prepared for conflicts and disagreements.** Conflict and disagreements are inevitable in highly charged situations and could arise in different contexts. For example, the broader community may want accountability in a way that a directly impacted survivor does not, or families who lost loved ones may desire completely different resolutions. In these instances, organizations may wish to facilitate discussions among stakeholders in order to arrive at the best possible outcomes that center the needs of those who are directly affected by the crisis at hand. Identifying healing justice practitioners with culturally relevant experience in conflict mediation in advance might be a useful approach.

While no organization can fully be prepared for a community crisis, developing rapid response infrastructure in advance will provide a measure of confidence and support in the

aftermath of an unthinkable event. The above roles and approaches, culled from interviews with frontline responders and research, can be a starting point for many organizations. Regional taskforces, tables, and networks can also integrate many of the roles and promising practices to strengthen their overall capacity to render rapid response.

Philanthropic entities supporting frontline response groups could provide adequate resources to buttress rapid response infrastructure as part of existing funding rather than wait until a crisis occurs. Often, funders provide large influxes of resources in the wake of a crisis, and organizations might not have the capacity to effectively integrate those funds as they also tend to urgent community needs. Program officers could have conversations with grantees regularly about what they require in terms of addressing community crises and target resources appropriately.

IF YOU ARE...

A community-based organization



develop a rapid response plan and process with staff, volunteers, community members, and stakeholders

A regional or national network



bring together your members and partners to set up infrastructure for rapid response at the regional and national levels

A funder



have regular conversations with grantees about their rapid response infrastructure needs and provide resources as a regular course of funding





SECTION II RECOMMENDATIONS: Building Infrastructure for the Long Run

As the first part of this report demonstrates, Asian American organizations are navigating an intense and endless cycle of rapid response and recovery. At the same time, they are actively developing the capacity and infrastructure to support their communities for the long run. They are reimagining community safety, advocating for equitable and inclusive systems and policies, and implementing long-term programmatic and power-building strategies. But it is next to impossible to maintain the balancing act of responding to crises while planning for the future. Organizational leaders expressed concerns that without time and capacity to build for the long run, their work would be shaped by cycles of rapid response alone. That is why Asian American leaders are making the case for sustainable movement infrastructure in the following ways:

- 1 | **Shaping Crisis Recovery and Healing;**
- 2 | **Developing Capacity for Learning and Collaboration;**
- 3 | **Practicing Solidarity During and Between Crises;**
- 4 | **Strengthening Community Power; and**
- 5 | **Building Capacity for Durable and Diverse Ecosystems.**



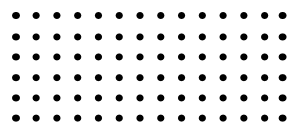
“Trying to respond to individual acts of anti-Asian violence is just like running around trying to put out a fire with no strategy. You just end up really burned out and having not actually changed the conditions at all.”

—SASHA WIJEYERANTNE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CAA AV: ORGANIZING ASIAN COMMUNITIES

SHAPING CRISIS RECOVERY AND HEALING

Beyond immediate rapid response infrastructure, it is vital that organizations are prepared to shore up **long-term support for crisis recovery and healing**. Community leaders explained that there is often a high level of interest and focus in supporting and implementing mechanisms for crisis *response*, especially on the part of philanthropy, but not for crisis *recovery*. As Soyoung Yun (AAAJ-Atlanta) noted, “People are much more willing to give during an emergency, crisis, or disaster. But then you do wonder what happens when all this support stops? Where do people get the resources to cover basic medical and mental health costs?” Similarly, organizations often receive large amounts of funding and grow quickly during crisis moments, but are unable to manage the pace of their growth without





sufficient internal infrastructure. Tending to long-term recovery requires volunteer and community engagement, investments in staffing and programming, and ongoing and unrestricted philanthropic support.

A consistent throughline between rapid response and recovery that emerged in interviews with nonprofit leaders is the importance of healing justice programs that acknowledge direct and vicarious trauma and shape tailored resources to meet short-term and long-term needs.⁴⁶ In our interviews, leaders mentioned the importance of utilizing a healing justice lens with the entire ecosystem: community members, victims, survivors, family members, and staff acting as frontline responders. Activities range from integrating somatic and psychological check-ins at community meetings, sharing information about emotional support resources in newsletters and on social media, and acknowledging the long-term effects of vicarious trauma and being a witness to targeted violence.

Organizations like Tsuru for Solidarity and South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) are integrating healing justice programs into their work with community members and survivors. Tsuru for Solidarity, for example, provides healing circles to support community processing, and SAALT recently launched a new project offering survivor-led discussions on healing and justice.^{47, 48}

Nonprofit leaders are also concerned about the impact that the past three years are having on staff and volunteers, particularly those working directly with community members impacted by violence. Frontline responder staff are often engaged in a myriad of activities, from fielding media calls and providing emotional support for survivors to identifying the right course of

action on a daily or even hourly basis as a crisis unfolds. Often, frontline responders prioritize the urgent needs of community members over their own well-being. Being exposed to trauma in a consistent manner can also lead to long-lasting psychological and physical consequences.



“If we were really to work towards fixing material needs, we also have to figure out a way to do some of the emotional healing, because what we’re noticing within our communities is emotional trauma.”

—LAI WA WU
POLICY AND ALLIANCE DIRECTOR,
CHINESE PROGRESSIVE ASSOCIATION

Nonprofit leaders identified a range of approaches to support staff and volunteers during and after times of crisis, including:

- » Grief counseling for all staff, including leadership, from the outset
- » Trauma-informed supervision
- » Enabling staff to take breaks as needed and having multiple staff be trained to play frontline roles
- » Meaningful and paid access to effective mental health and alternative health resources
- » Time to reflect and evaluate in between crises
- » Permission to set boundaries and say no
- » Coaching and mentorship support



EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY STATEMENTS



“After the collective decades of work in our communities, we continue to ask: What does repair look like in this instance of harm that doesn’t create further violence? What does healing look like for the victims? What should accountability look like for the youths who caused the harm? What are the larger systems and leaders who are failing our communities who must also be held accountable? If systemic failures have led to this incident, what does collective responsibility for collective transformation look like? How do we simultaneously break this cycle of violence, heal harm, and address the structural issues that lead to anti-Asian hate?”

—JOINT STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO RECENT ANTI-ASIAN VIOLENCE
DECEMBER 2021, PHILADELPHIA;
ASIAN AMERICANS UNITED



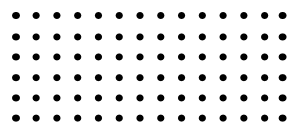
“We call for interventions and responses that address the root causes of violence and systemic racism through a community-centered approach. This means providing culturally and linguistically sensitive services for survivors, victims, and their families including access to mental health, legal, financial, and healing support. Federal and state agencies must ensure robust enforcement of civil rights laws to protect people targeted by hate and discrimination. Government agencies, from the Community Relations Service at the Department of Justice to state and local level programs, must prioritize violence prevention, restorative justice, and victims’ assistance funds. Beyond these immediate steps, members of Congress and federal agencies must invest in our communities with long-term solutions that uplift the lives of everyone. Congress must ensure access to a robust social safety net that includes equitable housing, jobs, health care and education while ending policies that lead to the deportation, criminalization, and surveillance of immigrants and communities of color.”

—ASIAN AMERICAN LEADERS TABLE
IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 RACISM AND
ATLANTA SPA SHOOTINGS



For the Day of Remembrance honoring the victims, survivors, and families of the Atlanta spa shootings, AAAJ-Atlanta invited Asian American artists to explore collective grief and community care and healing. At the March 2022 vigil, a community member displays two illustrations by artist Natalie Bui.

Photo credit: Steph Chan



As groups are developing their values and goals, peer spaces can provide opportunities for co-learning and strategic collaborations. Some groups have taken clearer stances around transformative justice and abolition, while balancing the needs and demands of survivors and victims. Phi Nguyen (AAAJ-Atlanta) shared the difficulty of navigating such a situation: “We have always taken the position that investing in carceral solutions does not actually create true community safety for everybody. I think it’s just a hard thing to navigate because you do really want to both be principled, but be really respectful of and hold space for where other people are coming from, especially those who are most directly impacted.”



“In Georgia, as in many states across the country, systemic disinvestment from and criminalization of communities of color means that we do not have the infrastructure or resources in place for effective community safety, a robust social service safety net, and in-language support.”

—AAAJ-ATLANTA
IN RESPONSE TO ATLANTA SPA SHOOTING

Groups are also grappling with how to best support victims and survivors given that going through any process, whether it involves the justice system or restorative practices, or a balance of both, may be challenging and retraumatizing. For example, Jo-Ann Yoo (Asian American Federation), reflected on an incident in Brooklyn in the summer of 2020, when an 89-year-old grandma was attacked and set on fire by two teenagers. “How does she sit across from these kids and have a dialogue? How do

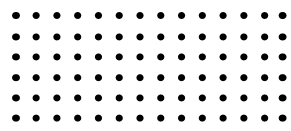
you have restorative justice when people don’t even speak the same language? How does that even happen?” Alix Webb (Asian Americans United) echoed similar sentiments: “We need ongoing work around restorative justice, bringing people into that process, having them think about how it would work in their community? And how do we bring the process to elders and not just youth so there’s not this generation divide?”



Photo credit: Meg Jenson, unsplash.com

Still others are searching for hybrid options that enable the use of the legal system for certain purposes in the time being, while simultaneously advocating for transformative and restorative justice practices. OPAWL-Building Asian American Pacific Feminist Leadership, an organization based in Ohio, took such an approach in its January 2023 statement on Midwest hate incidents. The statement reads in part: “Those who perpetrate racially motivated violence must be held accountable for the harm they cause, and until we grow our capacity for transformative alternatives, the criminal justice system will often be the only





viable option for victims to seek justice. However, OPAWL recognizes that prosecutions within our criminal justice system rarely bring true justice or healing to victims and communities impacted by racialized violence.”⁵⁵

Additionally, leaders observed that it can be difficult to navigate differences in values and stances within movement and coalition spaces. Some leaders pointed out that it can be uncomfortable to communicate ideas that are evolving, particularly if there are expectations for groups to be in full alignment around policy analyses. Nonprofit leaders shared that it is important to cultivate and practice patience and grace with one another as they and their organizations move through a process of learning, unlearning, and transforming. In order to learn in public and in real time, it can be important to practice generative conflict that addresses the inevitable fissures that might arise within coalitions. Some promising practices include identifying shared community agreements around addressing tensions, being ready to engage in principled struggle over disagreements, and working with facilitators who can hold space for difficult dynamics.

Leaders identified a range of methods that can buttress their ability to learn, strategize, and reflect, such as:

- » Opportunities to learn with community members which could include dialogues and listening sessions, and a feedback mechanism that meaningfully involves community input as organizations make meaning of their values and stances around addressing targeted violence.
- » Time to learn and strategize with colleagues around values alignment, organizational history, accountability, transparency, and trust.

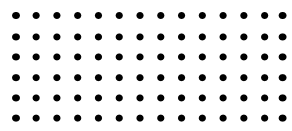
- » Learning sessions for staff at all levels within and across organizations.
- » Strategy sessions with Pacific Islander, Black, Native, Latinx and Arab, Middle Eastern, and Muslim leaders around how they are working through similar dynamics.
- » Collaborative experiments with partner groups.
- » A process of integrating practices that will address conflict in a generative manner, including access to facilitators and mediators.



A “Stop Chinatown Jail” stencil on a New York City sidewalk. Residents of the Chinatown neighborhood in Manhattan are organizing against the construction of the new megajail, which is part of the city’s \$8 billion plan to replace the Rikers Island facility with new prisons.

Photo credit: Deepa Iyer





PRACTICING SOLIDARITY DURING AND BETWEEN CRISES

In interviews, community leaders indicated their desire to engage in meaningful solidarity with both Asian American groups and with other communities but also identified barriers that hinder their capacity to do so in a consistent and regular manner. These obstacles range from not having adequate staffing to not having time to build trusting relationships, particularly in the midst of rapid response.

EXAMPLES OF TRANSFORMATIVE SOLIDARITY PRACTICES:

- » Centering the needs and demands of those directly affected by inequity and injustice
- » Acting as thoughtful and accountable co-conspirators who take risks and who use our privilege and power for the common good
- » Identifying commonalities and connections between communities and issues without flattening, comparing, or equalizing them
- » Building capacity as individuals and organizations to do accountable work: fostering trust, practicing generative conflict, and changing direction, if required, after reflection and evaluation

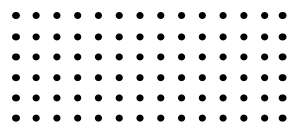
Community leaders noted the importance of building internal and cross-racial solidarity through a range of practices including:

- **Deepening relationships between Asian American communities and organizations.** In interviews, nonprofit leaders emphasized the importance of building internal solidarity between Asian American organizations and

community members. They acknowledged have uneven relationships with different ethnic groups. For example, groups focused on East Asian communities may not have strong connections with Southeast Asian and South Asian groups, or pan-Asian American groups may not have programs and staffing that represent the breadth of the Asian American community. Ways to build internal solidarity include: creating more opportunities to learn about the histories of oppression and resilience across Asian communities; ensuring full representation of Asian American groups among community partnerships, staffing, board membership and volunteer engagement; curating conversations between diverse Asian American communities; and supporting campaigns and efforts led by Asian American groups.

- **Building relationships with Black, Native, Indigenous, Arab, Muslim, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Latinx leaders.** Many leaders expressed their interest and commitment to building relationships with peers leading non-Asian organizations through strategy spaces, retreats, summits, and networks. Co-learning sessions could also be helpful entry points to deepen relationships. For example, the Asian American Leaders Table has held co-learning sessions on community safety and abolition to understand how other communities have been reckoning with these issues, while Grassroots Asians Rising, a national network of grassroots organizations rooted in working-class Asian communities, has held sessions to share strategies on addressing national security and profiling from organizations representing Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian communities.





- **Dismantling wedge narratives that perpetuate anti-Black racism.**
In the wake of hate violence targeting Asian Americans, examples of divisive narratives have emerged. In some cases, media reports claimed that Black people were the perpetrators in the majority of incidents, despite research showing otherwise. For example, in a review of national anti-Asian hate incident reporting and data collection published between 2019 and 2021, Professor Janelle Wong (University of Maryland) found that more than three-quarters of offenders of anti-Asian hate crimes and incidents have been white, contrary to media reports and viral social media narratives.⁵⁶ Additionally, nonprofit leaders emphasized that the vital process of addressing anti-Blackness within Asian American communities should not compromise the equally important need to center and uplift issues affecting Asian Americans. In Oakland, for example, groups have hosted cross-racial, cross-cultural, and often cross-generational conversations, panels, and town halls to build connections and relationships across the Asian and Black communities, using a range of entry points, from hip hop and storytelling to mental health, public safety, and shared histories as catalysts for discussion.⁵⁷
- **Building relationships between Asian Americans and their neighbors.** Recognizing that relationship building between communities must go well beyond organizational connections, some nonprofit leaders are initiating small experiments to bring people from diverse backgrounds together in their neighborhoods. For example, Jo-Ann Yoo (Asian American Federation) mentioned that a growing Chinese community is settling in East Harlem(NY), where there are opportunities to connect people through cultural events

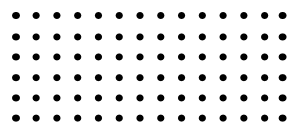
and relationship building. “We need to bring people out of their homes,” she said, emphasizing the importance of neighbor-to-neighbor contact as a way to develop trust and meaningful connections. This type of relationship building can spur greater awareness around how community members of diverse backgrounds are similarly impacted by inequitable systems. Yoo pointed out: “We are all in the system together because nobody’s investing in you. We need to have this conversation.” In the same vein, Lai Wa Wu of CPA shared that her organization has had a series of neighborhood exchanges with Black partners in San Francisco. “Our respective members came together to talk about the impact of redevelopment and gentrification.” In these ways and more, Asian-led groups are finding ways to bridge barriers and gaps with other communities of color.



A mural by Shani Shih at the Murals That Matter: Activism Through Public Art exhibition at the National Building Museum, Washington, D.C., September 18, 2020.

Photo credit: Elvert Barnes, Flickr, Creative Commons (CC BY-SA 2.0)





- **Speaking out to support communities of color.** Transformative solidarity occurs when organizations and community leaders show up and speak up to support each other, both during “movement moments” and in between them. This happens most effectively when community partners have a history of working together, mutual trust, and a clear understanding of how their circumstances are connected due to similar root causes that lead to inequity and injustice.

For example, in February 2021, nearly a hundred Bay Area Asian organizations endorsed a statement which noted that the histories and futures of Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Pacific Islander communities are intertwined, and called for culturally-relevant and trauma-informed investments to make all our communities safe.⁵⁸ And, in the wake of the mass shooting in Half Moon Bay, California, where both Chinese and Mexican farmworkers were killed by a fellow Chinese farmworker, Asian American and Latinx organizations in the Bay Area released a solidarity statement that highlighted their shared grief and placed a spotlight on the inequitable conditions facing migrant farmworkers in the region. Another example comes from the Movement for Black Lives which released a statement to express solidarity with Asian communities after the Atlanta spa shootings. Similarly, Asian groups have supported Black communities as well. The National Nikkei Reparations Coalition and Tsuru for Solidarity have continued to support the Black-led movement for reparations, and advocate for the creation of a federal commission to study reparations.⁶⁰

EXAMPLES OF SOLIDARITY STATEMENTS



“We will continue our efforts to uplift shared histories and struggles between Black and Asian people while deepening our understanding of the different ways in which white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and systemic racism show up in our communities.”

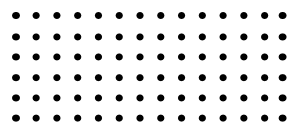
—MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES
STATEMENT ON ANTI-ASIAN VIOLENCE, MARCH 2021,
IN THE WAKE OF THE ATLANTA SPA SHOOTINGS



“For many of the communities we serve, including Asian and Latinx immigrants and refugees, the horrors of gun violence in the U.S. are continuing cycles of pain and harm rooted in white supremacy, colonialism, and misogyny—and compound the acute fears and trauma of the past few years. Decades of funding cuts have stripped our communities of livable wages, affordable and safe housing, robust public infrastructure, education, healthcare and trauma care, and many other essentials.”

—JOINT STATEMENT FROM BAY AREA
LATINX AND ASIAN COMMUNITY GROUPS
JANUARY 2023, IN THE WAKE OF THE
SHOOTINGS IN HALF MOON BAY, CALIFORNIA





STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY POWER

In our interviews, Asian American leaders uplifted the importance of developing and implementing programs that raise consciousness and build power within Asian American communities - across generation, class, immigration status, and ethnicity. They acknowledged that a significant challenge to community building occurs when community members have diverse perspectives and opinions that might not be in alignment with an organization's values. In order to build community power, organizations have been creating space and time to understand the needs and priorities of their membership, curating courageous conversations, practicing internal reflection, and experimenting with different forms of political and popular education.

According to Sasha Wijeyeratne of CAAAV, "political education doesn't mean everyone's on the same page. It's a space of constant contestation. It's a space of constant education." Even when community members may express anti-Black sentiments or a carceral mindset, it is important to find approaches that support genuine dialogue without leaving anyone behind. Building power means that people who aren't completely aligned with each other or with organizational values still have a place, and that by struggling together, they may reach deeper alignment with each other.

Nonprofit leaders identified a range of power-building strategies that should be supported and expanded, including:

- » Campaign-based organizing around policy priorities affecting communities
- » Mutual aid formations to support emerging needs
- » Base building with communities, inclusive of age, class, background, and immigration status
- » Organizing community members who are most vulnerable due to class, immigration status, gender identity, sexual orientation, caste, and linguistic proficiency, et al.
- » Leadership development through popular education
- » Courageous conversations about issues that can be sensitive or polarizing in a container that values community agreements and generative conflict
- » Asset and strength mapping of the capacities in a particular locality
- » Civic engagement campaigns that bring in new people
- » Internal solidarity practices between Asian groups
- » Advocacy and organizing capacity to address the myriad and related issues affecting community members in this moment beyond targeted violence, including the rise in white supremacy and fascism, attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion in classrooms, restrictions on reproductive rights, escalating violence towards transgender communities, and the targeting of mosques and synagogues
- » Hiring community members to be part of organizational teams
- » Building a solid bench of leadership, particularly among people who are entering Asian American organizations over the past three years
- » Youth-centered programming and efforts that center social justice education



BUILDING CAPACITY FOR DURABLE AND DIVERSE ECOSYSTEMS

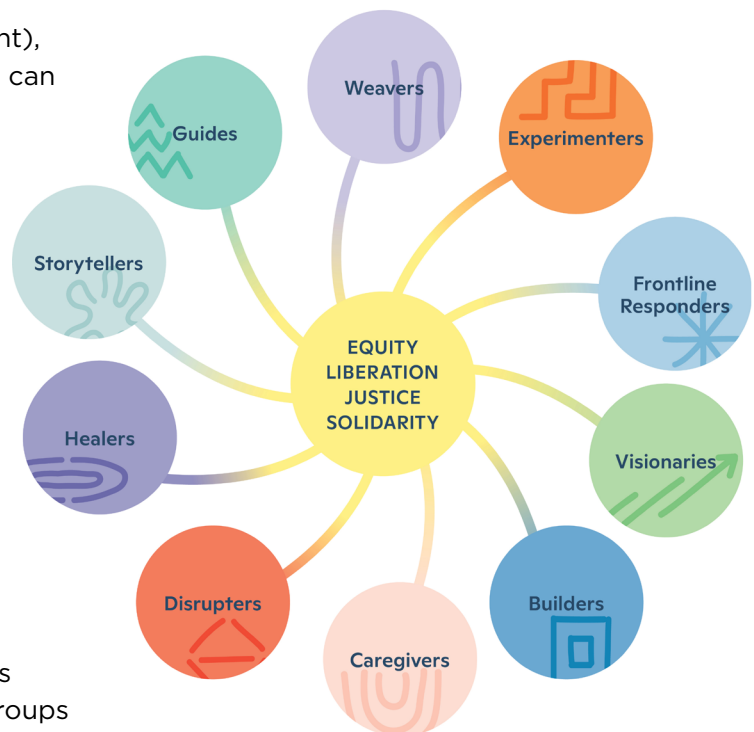
Across the board, Asian American leaders reflected that when they are connected to a diverse ecosystem of groups towards common goals, their own work becomes stronger. A diverse and durable ecosystem can lead to the following outcomes:

- » Enable organizations to focus on the roles and skills they wish to deepen and expand, rather than be in a position of responding to every crisis.
- » Prevent competition, redundancy, and duplication of efforts which can often be confusing for community members.

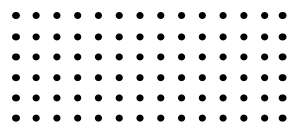
- » Create opportunities for building collective power through joint programs, campaigns, and fundraising initiatives.
- » Provide community members with multiple entry points to meet their needs.

For example, the Asian American Leaders Table is an ecosystem of organizations with different skills, capacities, geographies, and goals that come together in order to advance shared values of centering Asian American communities and building solidarity. The Table, like other networks and coalitions, can be viewed through the lens of the Social Change Ecosystem framework⁶¹ in which various organizations play various and distinct roles that support each other.

Using the social change ecosystem map (at right), we can understand how different organizations can play various roles in order to advance shared goals. In a crisis situation, a diverse ecosystem can provide organizations with the relief of knowing that they do not have to play the frontline responder role at all times. For example, storytellers document acts of violence and contextualize them to shape the public's understanding of the generational and historic roots of a crisis. Visionaries, disrupters, and experimenters reject the status quo and provide different ways to imagine and practice community safety. Caregivers, healers, and builders ensure that frontline responders have the resources and foundation to sustain the work, while weavers and guides connect the struggles of Asian-led groups with other communities. Groups often play multiple roles, depending on the context and the capacity of the ecosystem as a whole.



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In interviews, nonprofit leaders uplifted the importance of a diverse ecosystem. For example, Sasha Wijeyeratne (CAAAV) noted that the robust Asian American ecosystem in New York City has been useful in clarifying CAAAV's unique role: "We're not a rapid response group and we're not an activist organization, so we don't move that fast. We are glad that there are other people that can respond really quickly when something happens." Lai Wa Wu (CPA) expressed a similar sentiment about the Bay Area's ecosystem. She noted that when community members come to CPA in need of assistance for immediate services around hate violence, CPA's staff provide a list of referrals. "This is where the ecosystem, the coalitions that we are building and continue to build, is so important. And why it's so important [to be able to say] that these are the service organizations that we can refer you to."

To create and maintain a diverse ecosystem, community members and funders could support projects that:

- » Identify the gaps and needs in a particular area, and build programs and efforts that serve the ecosystem broadly, rather than being competitive, redundant, or duplicative.
- » Build emerging organizations led by newly organized Asian ethnic groups, including those led by young people.
- » Establish new organizations in areas with limited infrastructure and emerging Asian American populations.
- » Support non-501(c)(3) formations such as mutual aid collectives and cooperatives, alternative media, and local and regional networks.

- » Provide resources to support the weaving of groups within an ecosystem which can include regular check-ins, reflection and evaluation practices, solidarity narratives, and strategic conversations.
- » Provide resources in such a manner that internal infrastructure can match external demands.

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PHILANTHROPIC INSTITUTIONS:

- ✓ Given that many foundations are supporting Asian American organizations to address targeted violence from a rapid response standpoint, what does long-term support look like?
- ✓ How are foundations and organizations discerning the right pace of growth in moments of crisis?
- ✓ How can foundations ensure that they provide resources to address the range of issues affecting Asian Americans rather than categorize them all as "anti-Asian hate?"
- ✓ How can foundations stay focused on playing their role as resource providers rather than implementing community-based programs that may end up duplicating efforts already happening within an ecosystem?
- ✓ How could foundations already supporting Asian American groups influence their peers to better understand the short and long-term needs of Asian American communities?



Conclusion

The palpable and heightened fear, anxiety, rage, and grief that Asian Americans are experiencing currently is exacting a significant toll on community members and organizational staff. As we finalize this report in early 2023, the need to strengthen immediate and long-term movement infrastructure is as pressing as ever. In January, while riding a city bus, an 18-year-old Indiana University student was stabbed in the head by a white woman who later told authorities she targeted the victim for “being Chinese.”⁶² In Cincinnati, a man fired at least a dozen rounds into the front windows of Tokyo Foods, a Japanese-owned store that has been serving the community for 35 years.⁶³

Asian American organizations are responding to these crises while simultaneously addressing systemic inequities, building community power, and practicing solidarity. As this report shows, effective nonprofit and movement infrastructure is necessary to manage the crises and emergencies of our time, and to prepare for long-term community building, solidarity, and justice.

We hope that this report increases awareness and spurs timely and appropriate action steps by community organizations, their partners, and their funders. For example, community-based groups working with Asian Americans could work together to create regional infrastructure for rapid response, utilizing many of the promising practices in this report. Funders could increase support for Asian American organizations to meet their goals not just during crises but for the long run by investing in efforts to build power and solidarity. And

non-Asian groups could voice support for their Asian American partners via statements, co-learning sessions, and strategic collaborations.

Every day, community members are struggling together, strengthening our ecosystems, inviting more people into this work, and showing up for each other in solidarity, even as they tend to crises. Ancestral traditions within many Asian communities uplift this simultaneous action of grieving and moving forward together. Over the past three years, two phrases have emerged from Vietnamese and Sikh leaders that embody this balancing act: the community practices of *chia buồn*—a Vietnamese saying that means *divide our sorrow*—and *chardi kala*—a Sikh saying that means *hope and optimism in the midst of difficulty*. We hope the perspectives and ideas in this report are a way to both *chia buồn* and *keep chardi kala* across and beyond Asian American communities.



Community members leave messages about collective grief, healing, and hope at the remembrance vigil marking one year since the Atlanta spa shootings.

Photo credit: Steph Chan



Rapid Response in Real Time: Suggested Approaches

It's no longer a question of if, but rather when, an emergency might occur in the United States, whether that is targeted violence, a pandemic, climate disasters, or human-made systems breaking down, from unsafe drinking water to power grid failures. While nonprofit organizations strive to address unanticipated community needs, they are not always prepared or resourced to meet the demands. And the current environment of cyclical and compounding crises means that many organizations are continually operating in emergency mode.

For nonprofits that may be responding to an immediate crisis, building rapid response infrastructure takes time—a scarce resource during emergencies. This resource, *Rapid Response in Real Time: Suggested Approaches*, offers a starting point for groups both within and beyond Asian American communities who are called to provide frontline crisis response.



Building Movement Project



ASIAN AMERICANS
**ADVANCING
JUSTICE**
ASIAN LAW CAUCUS



FOR GROUPS AND NETWORKS DEALING WITH COMMUNITY CRISES: Suggested Approaches for Navigating the First 48 Hours



The ecosystem includes: Crisis Coordinators; Victim and Survivor Advocates; Trained Interpreters and Translators; Mental Health Counselors, Therapists, Social Workers, and Community Healers; Pro Bono Lawyers and Trained Legal Advocates; Coordination of Emergency Funds and Administration; Media Liaisons; Government Liaisons; and Community Liaisons.



RECOMMENDED ROLES AND PROMISING PRACTICES FOR RAPID RESPONSE

Although this is not a comprehensive “checklist” for mapping out staff roles in a crisis, these recommendations are drawn directly from interviews with nonprofit leaders who have been coordinating and providing rapid response over the past several years.



Crisis Coordinators are the point persons who manage the entire infrastructure of rapid response within organizations or taskforces.

- Organize daily and weekly calls to share and exchange information, delegate tasks, and understand how the various parts of rapid response infrastructure are working together.
- Serve as the go-to person for others within the rapid response ecosystem, including victim and survivor advocates, liaisons, and pro bono legal and mental health providers, and serve as a link between government stakeholders and partner groups.
- Assess community comfort with rapid response.



Victim and Survivor Advocates conduct intake and ongoing case management that responds to the various needs of the families of victims, as well as survivors and witnesses.

- Connect with affected community members within 12–24 hours after a community crisis, and center their needs.
- Consider long-term support for victims and survivors.
- Consider the attitudes and experiences that affected community members have with law enforcement and the justice system.



Trained Interpreters and Translators support monolingual or limited English proficient victims, survivors, and community members.

- Ensure that monolingual or limited English proficient victims, survivors, and community members can understand the array of resources available to them and can communicate fully with government agencies, law enforcement, media, and public officials.
- Consult with the crisis coordinators and rapid response ecosystem to develop translated materials in accessible, everyday language.



Mental Health Counselors, Therapists, Social Workers, and Community Healers support victims, survivors, community members, and staff throughout the different stages of processing and healing.

- Ensure mental health providers have the skills and training to understand and respond to varied cultural and faith-based values, beliefs, attitudes and communications approaches to trauma, loss, grief, and healing.
- Develop and share tailored resources for young children from impacted communities, as well as their caregivers and educators.
- Provide grief counseling for all staff, including leadership, from the outset.



Pro Bono Lawyers and Legal Advocates assist victims and survivors to navigate complicated and bureaucratic legal processes and systems.

- Create and translate know-your-rights resources in the languages used by impacted community members.
- Appoint an organizational point-of-contact to coordinate help from private attorneys and local bar association members.



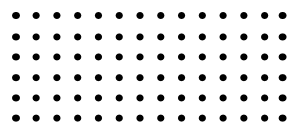
Emergency Funds and Administration Coordinators set up mechanism to receive, allocate and administer funds in the wake of the crisis.

- Lay out the various options that arise for survivors and victims, from workers' compensation to state and federal government victim assistance funds that may cover medical, funeral, or mental health treatment costs.
- Delineate which organizations or committees will be responsible for receiving, allocating and administering funds, which could be in the form of individual donations via a Go Fund Me or large contributions from foundations, corporations and government agencies.



Media Liaisons are the first point of contact in responding to media requests, ensuring that names are correctly pronounced, and sharing press releases.

- Identify appropriate spokespersons and stay connected with regional and national communications staff at partner organizations.
- Develop a process to handle media intake, fact check statements, approve public communications, and monitor media stories. Hold off on talking to the media until it's clear what to say.
- Preempt inaccurate or divisive narratives with inclusive and comprehensive ones.
- Consider how and when to make organizational statements that take policy positions or make demands.



Government Liaisons interact with government officials and elected leaders in order to share information and advocate for those affected by a crisis.

- Connect with the local victim advocate office to support impacted community members more quickly with publicly available resources.
- Advocate for appropriate responses from agencies and elected officials.



Community Liaisons are responsible for interfacing with the communities who are connected to victims and survivors as well as with organizational partners and allies.

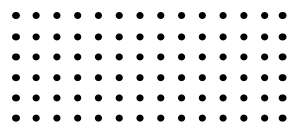
- Curate the mutual flow of information among and between community groups.
- Prepare for conflicts and disagreements among impacted community members and stakeholders. Identifying healing justice practitioners with culturally relevant experience in conflict mediation might be a useful approach.
- Engage with organizational partners and allies offering support and solidarity.





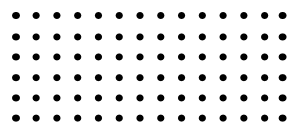
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