What is the National Gender and Equity Campaign?

Founded in 1990, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP) is a national membership and philanthropic advocacy organization dedicated to advancing philanthropy and Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities. Our members include foundations, staff and trustees of grantmaking institutions, and nonprofit organizations in nine regional chapters in the United States. AAPIP engages communities and philanthropy to address unmet needs; serves as a resource for and about AAPI communities; supports and facilitates giving by and to AAPI communities; and incubates new ideas and approaches for social justice philanthropy.

An initiative of AAPIP, the National Gender and Equity Campaign (NGEC) works to build and strengthen the social justice movement building infrastructure of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities in order to achieve a more just and equitable society. As a result of the NGEC’s work, a new social justice capacity building intermediary named Building Responsive Infrastructure to Develop Global Equity (BRIDGE) will be built to share culturally competent approaches, tools, and resources developed and tested through NGEC.

Why community engagement?

NGEC was founded on the principle that communities, particularly those who are most impacted by inequities, must be fully engaged in the planning, implementation and progress measurement of efforts that aim to build a more just and equitable society. Thus, we’ve always used a variety of community engagement approaches.

As the NGEC began its work in Minnesota, we started with a series of interviews and community conversations. Over and over we heard from community that though they found the conversation with us about social justice invigorating, what they most wanted to do was take the conversations to their own communities and stakeholders.

This affirmed for us that to be engaged with community meant we could not just bring people to be in conversations with us at our tables, but we needed to support community members to be in conversations with each other and to create their own tables. We, therefore, designed and carried out a six month Community Engagement Process in Minnesota.

The NGEC’s Community Engagement Process provided financial support, technical assistance and a joint learning space for 22 local Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) groups. We gained a great deal from this effort, and believe that others aiming to be more inclusive and effective can do so by including community engagement in their planning, implementation, and continuing interpretation of progress as well. This guide attempts to share our process, tools and methods that others might consider for their community engagement.

Facilitation Guide for Community Engagement Available on NGEC Website

If you are interested in getting the full facilitation guide, it is available on NGEC’s website at: http://www.genderandequity.org/docs/Comm_Engagement_Guide.pdf
What did NGEC mean by community engagement?

For the NGEC community engagement has been our means of involving the community in our learning and decision-making process. It is grounded in our practice of listening to and learning from communities to develop and implement strategies that build a more just and equitable society. To help make this practice possible for Minnesota’s AAPI organizations, we provided financial resources to support conversation-based activities of 22 AAPI organizations to reflect, assess, and explore their work in connection with social justice efforts. This reflection involved an organization’s key internal stakeholders: staff/volunteers, leadership/board, and the people who are served by the work.

Individuals who participated in initial conversations with us felt that it was often organizational leaders who had opportunities to participate in various forums; however, organizations rarely had support to be reflective about their role in the community, and to explore the meaning of social justice and how it translates into organizational practice.

Based on this feedback, we designed a specific community engagement process to promote dialogue and conversation within AAPI organizations and their internal stakeholders. This community engagement process had the specific intent of supporting groups to go deeper by being reflective with internal stakeholders rather than reaching new audiences.

Specifically, the process had three goals for groups. The three goals were to help each group:

1. Better understand how the organization has stayed relevant and responsive to community needs,
2. Assess the organization’s capacity and ability to meet the ongoing needs of communities in the current environment, and
3. Explore how the organization implements its vision in the community and how a social justice framework may fit.

Building on Assets — Using a Conversation-Based Approach

We started with the premise that community engagement did not have to be new for groups, but rather build on approaches that most communities were familiar with. We understood that in many communities, the coming together to speak about community needs and to find solutions was already a method widely used. We viewed this as an asset, and built our process around a conversation-based approach, supporting the power of listening and sharing voices through conversation that supported organizations to reflect and move to decisions about their work.

Guided by this, we also supported each group to develop and use other activities that may be more appropriate to engage their communities, such as conducting surveys, trainings, focus groups, needs assessment etcetera; however, we stressed that the most important aspect of the process regardless of the methods of engagement should focus on being in conversations with each other.

Our process moved the groups through a flow of information where they reflected and developed meaning of the information they gathered in order to make decisions about their future direction.

continued on page 3...
Who were the stakeholders for the groups?

The concept of “community engagement” often brings to mind an extensive new community outreach project or initiative that involves many people outside of an organization. This was not our intent, and we shared that explicitly to the community groups.

We believe strongly in the value of engaging those who have a high stake in the work of an organization, and encouraged each group to plan conversation-based activities to include representatives of all three stakeholder groups below:

1. Those who carry out the work, i.e. staff and/or volunteers,
2. Those who make decisions about the work, i.e. board and/or advisory committee(s), and
3. Those who are impacted or served by the work, i.e. clients, constituents, and/or members.

Simplifying Community Engagement — a three step process

We designed a simple three step community engagement process to guide groups. These steps are: (1) Develop your questions, (2) Gather the information and make meaning of the information, and (3) Make decisions on the information and share that decision with others.

Step 1: Setting the stage for dialogue

Step 1 asked organizations to determine the questions it wanted to explore with its internal stakeholders, and to plan the appropriate activities to gather information in order to engage in conversation with its stakeholders. Internal organization preparation also occurred in this stage of the work, such as, hiring consultants or training its internal staff on facilitation.

Step 2: Facilitating conversations

In step 2 the organizations carried out activities to gather information and facilitated conversations with its stakeholders about the information in order to make meaning together.

Step 3: Record, synthesize and share learnings

The final step in this process ensured that the organizations gave meaning to the conversations and used the information to help make decisions about its future work.

Tools & Methods NGEC Used To Help Groups Make the Most of Community Engagement

Modeling activities and exercises is one of the best ways to help groups successfully carry out their community engagement. At every group interaction we had, we planned the agenda to ensure we could include useful tools that we would model so that groups could replicate the same exercises should they choose. We continued to receive very positive feedback that groups often used our templates, exercises or facilitation techniques after these times together. Additionally, we created a “Facilitation Guide for Community Engagement” to offer tips and tools for groups, and NGEC staff provided individualized technical assistance throughout the process.

We also hosted three face-to-face joint convenings to bring groups together for shared learning, reflection and contemplation. The groups affirmed at each face-to-face convening that they were increasing their sense of connection and desired exploration to find more meaningful ways to work together.

The Joint Convenings

All twenty-two AAPI community organizations came together at the start, mid-point and end of this community engagement process. During these times the 22 groups created a space to hear each other’s journeys, lessons and began exchanging and exploring solutions together. Organizations shared details of what worked and didn’t work in their community engagement process, and agreed that overall, it was a good reflective practice. The group also had rich in-depth conversations about the diversity of AAPI issues being addressed by all the organizations and saw the commonalities. This learning space also helped deepen relationships between individual leaders, organizations, and communities. At the final gathering, organizations called upon each other to build on the synergy and momentum generated, and to explore collaborative work to address some of the critical issues and efforts they said needed attention.

Other methods groups might use in community engagement:

- Storytelling
- Talking Circles
- Focus Groups
- Appreciative Inquiry
- Scenario Thinking

These and other methods are presented in our Facilitation Guide.
TOGETHER BUILDING A MORE JUST & EQUITABLE SOCIETY

LET US KNOW: This guide was produced to share NGEC’s approach and tools with others in the field. We would greatly appreciate any feedback about whether you found this guide to be useful (or) not useful. To provide feedback, please email Bo Thao, BRIDGE Director at Bo@aapip.org.

To request for additional copies of this guide, please contact Margie Andreason, Program Associate at Margie@aapip.org.

Stay in touch! We are building new tools and resources.

If you are interested in learning more, please contact Bo Thao, BRIDGE Director at (612) 729-1994 / bo@aapip.org.

A More Holistic Way to Think About Social Justice Capacities of Organizations

NGEC believes that social justice organizations are imperative to social justice movement building. To that end, the ability to identify the necessary infrastructure and practice needed to become one, allows organizations to be more mindful in their development. The NGEC’s Anatomy of a Social Justice Organization attempts to articulate the necessary elements needed to become a social justice organization.

From a holistic vantage point, organizations possess assets in their ability to grow and sustain themselves financially and structurally, their ability to nurture relationships and partnerships within and across communities, as well as, their ability to sync their values and identity with their programming and strategies. With this premise in mind, the NGEC designed the framework below, an accompanying BRIDGE Organizational Assessment Tool (BOAT), and the Continuum of Growth and Development, to help organizations identify their starting points (including their strengths and the areas for further development) so that they can become more effective and sustainable social justice organizations along a continuum of development.

(Head) Organizational Structure:
Chosen formation to align values and principles with organizational practice – includes, policies, procedures, and overall organizational culture

(Heart) Organizational Identity:
Shared principles, values, experiences, and ideas that guide the organization – these values and principles are shaped by those who are most impacted by inequity

(Hands) Organizational Strategies:
Programming and activities chosen intentionally by the organization to build community power and act as vehicles to effect social change

(Backbone) Organizational Sustainability:
Long-term commitment to building the social justice movement through funding, organizational development and transformation

(Legs) Organizational Linkages & Connections:
Relationships created and maintained with others to effectively contribute to movement building efforts – such as, networks, coalitions, and community mobilization campaigns