



ASIAN AMERICAN FEDERATION

2024 POLICY PRIORITIES

APRIL 2024



ANTI-ASIAN HATE
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT
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MENTAL HEALTH
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ANTI-ASIAN HATE

Vision: Sustainable community-centered solutions driven by intentional coordination create enduring safety for Asian New Yorkers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Asian American Federation (AAF) witnessed an unprecedented surge in Anti-Asian violence. To this day, Anti-Asian hate continues to evolve and impact the daily lives of Asian New Yorkers. Many community members remain hypervigilant and rely on our community organizations for culturally and linguistically competent assistance and safety resources. Because of ongoing fears of violence and harassment, Asian New Yorker's mental health, ability to connect to other community members, and willingness to interact with City and State programs are all significantly impacted.

In New York City, there were reports of more than 2,700 incidents collected by AAF, Stop AAPI Hate, New York Police Department (NYPD), and the New York City Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) between March 2020 and March 2022, which represents only a fraction of total incidents due to underreporting.

1. Restore State funding for the Hope Against Hate Campaign at \$3.5 million in FY 2025 as Anti-Asian violence and violence against marginalized communities evolves.

Since its launch in 2021, AAF's Hope Against Hate (HAH) Campaign has coordinated the collective effort of 31 organizations across the state to address Anti-Asian violence through community-centered solutions. Over 10,000 New Yorkers participated in anti-violence trainings and youth initiatives in the first year of the HAH Campaign. They were connected to various victim support services, reporting assistance, and community safety programs. HAH Campaign participants who were surveyed reported that the safety training had a positive effect on reducing fear and equipping them with the strategies needed to address Anti-Asian bias incidents. With increasing incidents of Islamophobia in New York due to the Middle East crisis, it is imperative to sustain AAF's Hope Against Hate Campaign to continue providing safety programming and victim support services to affected Asian New Yorkers.

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ANTI-ASIAN HATE

Vision: Our community members experience a continual sense of safety through coordinated, sustainable community-centered solutions.

2. Maintain New York City support for AAF's ongoing Hope Against Hate Campaign, including \$400,000 in FY 2025 Partners Against The Hate (PATH) funding support.

Partners Against The Hate (PATH) funding has provided critical support to our HAH Campaign to coordinate proven, easily accessible actions that increase street safety. For the last three years, this program has distributed 10,600+ safety resources to community members and provided safety training on conflict de-escalation, situational awareness, and self-defense strategies to over 630 community members. Through our PATH partners, we have also recruited and trained 240+ volunteers to act as Community Companions and provide protective accompaniment and protective presence services in Asian-majority neighborhoods. As Anti-Asian violence increases, it is clear that PATH funding is imperative to ensuring the pan-Asian community in NYC stays safe and that vulnerable community members have access to safety services.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Vision: Asian American voters are empowered through voter education and engagement that prioritizes first-time and limited English proficient (LEP) voters. Potential voters who have felt historically disempowered by and apathetic about civic participation are resourced and activated.

The Asian American Federation's (AAF) grassroots civic engagement collaboration, the AAPI Power Coalition, comprises ten partner organizations in New York City. Through funding, training, and resources for on-the-ground voter mobilization, the AAPI Power Coalition has reached underserved communities since 2021. In 2023 alone, the Coalition reached 255,390 voters through culturally sensitive and in-language efforts. The impact of our work is evidenced by our 2022 Civic Engagement Report, which found that our activities drove a statistically significant 11% increase in voter turnout. The findings revealed an urgency for our elected leaders to support data-driven civic engagement work, especially among Asian Americans. As Asian Americans continue to be the fastest-growing population in the city and state, we will continue to break barriers through data-driven civic engagement work that is culturally and linguistically sensitive.

1. Prioritize the accurate representation of Asian American voters by assessing voter needs and trends.

New York State is among the 40 states that do not require voters to specify their race or ethnicity during registration, so political campaigns and voter outreach often depend on commercial databases for information on voter race. However, these databases frequently undercount Asian American voters due to race assignment algorithms that rely on a restricted set of Asian surnames. Asian Americans with less common surnames or who mistakenly reverse their first and last names—a common error due to the naming conventions in their native languages—tend to be categorized as 'unknown.' Asian American voters are underrepresented, which has resulted in inadequate engagement. In turn, this has affected the outcome of at least one election. During the 2022 general election in New York City's Assembly District 49, the lack of engagement with Asian American voters influenced a potential margin of victory, impacting election results. Our [case study](#) from the 2022 general election in New York City's Assembly District 49, highlighted important findings about the Asian American voters.

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CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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2. Invest in and implement strategic outreach initiatives to enhance engagement within the Asian American community during this election cycle.

For the 2024 elections, AAF and its partners at the [AAPI Power Coalition](#) will employ various strategic outreach initiatives to engage Asian American voters.

Relational Texting: AAF will leverage advancements in mobile and texting technologies to enable the execution of personal, authentic text-based conversations at a larger scale. This strategy offers a more personal touch to voter engagement, facilitating genuine and meaningful interactions, starkly contrasting impersonal methods like cold calls, door-to-door campaigns, or mass emails. It builds upon the existing relationships in personal networks, fostering open, honest, and in-depth dialogues on crucial matters, thereby enhancing voter engagement and influence.

Community Building, Engagement, and Education: The Asian American community has the potential to be engaged civically but has been disenfranchised or feels disempowered about civic participation. Getting to the root of this issue requires creativity and deep relationship-building. AAF will address barriers to civic participation through intentional relationship building, strategic, culturally sensitive, and relevant community programming, and the creation of pathways for sustained civic engagement.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Vision: Through meaningful engagement, policy change, and equitable access to funds and other resources, Asian small businesses are critical economic anchors in the community.

While immigrant small businesses contribute substantially to our state and city's economy, they were left out of most pandemic recovery efforts. They face new and ongoing challenges that make running their businesses difficult. To bridge the gap in outreach and engagement, the Asian American Federation (AAF) provides critical capacity-building and technical assistance services to help small businesses navigate various challenges, including bureaucratic red tape, inconsistent regulatory enforcement, and persistent language and process inaccessibility. These high-demand services, alongside inclusive policy reforms, create conditions for Asian immigrant small businesses to thrive.

1. Support technical assistance for immigrant small businesses to increase digital literacy for LEP/new immigrant business owners.

Supporting local CBOs that provide technical assistance to immigrant small businesses enables CBOs to provide in-language services that increase digital literacy. Many immigrant business owners experience difficulty navigating government agencies, particularly agencies that have launched online platforms to automate their services. This technological development in government administration widens the digital divide and makes it even more difficult for immigrant businesses to contact city and state agencies that oversee their business practices.

New York State

2. Ensure protection of immigrant brick-and-mortar small businesses against predatory and unfair commercial leasing practices.

AAF will launch educational outreach about commercial lease tenants' rights and raise awareness of unfair and predatory practices, such as demanding "key money," an under-the-table financial demand to secure a lease, and refusing to return these funds at the termination of the lease.

New York City

3. Continue funding place-based projects to support immigrant commercial corridors.

AAF will prioritize participation by trusted community-based organizations in place-based development efforts to ensure inclusive and equitable economic recovery. Placemaking programs like NYC Small Business Services' Avenue NYC program have been particularly helpful to immigrant communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and the City Council should prioritize Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in commercial corridor revitalization efforts.

New York City



LANGUAGE ACCESS

Vision: Asian immigrants are treated as integral community members with accurate and timely in-language information on program support and resources.

In New York State, the Asian population has increased by almost 38%, from over 1.5 million in 2010 to just over 2.1 million in 2020, making up 11% of New York's total population. In New York City, the Asian population has grown to nearly 18% of the total population. Despite the misperception that Asian New Yorkers live in just a few ethnic enclaves, they make up at least 10% of the population in 35 of the 51 City Council districts. Two-thirds of Asian New Yorkers are immigrants, nearly 30% of which arrived in or after 2010.

Language barriers remain disproportionately high among Asian New Yorkers. Almost 40% of Asians living in New York State have limited English proficiency, compared with a statewide average of 13%. Nearly 50% of Asians living in New York City have limited English proficiency, compared with a citywide average of 23%. Through the cultural and linguistic diversity of New York's Asian Community at large, the Asian American Federation (AAF) values Language Access as a cornerstone of its policy advocacy.

1. Amidst rapid growth in Asian communities, the State must pass legislation expanding the number of languages requiring translation under State law.

Language access is the most often-cited barrier between Asian New Yorkers and the critical services they seek. The state must pass legislation that increases the number of languages under its language access policy and it must also focus efforts on the immigrants who have arrived within the last five years. Newly arrived immigrants are often those most in need of language access. Furthermore, legislation must expand the scope of State language access requirements across State agencies, require biennial evaluations of languages requiring translation based on Census and American Community Survey data, and provide for regional flexibility so different areas of the State can serve the growing languages in their own communities.

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LANGUAGE ACCESS

Vision: Asian immigrants are treated as integral community members with accurate and timely in-language information on program support and resources.

2. Restore funding for the Language Justice Collaborative alongside other communities of color and immigrants in New York City.

Dedicated funding and dynamic partnerships with allied groups are essential for achieving language justice. As a member of the Language Justice Collaborative, a diverse group of immigrant and community partners, AAF is committed to increasing language access for all. By enforcing existing laws and executive orders and creating innovative programs to increase language access, AAF believes that addressing language interpretation service gaps is critical.

The restoration of \$7 million in funding for the Language Justice Collaborative will allow AAF to sustain our language access programming. This includes the continuation of our Asian language worker cooperative, which professionalizes interpretation capacity within our community.

Sustaining the tremendous potential for immigrant community organizations to develop language services worker co-ops that provide services such as interpretation, translation, and English as a Second Language instruction is paramount. Beyond government and nonprofit legal interpretation, language services worker co-ops can help meet the ever-growing demand for professional, high-quality language services in the courts, education, healthcare, and private sectors. Furthermore, they provide skilled employment and business ownership opportunities to immigrant communities.

MENTAL HEALTH

Vision: Asian New Yorkers are fully empowered to address historic inequities in mental health service provision and education. Through investment in community-based organizations and the development of service providers, community members have access to sustainable, in-language, and culturally competent resources.

Since 2017, the Asian American Federation (AAF) has advocated for increased linguistically and culturally competent mental health services for Asian New Yorkers. In partnership with our member organizations, our mental health programming connected 13,500 Asian New Yorkers in 2023 to mental health services from providers who speak their language and understand their unique cultural needs. In 2022, AAF released the first-ever online mental health directory that prioritizes linguistically and culturally competent providers for Asian New Yorkers, with nearly 350 providers currently in the database. This work, and the work of our community mental health providers, needs support more than ever before.

Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing populations in the US and New York State and City, but the mental health system has largely ignored them. They tend to use mental health services less often than other groups, which leads to a lack of research on their mental health needs and challenges. This can create a false impression that Asian Americans do not need or want therapeutic support. However, the surge of hate crimes, racism, and violence against Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the hidden and unaddressed struggles they face and the significant mental health stressors that affect this diverse community. In 2024, AAF released a report, "[Seeking Help, Finding Hope](#)" that aims to address the gaps in research on the challenges to getting mental health care by gathering feedback from Asian New Yorkers.

1. Include a landmark investment by New York State through the Communities of Color Mental Health Initiative.

Communities of color have been coping with a mental health care system not built with us in mind. [More than 80% of psychologists in the U.S. are white](#), and the vast majority of therapy services are only available in English. Only 39% of Latino, 38% of AAPI, and 30% of Black New Yorkers experiencing depression [receive mental health treatment](#), compared to 58% of white New Yorkers. For example, in AAF's recent report, "Seeking Help Finding Hope," 80% of respondents experienced symptoms usually associated with mental distress. Still, only 45% of those individuals recognized the need to seek mental health support—much less actually obtained that care.

AAF urges New York State to include a historic investment in the Communities of Color Mental Health Initiative. In this time of multiple crises, mental health care is not a luxury, particularly for the most marginalized communities in New York. The COVID-19 pandemic caused losses and an uneven recovery that disproportionately affected our communities. Racially motivated violence, elder isolation, and youth harm in school and online have collectively impacted Asian New Yorkers' mental health.

[Read More](#) →

MENTAL HEALTH

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2. Increase funding for the Immigrant Health Initiative and the Mental Health for Vulnerable Populations Initiative to support mental health across Asian and other marginalized communities.

In FY 2023, six AAF member organizations received funding from either the Immigrant Health Initiative or the Mental Health for Vulnerable Populations Initiative. However, public requests for mental health programs are growing exponentially. Mainstream organizations and hospitals typically refer patients to our partner organizations because they are not adequately equipped with the cultural or linguistic competency to serve Asian clients. Our partner organizations take these patients on despite not receiving the funding to do so. Funding must increase to not only support existing clinical and non-clinical mental health services but also to expand dedicated mental health staffing with a focus on bilingual staff retention and increased case management services that require significant staff capacity.

NONPROFIT SUPPORT

Vision: State and City resources to support capacity-building fully meet the demand for services from AAPI community-based organizations (CBOs).

The Asian American Federation (AAF) represents more than 70 Asian-led, Asian-serving member nonprofits that serve 1.5 million Asian New Yorkers and their multitude of direct service needs. While these organizations cope with increased demand for services across sectors, they need more continuous financial support from the State and City for organizational capacity and programmatic services. The median total allocation from FY 2024 City Council Initiatives was less than \$255,000 for 41 member organizations, barely enough to maintain operations, and State funding was no better. Policymakers must invest in long-term capacity-building initiatives for our community organizations that serve the fastest-growing community in our City and State.

1. As a part of the \$54.35 million NY State AAPI Equity Budget Proposal, the FY 2025 State Budget must increase social service funding for AAPI organizations to \$50 million.

With the FY 2023 State AAPI social services funding, AAF will support more than 130 Asian-led, Asian-serving organizations across the State. The Asian population in key upstate cities and Long Island has experienced notable growth. Despite increasing by 34% in New York City from 2010 to 2020, the statewide Asian community also grew by more than 30% in Rochester and more than 140% in Buffalo. The FY 2025 State Budget must reflect this growth and increase this funding to reinforce these critical capacity investments, as well as identify and support new organization.

New York State

2. Protect City Council Initiative funding aimed at supporting AAPI direct service providers.

AAF member organizations received allocations from more than 40 City Council initiatives in the FY 2023 City Budget. For many organizations, City Council discretionary funding provides essential program support. Amidst potential budget cuts, the City Council must protect funding streams under its discretion that support critical language-accessible and culturally competent programming and services that serve the poorest New Yorkers across all service sectors.

New York City

3. Maintain the Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund (CCNSF) at \$3.7 million for FY 2025.

For the last ten years, the CCNSF has built vital organizational capacity among CBOs serving communities of color, often the organizations most impacted by inequitable funding systems. As a technical assistance partner in FY 2024, AAF has provided leadership development programs for staff at organizations serving marginalized communities to ensure they have the tools necessary to lead their organizations and continue serving their communities. The City Council must continue to support this critical funding.

New York City





Asian American Federation

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