



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Asian American and Pacific Islanders Commission



2023 Annual Report

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Executive Summary

Dear Colleagues and Partners,

In a year marked by both challenges and remarkable resilience, we want to express our heartfelt appreciation for your support in empowering Massachusetts residents. As we journey through these inspiring times, we stand together to convey our deepest gratitude for your support for AAPI communities across the nation.

Our collective achievements stand as a testament to the collaboration with legislators from every corner of our great state. We extend our sincere thanks to the Asian Caucus, as well as to all legislators and elected officials who championed our cause and ardently advocated for increased AAPIC funding to expand our reach and impact among various communities.

In 2023, the AAPIC began developing our Three-Year Strategic Plan. The six-month process prioritized extensive community input from community organizations, previous Commissioners, grantees, listening session partners, elected officials, and many more. The process also included a Commission-wide retreat, countless discussions, and many hours of research. We are proud to share that the full Commission voted unanimously to approve the Strategic Plan at the January 2024 Commission Meeting.

We conducted crucial listening sessions with various communities, including the Burmese community in Lowell, older adults in Quincy, Tongans in Framingham, and AAPI communities in Western MA. In these sessions, we've achieved significant outcomes. The Burmese community in Lowell now has direct access to local legislators, resulting in valuable assistance. The Tongan community celebrated their rich traditions and highlighted issues they face, captured in this report. While the Western Massachusetts AAPI communities have established a regular meeting schedule to coordinate events and provide mutual support. These outcomes reflect our commitment to empowering communities, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering collaboration among AAPI groups across Massachusetts.

The AAPIC awarded a total of [53 separate grants](#) to community organizations. We also expanded the Youth Council, which is a group of AAPI high schoolers from throughout the state who work together to grow their advocacy skills. The Youth Council had the distinct privilege of meeting with the Asian Caucus at the Massachusetts State House to engage in discussions concerning youth empowerment and legislative matters.

Furthermore, the AAPIC diligently monitored and [championed legislation](#) that would positively impact the AAPI community. Notably, our efforts contributed to the successful signing of the

Data Equity Bill into law by Governor Healey as part of the FY 2024 state budget and the inclusion of language access legislation in a Fall 2023 executive order signed by Governor Healey. Additionally, we collaborated closely with the State Treasurer's Office, as a member of the [Baby Bonds Task Force](#). Work on implementing the findings of the report released in December 2022 continues as the Baby Bonds initiative aims to uplift families by advocating for policies that facilitate asset development and wealth building.

We extend our appreciation to the Office of the State Treasurer and Receiver General Deborah Goldberg for generously hosting our Commission and to her staff who work with the Commission in HR, finance, and more.

Our [Commissioners](#) and the dedicated Executive Committee, led in 2023 by Gary Chu, Richard Chu, and Saatvik Ahluwalia, have played a pivotal role in advancing our mission, bolstering our budget, and enhancing our programs. We are immensely grateful for their unwavering commitment to improving our community, our state, and our nation.

Finally, with the funding previously raised by our nonprofit, the Commission successfully organized the annual [Unity Dinner](#). The event featured inspiring messages from Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll, State Auditor Diana DiZoglio, Cambridge Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui, and White House Initiative on AANHPI Executive Director Krystal Ka'ai. Additionally, we had the privilege of recognizing seven [Unsung Heroes from the Massachusetts AAPI community](#).

We hope you explore this Annual Report and engage with us, especially as we embark on our upcoming Three-Year Strategic Plan, which will bring new programs and priorities to the forefront. We value your input on programs, legislation, potential partnerships, and more. Please do not hesitate to get in touch!

Sincerely,

Yasmin Padamsee Forbes, Executive Director

Gary Chu, 2023 Chairperson

Richard Chu, 2023 Vice Chairperson

Saatvik Ahluwalia, 2023 Secretary

About the Massachusetts Asian American and Pacific Islanders Commission

Established on October 29, 2006, the Commission originally known as the Massachusetts Asian American Commission (AAC) served as a permanent body committed to advocating for Asian Americans across the state. On July 16, 2021, Governor Charlie Baker signed legislation renaming it to the Massachusetts Asian American and Pacific Islanders Commission (AAPIC). This change underscores the Commission's broadened focus to include both Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

The Commission's mission is threefold: to celebrate and bring to the forefront the significant contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to Massachusetts' social, cultural, economic, and political spheres; to identify and address the unique needs and challenges faced by this community; and to enhance the well-being of this vibrant and diverse group. Through its work, the Commission aims to improve the quality of life for all Massachusetts residents, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for everyone.

The Asian American & Pacific Islanders Commission is composed of 21 Commissioners appointed by the Governor, Attorney General, Senate President, House Speaker, Treasurer, Secretary of State, and State Auditor.

[AAPIC Statute \(M.G.L c.3 § 68\)](#)

[AAPIC Bylaws \(updated October 18, 2022\)](#)

2023 Commissioners

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|------------------|
| ● Gary Chu, 2023
Chairperson | ● Meenakshi Bharath | ● Bethany Li |
| ● Richard Chu, 2023
Vice Chairperson | ● Karen Chen | ● Marilyn Park |
| ● Saatvik Ahluwalia,
2023 Secretary | ● Cinda Danh | ● Megha Prasad |
| ● Moana Bentin | ● Amy Goh | ● Jennifer Rubin |
| | ● Christopher Huang | ● Ekta Saksena |
| | ● Leo Hwang | ● Philjay Solar |
| | ● Danielle Kim | ● Tuyet Tran |

Thank you to Commissioners who ended their service during 2023:

- | | | |
|------------------|--------------|----------------|
| ● Nate Bae Kupel | ● Cinda Danh | ● Mary Lee |
| ● Mary Chin | ● Prahlad KC | ● Megha Prasad |
| | | ● Ekta Saksena |

Staff

- Yasmin Padamsee Forbes, Executive Director
- Jennifer Best, Policy and Communications Director
- Shubhecchha Dhaurali, Program and Research Director
- Anne Lizette Sta. Maria, Executive Communications Specialist

Interns

- Diana Li, Policy and Communications Coordinator
- Hannah Ku, 2023 Western Massachusetts Regional Coordinator
- Evan Owens, 2024 Western Massachusetts Regional Coordinator
- Ashley Shan, Youth Coordinator

Thank you to the staff and interns who completed their service at the Commission the past year:

- Esther Hwi-Young Kim, Program and Research Director (staff)
- Bonnie Chen, Communications Coordinator (intern)
- Siale Teaupa, Health and Pacific Islanders Coordinator (intern)
- Benjamin Wang, Governance and Policy Coordinator (intern)
- Sea Kay Leung, Assistant Youth Coordinator (intern)
- Hannah Ku, 2023 Western Massachusetts Regional Coordinator (intern)

You can learn more about the Commissioners and Staff on [our website](#).

Youth Council

2023 marked a significant year of growth for the Youth Council! In its second year, the Youth Council expanded from seven to nine students from diverse backgrounds across Massachusetts. The Youth Council's mission is to amplify the voices of young individuals and foster leadership qualities among AAPI youth statewide. These young participants received training, mentorship, networking opportunities, and platforms to express their perspectives.

Members:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| ● Elliot Chung, 12th Grade, Quincy | ● Ngan Huynh, 10th Grade, Dorchester |
| ● Talvin Dhingra, 11th Grade, Amherst | ● Soomin Lee, 12th Grade, Brookline |
| ● Tasneem Ghadiali, 11th Grade, Lexington | ● Sofia Hom, 11th Grade, Burlington |
| ● Will Hesp, 11th Grade, Belmont | ● Maggie Sun, 12th Grade, Malden |
| | ● Amy Zhou, 11th Grade, Cambridge |

“The Youth Council creates a chill space for AAPI students to collaborate and connect while working to promote AAPI visibility in MA.” – Amy Zhou, 2023-2024 Youth Council Member

Subcommittees

The AAPI Commission has seven subcommittees included in its bylaws: Governance, Finance, & Communications; Small Business & Economic Development; Development (Unity Dinner); Health & Human Services; Education & Leadership; Government Relations, Advocacy, & Civil Rights; and Arts & Culture. Additionally, the Commission forms other working groups as needed to address specific issues or projects. In 2023, several other working groups were established, including Western Massachusetts, Strategic Planning, Survey, and Small Grants Fund.

As we enter 2024, the Commission will focus its efforts into four subcommittees, in addition to adhoc ones when needed. The four subcommittees will be Governance & Finance, Government Relations & Advocacy, Programs & Research, and Community Visibility.

Arts & Culture

The priority for the Arts & Culture Subcommittee in 2023 was to find ways to better support AAPI artists. Going forward, the Subcommittee will work on creating an intentional and impactful lineup of performers for the 2024 Unity Dinner. The Subcommittee is also considering how individual artists can be best supported by the AAPI Commission's grants.

Governance, Finance, & Communications

The Governance, Finance, & Communications Subcommittee is tasked with ensuring the Commission functions smoothly. In 2023, it met to discuss the FY 2024 budget, staffing needs, subcommittee arrangements, and the need for a strategic plan.

Government Relations, Advocacy, & Civil Rights

The Government Relations, Advocacy, & Civil Rights Subcommittee is tasked with spearheading policy and advocacy within the Commission. The subcommittee researches and recommends bills for the full Commission to endorse. In 2023, the subcommittee also worked to strengthen and institutionalize a more comprehensive and community-forward research process in determining what bills the Commission should prioritize.

Health & Human Services

The Health & Human Services Subcommittee has prioritized supporting AAPI mental health. Staff and subcommittee members are currently looking into ways to make therapy and other psychological health services more accessible to AAPI residents of Massachusetts. Additionally, subcommittee members did outreach on behalf of the Commission at AAPI health-related events, including Asian Women for Health's "Reclaiming Our Shores" event in Quincy.

Small Business & Economic Development

The Small Business & Economic Development Subcommittee met to support AAPI small businesses in Massachusetts, including providing grants, compiling resources, and advocating for small businesses.

Small Grants Fund

The Small Grants Fund Subcommittee met both in the spring and the fall. In the spring, the Subcommittee considered applications from the previous (Fall 2022) round of funding that either were not funded at all or only partially funded. The Subcommittee awarded an additional \$32,750 to 31 organizations. Maximum funding was \$2,000 per organization. In the fall, the Small Grants Fund received 78 applications, totaling \$358,930 in requested funds. The Subcommittee suggested funding 23 organizations for a total of \$47,000, with a maximum of \$5,000 per organization. All grant awardees were approved by the full Commission.

Strategic Planning

The Strategic Planning Subcommittee met in the second half of the year in order to provide feedback on the strategic planning process and report. You can read more about the Strategic Plan later in this report.

Unity Dinner/Development

The Unity Dinner/Development Subcommittee met regularly in the lead-up to the 2023 Unity Dinner. The Unity Diner Subcommittee provided input on the planning of the Unity Dinner, which was undertaken by the staff on a daily basis. The types of decisions made by the Subcommittee included who would receive awards, performers, food, and financing.

Western Massachusetts

The Western Massachusetts Working Group is designed to further the Commission's support for Western Massachusetts. It primarily works to support the Western Massachusetts Quarterly Meetings, which bring together a diverse coalition of AAPI organizations, communities, and individuals to provide resources, keep people informed, and create community. The Western Massachusetts Working Group is supported by the Regional Coordinator.

Commissioner Highlights



Gary Chu: 2023 Chairperson; Governance, Communications, & Finance Subcommittee Chair

Dr. Gary Y. Chu (he/him) is the Vice President of Professional Affairs at the New England College of Optometry. He received his Doctor of Optometry (OD) degree from the New England College of Optometry in 1995 and his Masters of Public Health (MPH) in 2002 from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

Gary was appointed to the AAPIC by the Secretary of State in 2022. As 2023 Chairperson, Gary played a critical role in the strategic planning process, media relations, community outreach, Commissioner engagement, and much more. Dr. Gary Chu will continue to serve as the Commission's Chairperson in 2024.

Richard Chu: 2023 Vice Chairperson; Western Massachusetts Co-Chair

Richard T. Chu (he/him) was born and raised in the Philippines where he received his A.B. from Ateneo de Manila University, and completed his M.A. from Stanford University, and his Ph.D. from University of Southern California. His research and numerous publications focus on the history of the Chinese and Chinese mestizos in the Philippines and of the different Chinese diasporic communities in the world, centering on issues of race, ethnicity, gender, empire, and nationalism. He has also co-edited an anthology of LGBTQ studies pertaining to the Philippines.

Richard was appointed to the AAPIC in 2022 by the State Treasurer. As 2023 Vice Chairperson and Co-Chair of the Western Massachusetts Working Group, Richard ensured that Western Massachusetts was properly represented in Commission meetings and Executive Committee decisions, and did significant outreach in the Springfield and Amherst communities.

Saatvik Ahluwalia: 2023 Secretary; Small Business & Economic Development Subcommittee Chair

Saatvik Ahluwalia (he/him) is an award-winning digital marketer who is a Senior Campaign Manager at Zebra Technologies. He is a Public Voices Fellow of The OpEd Project and a New Leadership Council Fellow. He has won a Platinum MarCom Award, received public-speaking awards through Toastmasters International, competed in multiple Bollywood dance championships, and was profiled in the book "Those Immigrants!: Indians in America: A Psychological Exploration of Achievement" by journalist Scott Haas.

Saatvik was appointed to the AAPIC by the Attorney General in 2023. As Secretary, Saatvik aided in the organization of Commission meetings, was an integral part of Executive Committee decisions as well. Saatvik Ahluwalia will serve as the Commission's Vice Chairperson in 2024.

Amy Goh: 2023 Health & Human Services Subcommittee Chair

Amy Goh (she/her) is a Certified Nurse-Midwife and PhD candidate. She is also Adjunct Faculty at Thomas Jefferson University's Midwifery program. As a child of immigrants from South Korea, her decade-long career as a midwife in the Boston area has focused on providing quality midwifery care for immigrant communities and communities of color.

Amy was appointed to the AAPIC by MA House Speaker in 2023. As the Chair of the Health & Human Services Subcommittee, Amy spearheaded efforts to prioritize AAPI mental health within the Commission. She also did outreach at AAPI health-related events, including Asian Women for Health's "Reclaiming Our Shores" event in Quincy, MA.

Christopher Huang: 2023 Arts & Culture Subcommittee Chair

Christopher Huang (he/him) is a photographer and videographer with extensive experience in creating impactful visual narratives. Some of his career highlights include being hired to photograph some of the Asian American public media figures who helped inspire him to pursue a creative path. He is especially proud of inspiring younger POC storytellers to take control of their own narrative.

Christopher was appointed to the AAPIC by the MA House Chair in 2023. As Chair of the Arts & Culture Subcommittee, Christopher advocated for artists to be better supported by the Commission. He has also prioritized performances for the 2024 Unity Dinner.

Leo Hwang: 2023 Western Massachusetts Co-Chair

Dr. Leo L. Hwang (he/him) is the Assistant Academic Dean in the College of Natural Sciences at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Dr. Hwang is particularly interested in using participatory action research and asset based community development as a model for enhancing how we engage in racial justice work in higher education.

Leo was appointed to the AAPIC by the State Auditor in 2022. As Co-Chair of the Western Massachusetts Working Group, Leo supported Western Massachusetts communities through events, conversations, and more.

Danielle Kim: 2023 Government Relations, Advocacy, & Civil Rights Subcommittee Chair

Danielle Kim (she/her) is a proud second-generation Korean American, intersectional feminist, and community activist. She is the inaugural Executive Director of the Asian Community Fund at The Boston Foundation — the first and only philanthropic fund in Massachusetts dedicated to activating, convening, and supporting the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community.

Danielle was appointed to the AAPIC by the State Treasurer in 2020. As the Chair of the Government Relations, Advocacy, & Civil Rights Subcommittee, Danielle worked tirelessly to advocate for policies that benefit the AAPI Community at the state level. In addition to legislative research, policy discussions, and event planning, Danielle also worked to ensure that Commissioners understood policies that can be complex.

Impact

In 2023, the Asian American & Pacific Islanders Commission continued its mission of engaging with diverse communities across the Commonwealth, ensuring that the needs of AAPI communities were met and their voices were heard.

Recognizing the substantial needs within these communities, the Commission advocated for increased funding, resulting in a budget increase from \$356,053 in FY23 to \$582,753 in FY24. This boost in resources allowed the Commission to better support, advocate for, and connect with communities throughout Massachusetts.

Strategic planning emerged as a top priority for the AAPIC in 2023, aimed at maximizing the effectiveness of funding and support for the Massachusetts AAPI community. Through this process, the Commission reaffirmed its commitment to uplifting AAPI communities across the state, particularly those often marginalized within larger AAPI populations, governmental structures, and organizations.



The AAPIC continued to deliver key programs in 2023, including listening sessions and the Small Grants Fund. Additionally, it expanded programs such as the Youth Council and continued advocating for AAPI-centered policies. The Small Grants Fund distributed nearly \$80,000 in funding to community organizations.

“Thank you to the Asian American and Pacific Islanders Commission for selecting our organization as a recipient of their Small Grants Fund! Your support means the world to us and will fuel our efforts to bring cultural richness and artistic endeavors to our community. We’re deeply grateful for this incredible opportunity!” – Miclot Arts & Culture

Through our nonprofit arm, we organized our annual Unity Dinner, which united over 200 attendees, including 7 Unsung Hero Awardees and numerous elected officials, to celebrate the achievements of AAPI leaders in the previous year.

As we move forward, we anticipate expanding these programs in 2024, fostering meaningful connections with AAPI communities across the Commonwealth and continuing our unwavering commitment to representing the needs and voices of every facet of the Massachusetts AAPI community.



Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Massachusetts

Massachusetts has a long and rich history of Asian and Asian-American populations, and many of its towns are home to some of the largest, most concentrated populations of AAPI people across the United States. As of the 2020 census, the number of Asian/Asian-American residents has grown from 347,295 to 504,900 since 2010. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders now make up 8.4% of Massachusetts residents. Although Boston remains the city with the single largest population of AAPI-identifying individuals, suburbs—both more and less affluent ones—have seen unprecedented growth in their AAPI populations in the last few years. It is critical that the state is able to continue to support and foster growth within these communities.

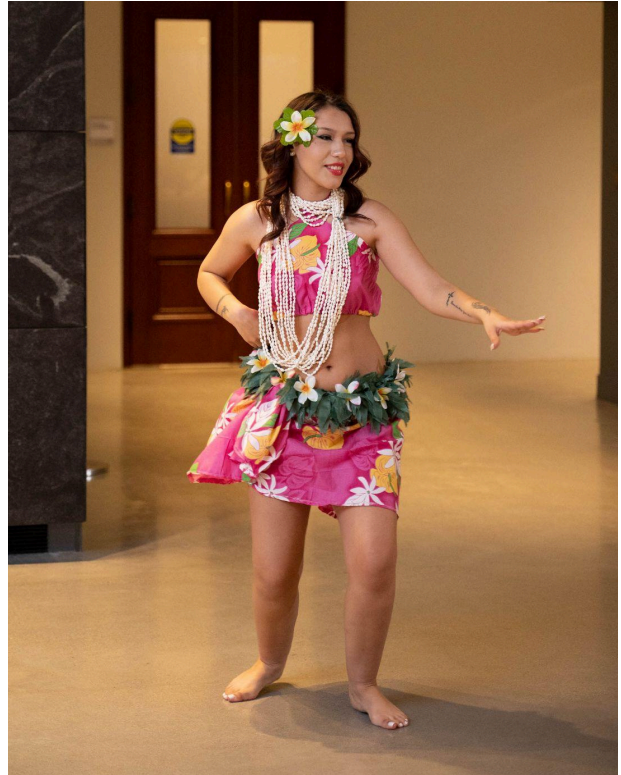
As a part of the data disaggregation bill signed by Governor Maura Healey in August 2023, state agencies that collect data on race and ethnicity will soon be required to record data on individual Asian and Pacific Islander groups. The goal of the new change is to more closely study and understand distinct cultural communities who may have previously been grouped together, allowing for more targeted, effective policy that speaks to the specific needs and challenges of certain populations.

Looking forward, it is critical that the AAPIC and the state at large keep in mind the broad diversity of the Asian-American and Pacific Islander communities. Household income ranges vastly between wealthier AAPI communities in suburbs like Lexington, Acton, and Westwood versus Boston, where nearly 29% of Asian residents live in poverty. As a result, all communities—whether the nationally-significant Cambodian population of Lowell; or Quincy, where 1 in 3 students is now Asian; or in Amherst in Western Mass, with over 13.4% of residents claiming Asian and Pacific Islander descent; or in Westford, Weymouth, or Sharon, small suburban towns with over 250% increases in their Asian populations from 2000 to 2016—face different, unique challenges and deserve tailored attention.

Pacific Islanders in Massachusetts

The Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) population is composed of individuals that are indigenous to Polynesia (including Hawai'i, Tonga, Samoa, Aotearoa New Zealand, Tahiti), Melanesia (including Fiji, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu) and Micronesia (including Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Guam and Palau). The 2020 US Census estimated there to be around 1.5 million individuals who identified as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, either alone or in combination with another race, residing in the United States. Of that 1.5 million, roughly 2,301 reside in Massachusetts.

In 2023, the Commission hired its first Pacific Islander Coordinator, Siale Teaupa, who focused primarily on connecting with Pacific Islander communities in Massachusetts. Through conversations with community members and many hours of research, Siale created a report for the Commission in regards to the Pacific Islander community and how the AAPIC can best serve them. She found that the Pacific Islander population in Massachusetts consists of transient residents, primarily students, and permanent residents, who often moved to Massachusetts from Pacific Island nations. The Pacific Islander community in Massachusetts is resilient, hard working, ambitious, and has a strong cultural identity.



While the NHPI community has many strengths, like any community, there are specific needs in which they could use support. Some of the needs expressed included more inclusive representation of Pacific Islanders, increased awareness of available resources, assistance in connecting with one another, and resources for higher education.

The report recommended the AAPI Commission and Massachusetts policy makers to address the needs of the Pacific Islanders in Massachusetts in a number of ways, including but not limited to an NHPI data collection task force, data disaggregation for AAPI subpopulations, and appropriate use of the term AAPI in creation and endorsement of legislation. The AAPI Commission will continue to strengthen its ties with Pacific Islanders in Massachusetts and further its advocacy efforts for this often underserved population.

Programming and Events

Listening Sessions

Burmese Listening Session, Lowell, January 2023

The Lowell Listening Session, held at Lowell International Church, brought together members of the Burmese community to express the concerns and issues they saw impacting their community. This listening session served as a space to collectively brainstorm programming and resources to support members of the Lowell Burmese community. Attendees and presenters shared the issues facing them and their communities, including housing affordability, lack of transportation, and access to resources.



There were three primary issues of concern voiced at the listening session. You can read the full notes from the listening session [here](#).

1. Residents living in Lowell expressed a lack of community and access to resources, especially if residents were not already connected to each other
2. Community members expressed concern about the price of living in Lowell
 - a. Housing is incredibly expensive and is driving out the existing Burmese residents who are based in the area

- b. Families do not know how to access resources, such as applying for financial aid to help their children pursue higher education, as many parents do not speak English
 - c. Individuals mentioned the difficulties of getting around the neighborhood and the lack of transportation, especially for those without a car
3. Individuals reported experiencing discrimination against AAPIs in schools, workplaces, and other public spaces

Speakers:

- Saw John Bright, Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN) and Case Manager at International Institute of New England
- Dr. Rev. KoKo Lay, Pastor
- Cherry Lim, Program Director, Asian American Center for Excellence & Engagement
- Ardeth Thawngmung, Professor, Political Science, UMass Lowell
- Dr. Phitsamay Uy, Associate Professor & Co-Director of Center for Asian American Studies, UMass Lowell
- Lillyanna Yim, AAPI Youth Council alum, Lowell High School student

Officials:

- Mayor Sokhary Chau, City of Lowell
- State Representative Rady Mom, 18th Middlesex District
- State Representative Tram Nguyen, 18th Essex District

Older Adults Listening Session, Quincy, April 2023



On Friday, April 14th, the AAPI Commission held a listening session at Wollaston Senior Center, with a focus on the experiences of AAPI older adults. We heard from community members and representatives from six community organizations. State Representative Tackey Chan and State Senator John Keenan also attended and spoke with the community about legislative fronts to combat the obstacles faced by AAPI older adults.

There were four primary issues of concern voiced at the listening session. You can read the full notes from the listening session [here](#).

1. The biggest challenge facing AAPI older adults is language access; daily challenges related to speaking English emerged as a common theme. These include experiences getting medical care, accessing government services, and more
2. Housing is another major issue, including safe, affordable, and secure housing, as well as senior living centers that have connections with ethnic communities, including serving ethnic food and having staff that speak languages spoken by the older adults they serve
3. Transportation is often infrequent and not accessible
4. Mental health: older adults, especially those who do not speak English well, easily become isolated, which leads to mental health challenges, including problems like gambling and depression



Speakers:

- Joyce Guan, Wollaston Senior Center
- Ben Hires, CEO, Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center
- Angie Liou, Executive Director, Asian Community Development Corporation

- Ramakrishna Penumarthy, Co-Founder, Volunteering for Seniors
- Frank Poon, Founder, Civic Education Alliance
- Usha Vakil, Friends of Indian Senior Citizen Organization (FISCO), Co-founder of Saheli

Officials:

- State Representative Tackey Chan
- State Senator John Keenan

Tongan Listening Session, Framingham, April 2023

On April 15th, 2023, the AAPI Commission held a listening session with the Tongan community in Framingham, MA. Community members had the opportunity to introduce their families and their journey of how they settled in Massachusetts. To start, two youth community members performed a maulu'ulu, a traditional Tongan dance. Representative Donaghue (19th Worcester District) attended the listening session and encouraged the Pacific Islander community members to register to vote, research and get to know candidates, and vote for candidates who best align with their values. The AAPI Commission shared resources and opportunities for the Pacific Islander community to stay engaged with the Commission. In closing, community members and the AAPI Commission had an informal discussion to get to know this Pacific Islander community and for the Commission to provide support. You can read the full notes from the event [here](#).

Officials:

Representative Kate Donaghue (D-19)



Mental Health Listening Session, Virtual, June 2023

On June 13th, the AAPI Commission held a Mental Health Listening Session to discuss the challenges and opportunities impacting the mental health of the AAPI community. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have the lowest help-seeking rate for mental health services of any racial and ethnic group. This may be due to the many systemic barriers to accessing mental health care and quality treatment, including the poor availability of linguistically and culturally appropriate mental health service providers. Cultural identity, faith, stigma, immigration status, and fear can also play a role. You can read the full notes and community sourced resources from the listening session [here](#).

Main Takeaways

- Culturally and linguistically competent care is incredibly important, and is one of the largest barriers to AAPI communities accessing mental health care
- It is critical to think of mental health and wellness comprehensively: systemic need is often the root cause of mental health issues
- It is important to not generalize the AAPI community: the AAPI community is vast and diverse, and has varying needs and support

Speakers:

- Aishwarya Chitoor, Saheli
- Chien-Chi Huang, Asian Women for Health
- Mabel Lam, Psychologist and former AAPIC Commissioner
- Heidi Hyunjin Lee, Harm Reduction Case Manager
- Dawn Sauma, MSW, LICSW, Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence

Western Massachusetts



As a significant number of AAPI-identifying people live outside of the immediate Boston area, the Asian American and Pacific Islanders Commission is proud to recognize the steps taken in 2023, led by Commissioners Richard Chu and Leo Hwang, to further the organization's reach in locales where there is still work to be done in regards to AAPI representation.

In October 2022, AAPI community organizations and associations local to Western Massachusetts gathered together in Springfield in the interest of expanding the AAPI Commission's reach further into Western Massachusetts. After the success of the initial listening session, where the needs, events, and resources of the surrounding communities were identified and uplifted, the Western Massachusetts branch of the AAPIC officially established a recurring quarterly listening session, starting in March of 2023.

In addition to the quarterly meetings, Commissioners, staff, and interns attended events held by other AAPI organizations both to do outreach and education about the Commission, as well as support the groups uplifting AAPI voices in Western Massachusetts.

Though large AAPI communities exist in both Worcester and Springfield, they previously were underrepresented in the Commission. The listening sessions have provided the first step toward fixing this gap, and have already begun to foster meaningful dialogue between community groups.



March 2023 Quarterly Meeting

In the first Western Massachusetts Quarterly Meeting of 2023, and the second overall, numerous community groups and members came together to share updates and request support. The two main areas community members would like to see more focus on are representation for Western Massachusetts AAPI communities, including AAPI curriculum in schools, and informative resources for AAPI individuals and communities, including those related to mental health, voting, and legal protections. [Read all the updates here.](#)

May 2023 Quarterly Meeting

The May 2023 Quarterly Meeting solidified the importance of the Commission's role in creating space for community in Western Massachusetts. Organizations expressed appreciation for the quarterly meetings, which help them remain in touch with each other and form a stronger network in Western Massachusetts across organizations. At this meeting, the main ideas and issues brought forward were a community calendar of events, continued concern over the lack of AAPI curriculum in schools, the potential for a survey of Western Massachusetts AAPI communities, and the hope for a future, larger AAPIC-wide event. Organizations also provided updates on events and programming. [Read all the updates here.](#)

June 2023 Oral History Training

On Saturday, June 10th, the AAPI Commission led an oral history training session at Amherst Regional High School with members of the Amherst Historical Society and the Khmer Exhibit Committee to aid in their oral history project to preserve the histories of local Cambodian refugees during the 1980s. The training discussed what oral history is, different approaches and techniques to interviewing, and included a mini interviewing exercise with the participants. After the training, various Khmer youth will travel back to Cambodia to speak with elders about their life stories.

September 2023 Quarterly Meeting

The September Quarterly Meeting brought important steps towards the creation of a Western Massachusetts Advisory Council for the AAPIC. Community members expressed desire for a more efficient way to be updated of community events and an interest in meeting with members of the state government in order to further elevate the voices of AAPI communities in Western Massachusetts. Organizations also provided updates on events that had occurred and those coming up, including numerous holiday celebrations. [Read all of the updates here.](#)

November 2023 Quarterly Meeting

Besides community updates, the primary goal of the last quarterly meeting of the year was to establish goals for the future Western Mass Advisory Council. The two goals discussed were

wanting to ensure that there is a diversity of groups and issues represented in the Western Mass Advisory Council, and wanting to ensure that AAPI populations in Western Mass are heard by the larger commission. [Read all the updates here.](#)

Swearing-In Ceremony



On February 22, 2023, Treasurer Deborah B. Goldberg, along with representatives from the Massachusetts Asian American & Pacific Islanders Commission, officiated the Swearing-In Ceremony at the Massachusetts State House. The event witnessed an impressive turnout of past and present Commissioners, community members, and AAPIC staff. Treasurer Goldberg administered the oath of office to newly appointed and recently reappointed Commissioners, who had been chosen by elected officials from across the Commonwealth.

The newly-selected Commissioners introduced during the ceremony included Saatvik Ahluwalia, Amy Goh, Christopher Huang, Bethany Li, Marilyn Park, and Jennifer Rubin. Reappointed Commissioners included Meena Bharath, Danielle Kim, and Philjay Solar.

In her remarks, Treasurer Goldberg congratulated the newly appointed and reappointed members of the Asian American & Pacific Islanders Commission, expressing her anticipation of collaborative efforts to advance the Commission's mission of promoting equity, justice, and opportunity for the entire AAPI community.



Secretary-Elect Saatvik Ahluwalia reflected on the significance of the in-person Swearing-In Ceremony after the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. He emphasized the Commission's unwavering support for AAPI communities, highlighting achievements such as the distribution of over \$45,000 through the Commission's Small Grants Fund to organizations and businesses based in Massachusetts. These efforts supported various impactful initiatives, ranging from aiding immigrants and refugees to addressing domestic violence in AAPI communities and preserving cultural heritage.

Former Chairperson Meena Bharath shared her insights into the Commission's progress, citing the successful establishment of the Youth Council in 2022. She also mentioned expanded roles for full-time staff members focused on community outreach and understanding the evolving landscape of AAPI communities in Massachusetts. Additionally, new interns have been actively involved in significant projects, including outreach to Pacific Islander communities and the enhancement of Commission governance.

Executive Director Yasmin Padamsee Forbes thanked Treasurer Deborah Goldberg for her generous hospitality in hosting the Commission. She commended Treasurer Goldberg's dedicated team, which includes Assistant Treasurer/CFO Minot Powers, as well as Assistant Treasurer & Chief of Human Resources, Swee Lin Wong, along with their team members, for their unwavering commitment and support. She also conveyed gratitude to the Asian Caucus for their steadfast support and dedication to amplifying the voices of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the Commonwealth.

Unity Dinner



In 2023, the Asian American & Pacific Islanders Commission successfully hosted its 15th Annual Unity Dinner, a remarkable event made possible through the generous support of sponsors through our non-profit arm. This memorable evening, held on May 6th, 2023, took place at the Edward Kennedy Institute for the U.S. Senate.

The 2023 Unity Dinner was a celebration of AAPI achievement, a platform to honor diverse AAPI cultures, and a means to strengthen the AAPI network. The event brought together over 240 attendees, representing various organizations, entities, and demographics from all corners of Massachusetts. Notably, it marked the introduction of the Unsung Heroes Awards, recognizing exceptional leaders and trailblazers within their local AAPI communities.

The evening commenced with opening remarks by AAPIC Chair Gary Chu, followed by keynote addresses from esteemed speakers, including Massachusetts State Auditor Diana DiZoglio and Cambridge Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui. Additionally, video messages from Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll and Krystal Ka'ai, Executive Director of the White House Initiative on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders, were shared.

During the event, Executive Director Yasmin Padamsee Forbes introduced the inaugural Unsung Heroes Awards, created to shine a spotlight on the remarkable contributions made by community members in Massachusetts. Each of the following awardees received plaques presented by the Massachusetts Asian Caucus:

2023 Unsung Hero Awardees:

- **Connie S. Wong, Deputy Commissioner for Labor Relations, Boston Fire Department:** Connie Wong's exceptional leadership as the Deputy Commissioner for Labor Relations, Human Resources, and Legal Affairs at the Boston Fire Department has resulted in significant progress in diversifying the department's ranks. Her innovative strategies and policies have boosted outreach, recruitment, hiring, and retention of minority and women firefighters, with the recruitment classes achieving nearly 30% diversity. Connie's work has notably increased the number of AAPI firefighters and made a lasting impact on AAPI representation within the Boston Fire Department.
- **Shaleen Sheth, Youth Activist:** Shaleen Sheth, a dedicated young professional, has been actively engaged in community service since the age of 12. She co-founded "Women Who Win," a non-profit organization that empowers women globally through storytelling, skill-sharing, mentorship, and networking. Shaleen's leadership has scaled the organization to over 20,000 members across 80 countries. She also serves as an Advisory Council Member for Saheli Boston, advocating for South Asian domestic violence survivors, and is part of the Young Professionals Leadership Council for Akshaya Patra. Shaleen has received recognition from the Massachusetts State Government for her outstanding work in women's empowerment.
- **Jinbyoung Nam and Sarah Nam, Businesspeople:** Master Nam and Ms. Sarah have demonstrated exceptional dedication by establishing several taekwondo schools in Western Massachusetts, transforming them into community centers. Beyond martial arts instruction, these centers provide crucial services such as before and after-school care, meals, arts and crafts classes, homework assistance, and transportation through a voucher program. Their unwavering commitment to underserved communities, especially during the pandemic, has been pivotal in providing essential support and services.
- **Shaina Lu, Artist:** Shaina Lu is a connector deeply committed to the AAPI community in the Greater Boston Area. Her community art projects, including the creation and restoration of the Chinatown mural, have had a significant impact. Shaina has created posters and infographics for various public good organizations, initiated an Asian Food Pantry during the pandemic, and served as a family liaison for the Chinese-speaking population at Eliot School. She is an activist, community organizer, and mentor to young artists, actively working to unify and strengthen the AAPI community.
- **Rev. Dr. Ko Ko Lay, Pastor of Burmese Christian Church:** Originally from Myanmar, Rev. Dr. Ko Ko Lay has served as a pivotal leader and servant in the Burmese Christian community in Lowell, Massachusetts. His leadership has transformed the church into a vibrant community center, offering programs and activities for children and youth. Rev. Dr. Ko Ko Lay provides essential support to non-English-speaking families, serves as a

liaison between Lowell public schools and Burmese parents, and advocates for tenants' and workers' rights. He offers both spiritual and emotional support, making himself available to anyone in need, regardless of their background.

- **Maria Isabela Campos, Youth Activist:** A former member of AAPIC's first-ever Youth Council, Maria Isabela Campos is a passionate advocate for Asian representation and the challenges faced by Asian youth. She has spoken at the AAPI Youth rally, performed at the Unity Dinner, and is dedicated to uplifting the voices of minorities. Maria's academic interests in medicine align with her commitment to representing minorities, and she plans to continue her advocacy at UMass Lowell.



To enhance the Unity Dinner's celebration of its 15th anniversary, an interactive exhibit was organized, showcasing the history, present, and future of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities in Massachusetts and across the nation.

Another exhibit which highlighted the diverse conceptions of AAPI identity, developed by the Youth Council and featuring submissions from the public, added a unique dimension to the event.

The 2023 Unity Dinner served as a momentous gathering, acknowledging the remarkable accomplishments of the Massachusetts AAPI community over the past year. It encapsulated the spirit of AAPIC, uniting the community to advance future initiatives and provide the well-deserved recognition for political, social, and educational efforts.

Celebrations and Speeches: AAPIC's Engagements at Community Events

- January 22: Lunar New Year Celebration | American Chinese United Association, Western MA Chapter
- January 31: Lunar New Year Celebration, Commissioners Danielle Kim, Meena Bharath, and Mary Chin honored | GetKonnected! and The Boston Foundation
- February 11: Lantern Festival | Chinese Association of Western Massachusetts
- March 16: Courageous Conversations AAPI Speakers: Rep. Tram Nguyen; Anna Choi, Endicott College Professor of Religion; Andy Zhang, Andover Chinese School; Yasmin Padamsee Forbes, AAPI Commission
- May 3: AANHPI History Month Celebration | White House Initiative on AANHPI
- May 3: Red Sox AAPI Night
- May 17: Governor's AAPI Heritage Month Celebration
- May 17: State Treasurers DEI event to spotlight contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to American society, including their role in shaping American culture, history, and politics. Speaker: Commissioner Chu
- May 20: Boston AAPI 5K | AAPI 5K
- May 22: Interstate Model-Sharing Virtual Panel | CT Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity. Speaker: ED, Padamsee Forbes
- May 30: AAPI Heritage Month | Massachusetts Historical Society. Speaker: ED, Padamsee Forbes
- May 30: AAPI Cultural Social Hour | Point32Health
- May 31: Equity and Accountability Panel meeting on ARPA funds
- May 31: New England Region Asian American & NHPI Connectivity Summit with US Small Business Administration
- May 31: MCSW Advocacy Day 2023, State House
- June 12: AAPI Anti-Hate Community Working Session | The Boston Foundation
- June 22-23: 2023 New American Hero Awards and Power and Policy
- August 5: India Day | India Society of Worcester
- August 13: Reclaiming Our Shores | Asian Women for Health
- August 15: AAPI Community reception with Mayor Wu's office for Phillip Eng, CEO & General Manager of the MBTA, and Secretary of Economic Development Yvonne Hao.
- August 24-26: National Association of Asian American Professionals, Boston Chapter (NAAAP Boston), Leadership Convention in Boston
- September 13: Latino Empowerment Council with Governor Healey and Lt. Governor Driscoll | State House
- October 1: Braintree's First Annual Mid-Autumn Festival | Chinese American Association of Braintree

- October 8: 2nd Annual Filipino American Festival | Harvard Square Philippine American Alliance
- October 20: 7th Annual Cultural Appreciation Day | Springfield | Speaker: Commissioner Chu
- Oct 25: Asian Americans in Civic Engagement and Politics Panel| UMB. Speakers: Representative Nguyen of Andover, City Councilor Liang, and ED, Padamsee Forbes
- November 18: 39th Anniversary Gala | Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association
- December 6: Powering Local AAPI-Owned Small Business Forum & #ShopAAPI Night Market | The Asian Community Fund at The Boston Foundation
- December 11: Governor's Holiday Tree Lighting



Policy and Advocacy

The AAPIC is guided by its statute, which mandates the Commission to inform elected officials and governments about issues impacting AAPI communities. One of the ways the Commission fulfills this mandate is by advocating for policies on behalf of AAPI communities.

The AAPIC endorsed five pieces of legislation in 2023, testifying in favor of four of the bills. Legislative endorsements serve as the Commission's primary method of political advocacy. Beyond endorsements, the Commission acts as a voice for AAPI communities and their concerns by participating in panels, symposiums, events, engaging with state and local elected officials, and collaborating with other organizations.

The process of Commission endorsement entails research and recommendations from the Government Relations, Advocacy, & Civil Rights Subcommittee. Once a bill receives subcommittee recommendation, it is brought to the full Commission for discussion and a vote. When a bill is endorsed by the Commission, the AAPIC provides public materials, attends events, speaks to reporters, and provides testimony at legislative hearings. These efforts collectively contribute to advancing policies that address the needs and concerns of the AAPI communities in Massachusetts.



1. [H.3003: An Act ensuring equitable representation in the Commonwealth](#)

Presenter: Rep. Tackey Chan, Sen. Jamie Eldridge

Endorsed: February 21, 2023

Bill Summary: This legislation requires standardized collection and reporting of race and ethnicity data by state agencies currently mandated to collect demographic data, in order to improve government services while protecting the privacy of Massachusetts residents.

Why it matters: Massachusetts residents come from a diverse range of backgrounds, each with unique family and immigration histories, cultures, and needs. Better data allows policymakers to rely less on personal stories and more on numbers and hard facts when proposing new policies, programs, and services to help their communities. For example, knowing which languages are most spoken at a community hospital enables that hospital to hire the right translators so patients receive accurate information and understand what's happening around them. Human service agencies can advocate for funding for programs based on their community's specific needs, such as mental health counseling for residents who came to Massachusetts as refugees.

Status: The AAPI Commission is proud to share that after years of advocacy by a diverse coalition, including the AAPIC, H.3003 was signed into law by Governor Maura Healey as a part of the FY 2024 General Appropriations. This accomplishment followed a positive hearing in July in the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight, which the AAPI Commission participated in and provided testimony for.

[Fact Sheet](#)

2. [H.542 / S.288: An Act to promote racially inclusive curriculum in schools \(CARE Bill\)](#)

Presenter: Rep. Tram Nguyen, Rep. Steven Ultrino, Sen. Adam Gomez

Endorsed: February 21, 2023

Bill Summary: This bill establishes a Racially Inclusive Curriculum Trust Fund, which would be used to develop and implement racially inclusive curriculum for primary and secondary education. Public schools would be required to teach accurate histories, writings, and contributions of historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups.

Why it matters: People of color are underrepresented and underserved in the current primary and secondary curriculum in Massachusetts. These inequities have had deleterious effects on the physical and mental health of BIPOC communities, as well as serving to exclude these groups from being seen and participating fully in society. It is imperative to increase accurate and thoughtful representation of marginalized groups in public school education, which is what this bill does.

Status: H.542/S.288 had its hearing in the Joint Committee on Education in October. The hearing was incredibly successful, with members of the Committee vocally supporting the bill, all in-person testifiers speaking strongly in favor of the bill, and the Commission being called as the first organization to testify. The next step for the bill is to be passed favorably out of Committee.

The Commission continues to work closely with coalition partners to support the bill, especially the CARE Coalition.

[Fact Sheet](#)

3. [H.3084 / S.1990: An Act relative to language access and inclusion](#)

Presenter: Rep. Adrian Madaro, Rep. Carlos Gonzalez, Sen. Sal DiDomenico

Endorsed: February 21, 2023

Bill Summary: This bill requires state agencies to take steps to provide culturally competent language services, including oral interpretation and written translation, in a timely fashion, and to develop language access plans to ensure equitable language protocols and practices.

Why it matters: The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare our Commonwealth's inability to provide desperately needed information and services in languages other than English. With one of the most linguistically diverse states in the country, Massachusetts must build the capacity of public-facing state agencies to meet the language access needs of an increasingly diverse population. Non-English speaking residents must have equal access to public health information, education, unemployment assistance, healthcare, housing, and other crucial services.

Status: H.3084/S.1990 was favorably reported out of the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight in October after its powerful hearing in September, which the Commission participated in. The bill was sent to the Ways and Means Committee, where it will need to be heard and reported favorably again. Language from the bill was included in an executive order signed by Governor Healey in Fall 2023. There is still energy behind pushing the bill forward so that it is codified into law, regardless of who is Governor.

[Fact Sheet](#)

4. [H.3119: An Act designating January 30 of each year as Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties and the Constitution in Massachusetts](#)

Presenter: Rep. Erika Uytterhoeven

Endorsed: October 17, 2023

Bill Summary: This bill makes January 30th of each year Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties and the Constitution, through a proclamation from the governor to be issued annually. January 30th is Fred Korematsu's birthday, and is celebrated as a holiday in a number of states, including California, Hawai'i, and Florida.

Why it matters: Fred Korematsu, a second-generation Japanese American, fought for civil rights and against Japanese internment during World War II. He challenged the order requiring internment, even becoming a fugitive, but was eventually caught. He sued, arguing that internment of Japanese Americans was unconstitutional, and his case, *Korematsu vs The United States*, went all the way to the Supreme Court in 1944. The Supreme Court decided against him,

arguing that internment was constitutional, though his charges were dropped after the case was reopened in 1983. It is important for people to recognize Korematsu, who put his life and body on the line to fight for civil rights. Not only is it critical to highlight the historical struggles AAPI communities have faced surrounding discrimination, surveillance, and anti-AAPI sentiment, it is also important to recognize the continued issues facing the AAPI community, including anti-China and anti-Asian sentiment, surveillance, and other issues.

Status: H.3119 had its hearing in front of the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight in October, which the Commission submitted testimony for. It was favorably reported out of Committee and referred to the committee on House Steering, Policy and Scheduling.

[Fact Sheet](#)

5. [H.1704 / S.996: An Act to reform the hate crime statutes](#)

Presenter: Rep. Tram T. Nguyen, Rep. Bud Williams, Sen. Adam Gomez

Endorsed: February 21, 2023*

**Note:* In October, the Commission decided to do more research on this bill and not provide testimony for it at any upcoming hearing until Commissioners had more information and community input. This action was taken due to community feedback in relation to the portion of the bill that increases criminalization, which has not been shown to decrease hate crimes.

Bill Summary: This bill reforms how hate crimes are treated under state law. Supporters argue that strengthening protections against hate crimes, ensuring that hate crimes are taken seriously by all levels of law enforcement, and increased criminalization will help prevent hate crimes. Opponents argue that it will increase criminalization of Black and Brown communities, including AAPI communities, which has been shown to, in some cases, increase rates of crime, and have not been shown to decrease rates of hate crimes, or crimes at large.

Status: H.1704/S.996 had its hearing in front of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary in December and was later sent to study. The AAPI Commission did not submit testimony for this hearing.

[Fact Sheet](#)

The AAPI Commission is looking forward to growing its policy and advocacy program in 2024. The Commission will be building out the community-input aspects of its policy endorsements. It will also continue working with many community partners and coalitions to further both legislative and non-legislative advocacy on behalf of AAPI communities throughout Massachusetts, especially considering the 2024 election.

Shaping Our Future: Strategic Planning

Navigating Progress: Annual Retreat, March 2023

In March 2023, the AAPI Commission convened its Annual Retreat, bringing together Commissioners and staff to engage in collaborative strategic planning, explore future values and objectives, and reflect on the events of the past year. Facilitated by Ruby Reyes, the retreat featured a magazine visioning exercise centered around three key topics: Programming, Policy and Advocacy, and Legal Support.

During this exercise, each group envisioned what a magazine featuring their respective areas would showcase in five years. Participants explored cover designs, headlines, sidebars, impactful quotes, and photos that depicted the Commission's evolving role in supporting the Commonwealth's AAPI community. Themes of youth empowerment and fostering a deeper understanding of AAPI identity among young people emerged as common threads. Following the brainstorming session, groups discussed the steps needed to achieve the goals identified in the visioning activity.

This retreat served as a unique opportunity for Commissioners and staff to learn from one another and collectively chart a course for how the Commission can better support the diverse and vibrant AAPI community in Massachusetts.

Building Bridges: Harvard Chan School Collaboration

Throughout April and May 2023, a collaboration between the AAPI Commission and students from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health (HSPH) took shape. HSPH students Siale Teaua, Elaine Jeon, and Arista Jhanjee worked alongside the Commission on a project involving interviews with five AAPI-serving Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in Massachusetts. These interviews aimed to capture the perceptions and feedback of these CBOs regarding the AAPI Commission's role and effectiveness.

On May 10, 2023, Executive Director Yasmin Padamsee Forbes and Program & Research Director Esther Kim were invited to attend the final class of Dr. Jocelyn Chu's Community-Based Participatory Action course, which had facilitated this collaboration. The HSPH students presented their findings to the full Commission during a Commission Meeting. Their presentation included insights into the needs and challenges faced by AAPI CBOs, along with valuable recommendations for enhancing the AAPI Commission's support for the AAPI community and CBOs. These findings became an integral part of the subsequent strategic planning process.



Charting Our Course: 2024-2026 Strategic Planning

In 2023, AAPIC successfully embarked on a comprehensive strategic planning process spanning 2024-2026. The final plan was approved by the full Commission in January 2024.

AAPIC collaborated with Heang Rubin and Katrina Brink from CHIC Community Engagement Consulting. Throughout the process, regular meetings were held involving staff, Commissioners, and CHIC Community Engagement Consulting.

To foster community involvement at every stage of crafting a 3-year strategic plan, an anonymous survey was conducted, gathering insights from Commissioners, staff, the Youth Council, community organizations, listening session participants, and other partners. Prioritizing community engagement was pivotal for the Commission. Survey results highlighted AAPIC's unique role as a state agency with a broad scope covering the entire AAPI community across Massachusetts, yet it also underscored the challenges that arise from being an inclusive entity. Additionally, the survey identified other key priorities, including enhanced community engagement and strengthening internal infrastructure.

A significant milestone in the strategic planning process was an all-day strategic planning retreat. This retreat encompassed community-building activities, small- and large-group discussions on priorities, and a dialogue with Rep. Tackey Chan, leader of the Massachusetts

Asian Caucus. The retreat yielded a multitude of ideas on how different priorities could be realized by the Commission over the next three years. Furthermore, it rekindled the passion of every Commissioner for serving the AAPI community in Massachusetts.

CHIC Community Engagement Consulting meticulously integrated inputs, discussions, and priorities into the final strategic planning report. Drafts of the report underwent scrutiny and revision by staff, the Executive Committee, and Commissioners within the Strategic Planning Subcommittee. The report was presented to the full Commission during the December Commission Meeting for comprehensive discussion, and was voted on by the full Commission in January 2024. The resulting strategic plan will enable the Commission to work cohesively and purposefully, ensuring that the entire AAPI community in Massachusetts is recognized, heard, and advocated for. The full report will be shared publicly soon.



Youth Council: Shaping the Leaders of Today and Tomorrow

The Youth Council, established in 2022, is a dynamic program designed to empower high school students from diverse backgrounds across Massachusetts. Its primary aim is to cultivate leadership qualities and provide young individuals with a platform to voice their perspectives. In 2023, the Youth Council saw an expansion, welcoming two additional members, bringing its total strength to nine. These members hail from various regions within the state and represent a rich tapestry of ethnicities, including but not limited to Vietnamese, Filipino, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Japanese.

The Youth Council embarked on a journey of skill development and knowledge acquisition through a series of tailored workshops and discussions throughout the year. These sessions focused on critical areas such as understanding power dynamics, exploring identity, and honing the art of storytelling. They provided the Youth Council with a toolkit for effective advocacy and community-building.



One standout moment was their visit to the Massachusetts State House in May, thanks to the Asian Caucus. The Youth Council not only had the privilege of touring this historic institution but also received official recognition on the State House floor. This rare honor allowed them to step into the shoes of legislators and experience the power of advocacy firsthand. Their discussions with members of the Asian Caucus, including Rep. Tackey Chan, Rep. Donald Wong, Rep. Erika Uyterhoeven, and Rep. Tram Nguyen, covered a range of topics, including mental health, inclusive education, and the climate crisis. These conversations inspired the Youth Council to take an active role in activism and policy, advocating for AAPI youth and their unique needs.

Over the summer, the Youth Council took their newfound knowledge and skills to the next level by organizing virtual Town Halls on subjects close to their hearts. These events centered around topics they were passionate about, such as local governance, AAPI experiences in education, Asian culinary traditions, and addressing special needs within the AAPI community. The Town Halls served as platforms for community engagement, featuring discussions, presentations, interviews, and more. In the process, Youth Council members acquired essential skills in research, outreach, public speaking, collaboration, and leadership.

As the Youth Council continues to blaze trails and cultivate a new generation of AAPI leaders, we are filled with pride and excitement for the future. Their journey embodies the spirit of empowerment and engagement that defines the AAPI Commission, inspiring us all to strive for a brighter tomorrow.

Small Grants Fund: Empowering AAPI Communities

The AAPI Commission's Small Grants Fund, established in 2021, has been a crucial vehicle for channeling financial support to grassroots community-based organizations serving AAPI communities. Over the years, this initiative has experienced remarkable growth, with its funding allocation soaring from \$15,250 in 2021 to nearly \$80,000 in 2023. Since its inception, the Small Grants Fund has made a substantial impact, injecting nearly \$145,000 directly into AAPI communities across Massachusetts, and is consistently one of the most popular programs mentioned by community organizations.

Spring 2023 Grant Allocation

In Spring 2023, the Commission took a unique approach by not conducting a full round of applications. Instead, they opted to revisit organizations that had applied in Fall 2022 but had not received the full requested funding or were not funded at all. Additionally, they considered organizations that had partnered with the Commission through listening sessions. The subcommittee, after careful evaluation, recommended grants to a total of 31 organizations, amounting to \$32,500 in funding.

The grants were strategically distributed across various program categories, with a focus on program development (48.4%), arts and culture (25.8%), events (19.5%), and small business support (6.5%). The recipients of these grants were selected from different geographic regions within Massachusetts. The Western region accounted for 32.3% of the funding, while Boston and Metrowest received 19.4% each. The Northeast and Central regions received 16.1% and 12.9%, respectively.

Notably, Middlesex County was a significant hub of grant recipients, representing 38.7% of the total, followed by Hampden County (19.4%) and Suffolk County (9.7%). The organizations supported by these grants exhibited diverse focuses, with some catering to multiple AAPI racial/ethnic demographic groups (40%). Others were specifically tailored to serve East Asian (25.8%), Southeast Asian (19.4%), and South Asian (16.1%) communities.



The grant recipients encompassed a wide spectrum of communities, including those dedicated to the Chinese (6), Indian (4), Vietnamese (2), Japanese (2), Burmese (2), Filipino (1) and Cambodian (1) communities. Thirteen organizations had a broader focus, serving multiple demographic groups. The Small Grants Fund continues to play a pivotal role in empowering and supporting AAPI organizations striving to make a difference in their communities.

“This recognition and support from the Asian American and Pacific Islanders Commission (AAPIC) means a great deal to us. It not only validates the importance of our initiative but also reinforces our shared commitment to making a positive impact on the lives of seniors in our community.” – Volunteering for Seniors, 2023 Grant Recipient



[You can learn more about the Spring 2023 grantees here.](#)

Organization	Amount
AI Academy	\$1,000
American Chinese United Association	\$1,000
ARISE (Advocacy for Refugee & Immigrant Services for Empowerment Inc.)	\$1,000
Ashland Indians	\$1,500
Asian American Service Association, Inc. Wollaston Senior Center	\$1,000
Bayanihan Association of America	\$1,000
Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center	\$1,000

Boston Little Saigon	\$1,000
Chinese Association of Western Mass	\$1,000
Community City Covenant Church	\$1,000
Friends of Indian Senior Citizens Organization	\$1,000
Greater Malden Asian American Community Coalition, Inc (GMAACC)	\$1,000
Hindi Manch	\$1,000
Hopkinton Cultural and Sports Club	\$2,000
India Association of Greater Boston (IAGB)	\$1,000
Khmer Exhibit Committee and the Amherst Historical Society	\$1,000
Lowell International Church (Massachusetts Baptist Multicultural Ministries)	\$1,000
Mountain River Taiko, Inc	\$1,000
Newton Cantonese School	\$1,000
Ryukyukoku Matsuri Daiko Massachusetts (RMD MA)	\$1,000
Sharon Chinese Association	\$1,000
SouLao'd Kitchen	\$1,000
Springfield Vietnamese Culture Association (SVCA)	\$1,000
TEAM Aid, Inc.	\$1,000
The Network for Social Justice	\$1,500
UMass Amherst AASA	\$1,000
Volunteering For Seniors	\$1,000
Wah Lum Kung Fu & Tai Chi Academy	\$500
Western New England University APALSA	\$1,000
Women Who Win	\$1,000
Yoma Myanmar Tea Cafe	\$1,000

Fall 2023 Grant Allocation

The Fall 2023 grant cycle marked a historic milestone for the Small Grants Fund, breaking records in both the number of applications received and the total funding awarded. We received 78 applications, collectively seeking over \$350,000 in support, which significantly exceeded our allocated budget of \$50,000. In response, the diligent Small Grants Subcommittee meticulously evaluated each application and thoughtfully recommended 23 exceptional organizations for a total of \$47,000 in grants. The Subcommittee's focus was on prioritizing applications with a long-term programmatic approach, emphasizing sustained impact over festival-centric initiatives. In November, the full Commission unanimously approved the roster of organizations recommended by the Subcommittee, and grants were disbursed to most recipients in January 2024.



Among the 23 funded organizations, financial support was allocated to a diverse range of initiatives, with the most substantial emphasis on arts and culture (52.2%), followed by program development (34.8%), events (8.7%), and support for small businesses (4.3%). Geographically, these organizations exhibited a broad reach, with 30.4% operating statewide, while 26.1% concentrated their efforts specifically within the Boston metropolitan area. Furthermore, 17.4% targeted the Northeast, 8.7% focused on Metrowest, and Central, Western, and Southeast regions each accounted for 4.3% of the allocations. Notably, nearly 35% of grantees served multiple counties within Massachusetts, reflecting a commitment to widespread community impact. Specific counties represented in the grantee pool included Hampden (4.3%), Bristol (8.7%), and Middlesex and Suffolk Counties (26.1% each).

The ethnic and racial focus of our grantee organizations was diverse and reflective of the rich tapestry of AAPI communities. 60.9% of grant recipients aimed to benefit multiple or all Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) ethnic/racial groups. Additionally, 8.7% directed their efforts towards the Southeast Asian community, while 4.3% and 13% respectively centered their initiatives on South Asian and Central Asian/East Asian communities. Within the realm of AAPI ethnicities, grantee organizations displayed specialized focus, with six organizations dedicated to the Chinese community, three to the Indian community, three to the Korean community, and two each to the Taiwanese, Vietnamese, Burmese, Nepali, Bhutanese, Afghan, and Cambodian communities. Moreover, single organizations each tailored their efforts to benefit the Kazakh, Malaysian, Singaporean, Filipino, Laotian, Thai, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, and Pacific Islander communities, specifically the Tongan, Samoan, and Hawaiian communities.

“We are thrilled and honored to have been selected for this grant, and we sincerely appreciate the support from the Commission. This grant will significantly contribute to the success of our project and the repairs for the Traditional Laos long boats.” – Lowell Southeast Asian Water Festival



[You can learn more about the Fall 2023 grantees here.](#)

Organization	Amount
Angkor Dance Troupe, Inc.	\$2,000
ARISE	\$2,000

Asian American Ballet Project	\$2,000
Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence (ATASK)	\$3,000
ASPIRE	\$2,500
Boston Korean Adoptees	\$1,000
Commonwealth Seminar	\$1,000
Greater Boston Chinese Golden Age Center, Inc.	\$2,000
Harvard Graduate School of Education: Let's Talk!	\$1,000
Lowell Southeast Asian Water Festival	\$2,000
Massachusetts Asian and Pacific-Islander (MAP) for Health	\$2,000
Massachusetts Baptist Multicultural Ministries, Inc. MBMM	\$2,000
Miclot Arts & Culture	\$2,500
Muslim Americans in Public Service (MAP)	\$2,000
National Asian Women's Association	\$2,000
New England Tongan Community (NETC)	\$5,000
OCA-APAA-NE	\$2,000
Philippine-American Mainstream Advocacy for Nonpartisan Associations, Inc. (PAMANA)	\$2,000
Rachel TonThat	\$1,000
Rayna Lo Art LLC	\$2,000
Vietnamese American Volunteer Association of Boston, Inc. VAVA of Boston	\$2,000
Volunteering for Seniors Inc.	\$2,000
Wah Lum Kung Fu + Tai Chi Academy	\$2,000

Communications



The AAPI Commission has prioritized expanding its reach through various platforms in recent years. The AAPIC has a presence on social media and other digital platforms, growing media relationships, and a focus on in-person outreach.

You can find the AAPI Commission on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [X](#) (formerly known as Twitter), all under the @AAPICommission username. Instagram is by far the most popular social media platform for the Commission, with nearly 150,000 engagements and 8,000 content interactions in 2023. Instagram had the most engagement during months of many events, especially May, which is AAPI Heritage Month. Facebook trends are similar to Instagram. LinkedIn tends to have the most engagement during times of hiring, which were January, September, and November/December. Engagement on X has steadily decreased in line with broader usage trends due to changes in ownership and policies of the platform.

Other digital communications for the Commission include the [newsletter](#) and the [website](#). The newsletter's frequency was increased from quarterly to monthly in April of 2023, and highlights Commission events, policy updates, and community opportunities. In total, the newsletter had almost 7,000 opens throughout 2023 and is sent to a list of 1,300+ recipients. The website, which will be revamped in 2024, includes resources for AAPI communities throughout Massachusetts, events and opportunities from the Commission, and information about

becoming involved with the Commission. In 2023, the website had over 50,000 pageviews and 16,000 users, 95.5% of which were new users.

The AAPI Commission also strengthened its media relationships in 2023. The highlight of the Commission in the media was being invited to [WCVB's CityLine](#) to celebrate the Commission's Unsung Heroes and AAPI Heritage Month. The Commission was also highlighted in the [Boston Globe](#) and [India New England](#), among other publications. The AAPI Commission will be furthering its outreach to news media in 2024 to further its advocacy efforts, especially surrounding legislation.

While digital media and the news media are critically important parts of the Commission's communications, the heart of outreach is often at in-person events. In addition to planning and running numerous events, the Commission frequently attends events throughout the Commonwealth to raise awareness and to help meet the needs of AAPI communities. The Commission is also in regular contact with many organizations, elected officials, and community leaders to ensure that all levels of government are hearing – and meeting – the needs of all AAPI residents of Massachusetts.

Budget Advocacy and Financial Overview

The AAPI Commission's financial resources primarily stem from Massachusetts State Government Appropriations, operating on a fiscal year cycle from July 1st to June 30th. Additionally, we maintain a nonprofit arm, primarily dedicated to funding our annual Unity Dinner.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, spanning from July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023, the AAPIC operated with a government appropriations budget of \$384,556. The predominant expenditures for the period between January 1 and June 30, 2023, included staff and intern salaries, as well as allocations for the Small Grants Fund. Throughout this timeframe, we maintained three full-time staff members: the Executive Director, Program & Research Director, and Communications & Outreach Manager. We also engaged up to six interns at different points, each contributing 10 hours per week. Notably, \$32,750 was allocated to the Small Grants Fund for the Spring 2023 funding cycle. The 2023 Unity Dinner is not funded using government appropriations.

As we transitioned into FY 2024, spanning from July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024, the AAPIC was fortunate to receive an increased government appropriations budget of \$582,753. Echoing the previous fiscal period, the major expenditures during this timeframe revolved around staff salaries and continued support for the Small Grants Fund. We expanded our full-time staff to four individuals. Beginning in November 2023, our team comprised the Executive Director, Policy & Communications Director, Program & Research Director, and Executive Communications Specialist. The Commission also approved the first round of FY 2024 Small Grants Fund awardees, amounting to a total of \$47,000. Furthermore, we are actively collaborating with the UMass Boston Institute for Asian American Studies to develop a comprehensive statewide survey of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. This project's funds are earmarked for early 2024 disbursement.

This increase in funding was made possible through the efforts of our staff, the Executive Committee, and the Asian Caucus who all underscored the importance of enhancing our budget to better serve the AAPI community in Massachusetts.

The AAPI Commission extends its heartfelt gratitude to the Asian Caucus, the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, the Treasury Department, and all state legislators for their unwavering support in augmenting the Commission's budget in 2023. As responsible stewards of public funding, we are committed to leveraging these resources to uplift and empower Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders across Massachusetts.

Looking Ahead: 2024

The Asian American and Pacific Islander Commission is proud of the work we accomplished in 2023 and is looking forward to an even more impactful 2024.

2023 marked a year of growth for the Commission, most notably with the creation of our first 3-year strategic plan and the expansion of our state appropriations. 2024 will be the first year of implementing the strategic plan, which means that we will be laying the groundwork for all of our work through the end of 2026. This means not only continuing our previous programs, but fostering stronger relationships and developing new ones with every part of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community in every corner of Massachusetts so that our work is responsive to their diverse needs and puts all people first.

With a community as diverse as Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Massachusetts, it is easy to feel disconnected – disconnected from other members of your community, from the government, from society as a whole. The Massachusetts AAPI Commission is looking forward to building more bridges, to strengthening bonds, and to uplifting every AAPI Bay Stater in 2024.

