

## Transcript for Webinar “Community Conversation: Asian American Groups Respond to Community Crisis and Build Power”

Host: Building Movement Project

Record Date: March 30, 2023 3:00pm ET

UyenThi Tran Myhre (BMP):

I'm opening the door.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Hello everyone. Thank you so much for joining us. We are going to get started in just a minute. In the meantime, while we're waiting, welcome you to introduce yourself in the chat if you'd like to do that.

We are going to go ahead and get started, everyone, because we have a lot to cover. My name is Deepa Iyer, she/her pronouns and I am with the Building Movement Project. We're a national nonprofit organization that catalyzes social change through research, resources, and relationships. And on behalf of the Building Movement Project and the Asian Law Caucus, welcome to our webinar today about the infrastructure needs, both short and long term, of Asian American groups that are on the front lines of crisis response. I'm going to turn it over to my colleague UyenThi to kick us off.

UyenThi Tran Myhre (BMP):

Hey everyone. Thanks so much, Deepa. My name's UyenThi Tran Myhre. I use she/her pronouns and I'm based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I serve as the movement building coordinator at BMP.

I want to share just a few notes about our space today. Thank you to Adaku and Jessica, our BMP colleagues who are supporting in the background. If you have any tech issues, please go ahead and send a direct message to BMP Tech support and you can use the Q&A function in Zoom to send your questions to our panelists. This webinar is being recorded and we'll share the recording along with additional resources next week.

Today's webinar is part of BMP's work to support movement leaders through solidarity narratives and practices. Over the past three years, we have been providing support to the Asian-American Leaders Table, a national network anchored by the Asian Law Caucus. This month we release Balancing Act, the report you'll hear about today. We're also joined by several Asian-American community leaders, including Aarti Kohli from the Asian Law Caucus, Phi Nguyen from the Asian-Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta, Ben Wang from Asian Health Services, and Sasha Wijeyeratne from CAAAV Organizing Asian communities.

As far as what to expect today, here is a roadmap. We're going to have a brief presentation to share key findings and recommendations from our report, two rounds of conversation with our panelists, and we'll close out for time with time for Q&A. We hope that at the close of this session you'll have a better understanding of the needs facing Asian American groups at this time, that you'll have a tool to help set up rapid response ecosystems, and that you are better equipped to support and resource Asian American groups in this time and for the future.

We want to take a moment at the outset to acknowledge that this report in today's conversation are happening during a time of ongoing grief and loss in Asian American communities. We began the year with the lunar New Year shootings in Monterey Park and Half Moon Bay. March 16th marked the two-year anniversary of Atlanta Spa shootings. And April 15th will mark two years since the mass shooting at the FedEx facility in Indianapolis. As we worked on this project with the Asian Law Caucus during such a heavy time, two phrases that have been helpful for Deepa and myself are a Vietnamese saying that means divide our sorrow, chia buon, and chardi kala, a Sikh saying that means hope and optimism in the midst of difficulty. We offer to you the theme of balancing sorrow through community and solidarity as we move into our conversation today.

At BMP, we are looking at the infrastructure needs of organizations weathering different crises around the country at this time. It's clear that Asian American groups have been tending to multiple crises during the pandemic. In fact, between March 2020 and March 2022, Stop AAPI Hate reported nearly

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11,500 incidents. The majority of which involved harassment such as verbal or written hate speech or inappropriate gestures. Two in five reported incidents took place on streets, sidewalks, or at parks. And one in 10 incidents occurred on public transit. It's important to recognize that these individual acts of anti-Asian violence do not take place in a vacuum. They're connected to systemic injustices related to class, gender and gender identity, immigration status and more. At both the state and federal level, groups are also responding to policies targeting Asian Americans from ongoing deportations and profiling efforts to bills such as the one in Texas that would bar people from four countries, including China, from purchasing property in the state.

Asian American organizations around the country have responded to this context through organizing, base building, advocacy and direct services. To better understand the infrastructure needs of these organizations, BMP conducted in-depth interviews with leaders who responded to acts of targeted violence over the past three years in Philadelphia, Indianapolis, Atlanta, New York, Oakland, and the Bay Area. The recommendations from these interviews combined with our research led to the development of our report, Balancing Act, which we released this month in partnership with the Asian Law Caucus. In it, you'll find themes, recommendations and a toolkit for creating a rapid response ecosystem.

The overarching theme of our report is Asian American leaders and organizations are engaged in a precarious balancing act between meeting crisis related needs and building for the future. In other words, Asian American groups are creating and implementing crisis response mechanisms for the short term to meet the needs of victims, survivors, and families while simultaneously addressing long-standing systemic inequities, building community power and practicing solidarity. In order for Asian American groups to build sustainable and durable organizations, they require abundant and tailored resources, partnerships and investments. How are Asian American groups engaged in this balancing act? What concrete recommendations do Asian American leaders have for partner groups and funders? We're going to explore all of this next with our community partners. I'd like to invite my colleague, Deepa Iyer, senior director of strategic initiatives at BMP, to share findings from our report and moderate the community conversation.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Thank you so much, UyenThi, and it's great to see everyone here. Appreciate all of the comments in the chat. Keep them coming as well.

I wanted to start by providing some key findings from Balancing Act report in partnership with the Asian Law Caucus. And at the outset I think it's important to acknowledge that it's no longer a matter of if but when a crisis will occur in this country and to Asian American communities and other marginalized communities. It's also important to acknowledge that over the years, we've all developed skills and partnerships over the course of tending to crisis. So how do we formalize and buttress these skills and partnerships into rapid response infrastructure?

Put another away. Here's a quote from Satjeet Kaur who was the executive director of the Sikh Coalition during the shooting at the Indianapolis FedEx facility. She asked, "When a crisis happens, what are the things that people on your team should be responsible for thinking through?" And that's the starting point for our first set of recommendations drawn from the experiences of community leaders who have been on the front lines of rapid response in the Asian American community over the past three years.

So what we learned from community leaders is that effective rapid response requires effective infrastructure, and that includes the right roles and practices combined with advanced planning and coordination. So one of the resources that you'll find in our report is a new toolkit called Rapid Response in Real Time, which provides eight approaches for navigating the first 48 hours after a community crisis,

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often the most important hours that you can see on this slide and that we will be dropping into the chat for you to take a look at as well.

This toolkit also includes a list of the types of roles that it would be important for us to build infrastructure for rapid response around. Those roles include crisis coordinators who coordinate the entire Robert response ecosystem as well as victim advocates, trained interpreters, mental health counselors and community healers, pro bono lawyers, emergency fund administrators, and liaisons with media, government and community. You'll find a list of these roles as well as the types of activities that they could engage in in our report in depth.

We also share some promising practices that we heard for rapid response, and I want to quickly just highlight them here. It's important groups told us to consider who plays what role in a rapid response ecosystem to consider and center the needs of affected community members and to especially look at their attitudes and experiences with law enforcement and the legal system. It's also important to consider how community groups can create spaces for healing and what kinds of statements that they should be putting out to the media and to the community and when, also how they should raise and allocate funds.

So I want to dig into this a little bit more and talk a little bit more about these recommendations, which obviously apply not just to Asian American groups, but to any organization that is in a frontline response role. So I'd love to ask our panelists to come on camera now for our first round of conversation, which is about the rapid response needs that organizations have to consider during this time. And as we move into the conversation, I really want to encourage and invite folks to share information and ideas and questions in the chat as well.

All right, so the first question that I have that I'm going to ask is to Aarti Kohli who's been our long-term partner in this work. She's the executive director of the Asian Law Caucus, which has been helping the Asian American Leaders' table since March of 2020. And Aarti, you've been doing that, but you also were on the ground in Half Moon Bay after the shooting earlier this year. So can you share with us two to three approaches and practices that were utilized during rapid response efforts there that the rest of us can learn from?

Aarti Kohli (Asian Law Caucus):

Yeah, absolutely. And I just want to start by thanking you, the Building Movement Project, and everyone here who we've partnered with over the years. So I think Half Moon Bay is interesting because we're based, Asian Law Caucus, is in San Francisco and Oakland, and if you know the geography of Northern California, Half Moon Bay is about an hour away. I think the perception for people in California is that we have a lot of resources, we have a lot of API organizations, but actually in Half Moon Bay there are no API organizations. So it was heartbreaking because I was sending rapid response information to our partners in Los Angeles when the Monterey Park shooting had happened, and the next day I was grappling with Half Moon Bay. One of the first things that we were trying to figure out was to get information. The information was coming from the media that there were Chinese farm workers who had been killed and we didn't know if there was anyone there to support those communities.

One of the key things that came out of that moment was that when I was doing outreach to the two nonprofits that I had heard of in Half Moon Bay, I needed someone to vouch for me. They were being inundated with people asking questions, reporters, all kinds of folks saying they wanted to help. And so I actually leaned into other relationships. I asked a funder, "Can you let them know that we are here, we're legitimate, we want to actually support and we have language skills if they need language skills," which in the end did end up being a need.

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So that piece of trust is so essential. And if you don't have it ahead of time, you've got to kind of build it in very short order. Initially, everything is very chaotic. We weren't even getting details on victims on all kinds of information, and I had a whole host of partners in the Bay Area who wanted to help too. So that was the Chinese Progressive Association, CAA, a whole bunch of folks, funders. And so we got together and actually aligned and realized we needed coordination on our end. And so we were able to find someone who had capacity, and this person became our crisis coordinator. It was interesting because the roles that you just mentioned in the introduction, we play a community lawyering role, but we are not going to be providing mental health support, but victims needed that. So the crisis coordinator actually was at one organization but then worked across multiple organizations. So no one organization is going to be able to provide everything for everyone.

The other quick thing is that on the other side when we were dealing with government, we were dealing with city, county, state, and the federal government. At one point, I talked to people at every single level. It became very clear that they were not talking to each other. And so while we had a coordinator, they didn't. And we, at one point, asked them to do that because it's overwhelming just for the victims, but for anybody who's actually trying to do the work, we were not responsible for coordinating government. And I see I'm almost out of time.

I think the last point I will make is that it's really important when you're not from the local geography to enter with a lot of humility. You don't know what you don't know. You don't know people's political agendas. And when crisis happens, I will tell you, people have political agendas. It's important to tread very softly to learn from the people on the ground. I mean, the first thing I told the partners on the ground that I spoke with is like, "I want to help and I want to understand what you need."

I know I'm at time, so I'll just end there. Oh, I have a few more. Okay. Yeah, so I would say what I worry about is when these incidents happen in locations where you don't have infrastructure and they're remote, they're rural, and so we should also be thinking about how can our infrastructure, whatever we're building at our individual organizations or in our networks, be expansive.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Right. Mm-hmm.

Aarti Kohli (Asian Law Caucus):

Yeah.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Thank you. Thank you so much Aarti, and thank you for pulling out those three pieces around the overarching crisis coordination need, how government did not have that, and also about having humility when you're walking into new communities. So thank you so much for sharing that. And hopefully the toolkit that we pull together can be a starting point for organizations as well to kind of figure out what this looks like at the outset instead of post-crisis.

So I want to next bring in Ben Wang from Asian Health Services and ask you a question about rapid response as well. So we know that you all have pivoted in response to the community needs in the Bay Area. I wanted to really understand, because there are a lot of organizations on this webinar, the types of decisions that you all had to make in order to respond to community needs in an effective way. What kinds of programs did you start and how did you come to those decisions?

Ben Wang (AHS):

Yeah, thank you Deepa and good afternoon to everybody attending here today. So Asian Health Services is a community health center based in Oakland, Chinatown, serving about 50,000 patients throughout Alameda County, primarily low income, limited English proficient, Asian immigrants and refugees.

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In 2021, AHS formed a community healing unit, which was in direct response to a series of experiences of crime and violence directly experienced by AHS patients as well as staff and community members. And so the premise was really to try to provide immediate support from a health and healing lens. So the three main components that were developed include access to mental health counseling and support, systems navigation including access to different financial assistance programs, and then a complimentary alternative healing component that now includes a yoga class and Cantonese and access to acupuncture services, access to massage therapy services. We also have a food delivery program in partnership with Uber where we send deliveries of food and groceries to people, especially those who are even more isolated after experiencing different types of violence.

Our program was also designed from the early stage to figure out how to reduce barriers and so how to have easier access to care and to getting mental health support. And so this was done through a couple ways. For one, for a typical AHS patient, they would have to go through the patient registration process to fill out applications to go through health insurance screenings and a number of different paperwork and application process. With the community healing unit, we decided to bypass that. And so you do not need to be a patient at our organization in order to receive care in this specific program. So that was one intentional choice. We also set up a dedicated phone line for people to call and speak to someone immediately during our open hours.

Another key decision I'll say is that we did open it up to serving individuals who experienced a range of different types of violence. And so of course from a law enforcement's perspective, there's a very strict definition of what is a hate crime, what is a hate incident, what doesn't count as that? But what we had seen on the ground was that our community members are really experiencing a range of different types of violence ranging from robberies and assaults to homicides to gender-based violence, intimate partner violence. And through all of these different types of experiences, there can be elements. And of course there are elements of racism, of patriarchy. It doesn't mean that all of those are classified from a law enforcement perspective as a hate crime or hate incident. But because we had seen so many of our clients really experiencing forms of racial trauma, we wanted to have an approach of opening up access to care for-

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

30 seconds.

Ben Wang (AHS):

30 seconds. Okay. To care for a wider range of types of client needs. The last thing I'll say is that I think through this, the mental health and trying to approach the best we can from a victim-centered approach, from a healing approach, and I do think that community health, mental health and healing centered approach is a very helpful not only for the direct services, but a helpful framing to broaden our understanding of these complex issues related to hate as well as violence and healing for our communities.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Thank you so much, Ben, for giving us the inside look at what were the decisions you had to make to expand the community you worked with and the types of programs you pull together, but also how that is connected to the broader approach around healing and restorative justice that we're going to hear a little bit about from Phi next as well. So thank you for that. And more information about what Ben is talking about can be found in our report as well, so you could kind of follow the different types of programs that they initiated as a result. Thank you.

I'm going to ask Phi now if you could join us. Phi, I'm so glad that you're here. So the question that we have for you is first and foremost, we wanted to acknowledge that just a few weeks ago in Atlanta,

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community members marked the two-year anniversary of the spa shootings there. In the immediate aftermath, we know that your organization and many others in Atlanta had to quickly build infrastructure that maybe didn't exist beforehand in order to respond. So as you look back over the past two years, can you share with us one or two lessons learned when it came to your rapid response efforts particularly as they relate to this approach and, I think what everyone agrees with, the importance of centering affected community members? Particularly in the report you shared some considerations related to raising and allocating funds or speaking out to media that involved a Balancing Act. So how did you all move through those dynamics?

Phi Nguyen (AAAJ-Atlanta):

Well, first of all, thanks for having me here. Hi everyone. Thanks for joining us. Well, I don't want to be too on the nose, but I do think centering the needs of those who are most directly impacted is a balancing act. I think that we as an organization were very grounded and steadfast, I would say, in our commitment to centering the survivors and the victim's families. But there were times throughout that period when upholding that value came into tension with some of other organizational values and priorities.

I think a salient example in our case and also in a lot of other situations that we're talking about here today is that Advancing Justice-Atlanta as an organization does not believe in or advocate for investment in carceral systems and solutions as a way to build community safety. But very often and very understandably for those who are directly impacted, the criminal legal system is really often the only place that they feel like they can get some measure of accountability or justice when they or a loved one is harmed or experiences violence.

So even if you are a person or an organization that is rooted in abolitionist principles, I think it's very important to find a way to also hold space for calls for increased policing, for hate crimes legislation, for enhanced criminal penalties especially when some of those calls are coming from those who are most directly impacted. And holding space looks different ways, but I think one way to hold space is to find a way to be in loving disagreement with people.

And then I think holding space, and this is something that we grappled with in the aftermath of the spa shootings, is to know when to add your voice to the dialogue and maybe when it's appropriate to take a step back and not to maybe use every opportunity to advance your position on an issue. I think that that came up for us certainly when there was an announcement about one of the prosecutors seeking the death penalty, which we as an organization don't support, but we understood that that was something that a lot of our community was really glad about and happy about. And so there we decided to not come out swinging and say something very directly about our opposition to the death penalty. So that's just one example.

I think another very concrete lesson learned that I'd like to uplift is something that I think we as an organization learn the hard way, which is administering a victim's fund is a much, much more complex and intricate process than we understood, and that I think most people realize. Raising money, I think, in the aftermath of a crisis is the easy and straightforward part. But after that, there are so many other considerations that make the process really tricky. I think, one, is at the outset there's the question of how you define victim. Is a victim limited to a person who experienced a physical injury? Or do you want to define victim much more broadly to perhaps include people who were at the scene but who were not physically harmed?

We also had to navigate really tricky dynamics around who could and who should perhaps receive the funds. So what we discovered in working closely with the families, that there were some conflicts or legal hurdles including things like immigration status that could affect who could and who should receive

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funding. And those things were certainly not obvious to us at the outset. It's something that we sort of had to learn on the fly.

I think one last thing, if I have time, and I think that Ben uplifted this earlier, but I think one thing is that we really do need support for frontline responders. I think our staff really absorbed a lot of secondhand trauma from working on the front lines, and I think it's really important that we make sure that we're taking care of the caretakers.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Thank you so much, Phi. I wrote down so much of what you shared, in particular, lifting up being in loving disagreement, which I think we'll probably touch upon with Sasha as well. And also kind of how you had to move through a criteria of questions within your organization to decide when and how to speak out. And then finally, this piece around healing, which we heard time and again and it's reflected in the report for not only community but also for staff as well in volunteers. So thank you and thank you for all that you do in Atlanta and beyond.

I want to again encourage folks to lift up questions or send your love to these amazing folks who have been among many others on the front lines of crisis response. And with that, I'm going to ask Sasha to come on. So Sasha's with CAAAV in New York City. Sasha, welcome. When we interviewed you for the report, you shared with us a lot of wisdom. One of the things that you said, I'm just going to read your quote, is, "Trying to respond to individual acts of anti-Asian violence is just like running around trying to put out a fire with no strategy. You just end up really burned out and having not actually changed the conditions at all." So clearly as we've heard, it's important to center the needs of victims, survivors, and community members. But why is it also important to have a systems-wide approach?

Sasha Wijeyeratne (CAA AV):

Yeah. Hi folks. Thank you so much for having me. I guess to start, I do want to be clear that it is really important to do the rapid response work in the wake of crisis, and I really appreciate what everybody shared. So this isn't to contradict that at all, but I think there are some lessons in CAAAV's history.

So CAAAV was started in a moment very similar to this one, but that moment was 37 years ago. The moment of violence that really people remember as marking that moment was the murder of Vincent Chin. Over time, CAAAV did come to this conclusion decades ago that actually we were burning ourselves out by addressing each individual instance of violence, of anti-Asian violence, of hate violence as an individual act, and that we actually needed to address more of the systemic issues that were facing our communities. And that meant our communities as Asian immigrants, but also our communities as working class.

And so there were many iterations of what it looked like to do that work and over time have landed at organizing around housing. We know that Asian immigrants are in the frontline, communities of gentrification. In New York City, there are multiple neighborhoods that are really the one, the places that developers see as their next cash cow, and those are the places where our people live. And so we began organizing there knowing that actually the violence people are experiencing on a day to day basis is also really grounded in where they live and in what these neighborhoods represent in the imagination of New York. And even within housing, we face this question, right?

So often, every day actually, people walk into our office and say, "I have this really urgent need that's happening in my individual home or my individual building, and it's devastating." One of the absolute hardest things organizers have to do is actually know when they have to say no to addressing that individual issue in order to actually take on what's driving gentrification, what's driving disinvestment,

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what's driving displacement in the neighborhood as a whole. It's one of the hardest things that we have to do in this work. And there there's reason for that.

And so I distinctly remember asking a very seasoned housing organizer in New York like, "How do you do this? How do you possibly say no? How do you possibly focus on the bigger picture when the levels of crises are so high?" And their answer was a very simple question, which was, "Okay, by the end of this year, do you want to say that you stopped 10 evictions or do you want to say that you stopped 200?" And that that's actually the question. And so there are moments where we absolutely have to respond to the individual crisis. And there are organizations that are really set up to do some of the immediate and the rapid response work. And again, thinking about housing, people will get displaced again and again and again until there is nobody left if we don't actually take on the things that are driving that displacement.

And so that means we can't always address the issue that it's happening in this one building or this one home or for this one person, that we actually have to take on targets that are causing those issues to happen. So that means taking on some of the biggest landlords in the city. That means taking on developers themselves, the people who are trying to build giant luxury apartment buildings that then drive our people out. But it does mean making really hard choices. Yeah, and I can give some examples of specific campaigns-

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Thank you.

Sasha Wijeyeratne (CAA AV):

... if that's helpful. I'm not sure if I have time.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

You've got a minute left.

Sasha Wijeyeratne (CAA AV):

Great.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

So if you want to go ahead, yes.

Sasha Wijeyeratne (CAA AV):

Yeah, so I can share a specific example of that, is that we just started organizing in Astoria. We've been here for about a year. Just as we began building a base here, one of the biggest developers in the city, multiple of the biggest developers in the city known for building massive projects in Manhattan, decided to build a \$2 billion development here. And this is just as we were starting. And so it's actually, I think, extra hard to say no to some of the more immediate repair and support requests when you're brand new in a neighborhood, when you don't have decades of trust to lean back on.

And so it actually meant having to say no to some of those individual requests in order to take on this massive billionaire developer. What that meant is that we actually were able to organize people across the neighborhood, both our own members, but also coalition members and build a real fighting force that was able to make a real dent in what that developer was able to do. It didn't fully stop them, but it significantly reduced the harm that developer would cause that will also then be able to fight every single threat that comes into our neighborhood in the future.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Thank you so much, Sasha, for doing that work and also lifting up. I think you said it time and again that it isn't easy. And I think that's why we call the report Balancing Act because it's a balancing act between individual and systemic responses, and it's also a balancing act between long-term and short-term, right?



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Which is why the infrastructure has to span both and not just be focused on one. And oh, wow, it is your birthday. Happy birthday, Sasha. You're getting some love in the chat. Yay.

Sasha Wijeyeratne (CAAAPV):

Thank you.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

All right. And so thank you to all four of you for giving us a sense of what are some of the short-term rapid response needs and also for lifting up a lot of the questions and decisions that your organizations have had to make, and so whether that means how you come into spaces or what it means to create new programs or what it means to center community needs and have that loving disagreement that Phi mentioned. A lot of this you will find again in the report when we talk about short-term infrastructure.

So I want to come back to this graphic again before we have a conversation on long-term infrastructure. What we wanted to highlight here is we just heard about one part of this, right? The balancing act of meeting crisis response. But at the same time, there's the balancing act of obviously building community power. So the other part that you'll find in the report from BMP and Asian Law Caucus is that groups are balancing and keeping an eye on the long-term, and yet it can oftentimes be next to impossible to balance crisis response with the programs and activities and relationships that take longer to build.

So here are some of the needs that we heard around long-term infrastructure. So these include, and I think Phi actually brought this up already, thinking of not only crisis response, but also crisis recovery and healing, including meeting the needs of staff who play frontline responder roles. We also heard about the importance of developing the capacity of organizations to co-learn and collaborate together. So one key theme that came up again and again in our interviews was this desire for idea and strategy exchanges between people in all parts of the country to understand how to do this work and maintain this balancing act.

We also heard about the importance of solidarity practice. So time and again, community leaders shared that they needed the resources and partnerships and time to build relationships within Asian communities and across communities of color. One interesting approach that was lifted up in our interviews from the Asian American Federation was the importance of curating informal opportunities and spaces for members of different communities at the neighborhood level to learn from each other, not just at the community organizational level. Groups also mentioned the need for long-term infrastructure to strengthen community power and base building as Sasha just talked about, particularly with young people. And then finally, the importance of supporting durable and diverse ecosystems emerged because a few organizations simply can't meet the plethora of community needs.

So we're going to dig into these a little bit more with our community partners, and you'll keep finding the link in our chat to the report. If you hadn't had a chance to take a look at it, please go ahead and download it, share it, read it, et cetera. So let's talk now about some of the long-term infrastructure needs. And I want to start with Ben first and ask you, Ben, a little bit around what Asian Health Services is thinking about when it comes to the long-term needs. What is it that you all need to ensure that you're not in a cycle of rapid response or that the community isn't either?

Ben Wang (AHS):

Yeah. Thanks, Deepa. I mean, I think obviously in terms of funding, in order to continue to expand to sustain this type of work, so many organizations really need long-term multi-year commitments and buy-in from a diverse range of funders. There's been an influx of funds and resources both from for AHS both from government sources including through the state of California due to advocacy and pressure from community groups and the AAPI equity budget, which resulted in a historic investment and community-

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based solutions to address hate and violence. But I think so often we've experienced that these types of issue areas may only be paid attention for a very brief moment in time.

And so I think right now we're trying to strategize and think through how do we sustain some of the successful components we're documenting and trying to highlight these are effective solutions. I think the framing around this balancing act is really appropriate because I think there is both an immediate impact. And oftentimes we hear from our community members that there is a huge desire for immediate responses, and they understand that there's root causes and there's systemic change, but there's a desire for this concrete kind of direct action, rapid response. And I think that's an element. And then it's also not separated from the longer term systemic change. I think there's components of leadership development and empowerment and education that is so intertwined with the direct services component as well.

I think just a couple areas for our programs we're trying to think through and strategize is around increasing mental health access and quality mental health access overall. And so besides in addition to mental health access for survivors of hate and violence, there is a great need for better mental health access for all.

And just as one example, I think that there's been a lot of data and research to show that one of the most effective ways to reduce crime is to also increase mental health access resources and support for justice-involved individuals. And so many justice-involved individuals of course are also victims in their lives as well. And so increasing access to community-based resources for formerly incarcerated individuals, providing employment and mental health access actually is some of the best data to reduce violence more holistically. I think that so many of the community-based interventions and programs, including community ambassador programs, senior escort programs, and then the mental health resources, those are some very concrete examples that really need sustainability. And there's ways that AHS is trying to work with our county public health department, other city, county, and state partnerships.

And then the last thing, if I have time, I do think in some of the broader organizing and advocacy, I feel like there is a great opportunity to reframe a bit the anti-Asian hate frame that is very focused on this hate crime definition, but to actually broaden our understanding that violence that impacts all communities and all marginalized communities, there is a lot of connection that anti hate work can be connected to violence prevention work that's done in so many other marginalized communities. So I see that as an opportunity to broaden the framing to strengthen this type of advocacy.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Thank you so much, Ben. Thanks for pointing out at the outset that crisis response often gets a lot of funding, but then what happens afterwards? And then naming some of the areas where long-term infrastructure needs to get built, especially around mental health and this reframing that you spoke about as well. So appreciate all the work that you do.

I want to actually now bring our birthday person back, Sasha. I love this because you know we're all in community together because people are responding to you here. Okay. And thanks for spending your birthday with us.

Sasha Wijeyeratne (CAA AV):

Of course.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

I want to talk a little bit about building community power, which you alluded to already and talked about. But again, in our report, quoting you again, you said, "Political education doesn't mean everyone's on

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the same page. It's a space of constant contestation. It is a space of constant education." I think this quote is so helpful when we think about long-term base building, the long-term infrastructure, because it reminds us that we shouldn't expect uniformity and consensus in our communities. So how do we build in patience, time, even difficult conversations with our communities so that we can still be in relationship with people even when they aren't exactly on the same page as where our organizations might want them to be?

Sasha Wijeyeratne (CAA AV):

Yes. That's a great question, and it's something that we struggle with all the time. And so again, we're a working class, we're a base building organization, and that means that people come into CAA AV with all kinds of backgrounds and with all kinds of politics. And so we're clear about who we are and we're clear about what we do, but we welcome anybody who wants to come in and who's willing to struggle and to grow. That's very different than... There are many organizations I've been part of that are more activist organizations that are really important, do critical work, where the expectation is that you come in with a particular politic. It gives you a different starting place, it lets you move a lot faster. It's important to have those spaces and organizations. And what we're doing is something different.

And so it does mean slowing down. It does mean being willing to have the conversations that feel painful, that feel offensive sometimes, right? It means actually being able to struggle with people and say, "Okay, you've had this particular lived experience and you now live in the US in which racism, anti-blackness, every other kind of ism is in the water we're drinking, in the air we're breathing. It's built into the foundation of this country." And so of course, there are going to be people who have internalized and hold those beliefs.

And so our job is to actually figure out how can we then challenge. How can challenge those? And I think what we found is that it really has to be a mix. You can't just challenge it ideologically, but it can't just be based on people's experiences. And so you actually have to find the blend. Find the entry point. What's the racism that our people have experienced? What are the ways that our people have felt, the way that this country works, have felt it in their lives, have felt it in their bones? And how do we use that as an entry point to begin talking about things broader than just ourselves?

And so having that grounded in ourselves and in our bodies, still ideologically clear. And it is a balancing act with those, to be on theme of the report, that you're constantly trying to weave and constantly trying to move people. And the way that people move is not linear. And so some of it is through one-on-one conversation and really deeply investing in people who are or clearly have the potential to be leaders and taking the time to struggle with people over their own experiences, over the way they see the world, over things that are often very, very deeply held. And also being able to have that but not shying away from hard conversations in a group.

Some of these moments of violence, of crisis have actually been openings to have conversations with our people. So for example, when George Floyd was murdered, there was a big opening to be able to actually talk with members about policing. Some of the ways we could enter that is asking members to think about what they actually rely for police on, right? If your wages are being stolen at work, do you call the police? Of course not. That's not what the police are set up to do. They're not going to get your wages back, right? If you're locked out of your apartment, do you think the police will actually help you get in? Of course not. At least not without a lot of other advocacy, right? Because they're actually going to defend your landlord.

And so using these moments of crisis to actually begin to dive deeper into conversations that are just being opened, I think we've found has been really successful. There's also a whole other conversation about funding and being able to make clear that there's a cost. When you fund the NYPD at \$6 billion,

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what actually doesn't get funded? Is it the repair that could be made to your apartment in public housing? Yes, actually that's the same bucket of money. But I think it does... Oh, sorry, go ahead.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

No, no, please finish your thought.

Sasha Wijeyeratne (CAA AV):

I was going to say I think it does require a lot of patience and a lot of support and a lot of creativity in how we actually have these conversations sometimes over and over again with our people. And also a lot of support for the people holding it, right? A space for organizers to actually release and debrief and let go of what they're then taking on and holding so that they actually also have the support to do this hard thing again and again and again without feeling like they're just hitting a wall.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Thanks so much, Sasha. I think as you were speaking, I wrote down some of the things around one-on-one conversations and opportunities for dialogue. It strikes me that a lot of that takes a lot of time and it's not something that is going to happen immediately. And so when we're thinking about infrastructure, it's so important to build in and support infrastructure for base building groups like yours and others around the country that are doing that hard work of being in dialogue with folks and not kind of disposing of folks, but actually having those hard conversations around all of these issues while you are also doing campaigns. So thank you for making that really clear for us.

Sasha Wijeyeratne (CAA AV):

Can I add one more thing?

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Mm-hmm.

Sasha Wijeyeratne (CAA AV):

Yes, both you have to build it in to know that there needs to be time in your campaigns in order to actually have these slow and steady conversations. I think around funding, sometimes the deliverables for funding are so specific and such a steady progression that they don't actually leave time for certain parts of the work to stall so other parts of the work can deepen. So I think also funding the way that organizations actually work means expecting a little bit less, and then you actually end up getting more. You end up getting the things that maybe surprise you if you're not making people hit very particular metrics at very particular times that may not be organic to how their work is actually moving.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Right. Brilliant. Yes, that the metrics have to actually be aligned with how communities are moving and not other ways. Okay, thank you. All right. I feel like I could talk to each of you for hours and I'm sure everyone would want to hear you all for hours, but we're going to keep going and we're going to bring Phi in.

So Phi, again from Advancing Justice-Atlanta. So Phi, I know that one of the ways in which you all are really grounded in your values is around solidarity. We heard time and again from interviews with community leaders that are practicing solidarity, during, and between, and after crisis is an absolutely vital strategy. So could you share with us a couple of examples of solidarity practice that you all have engaged in over the past two years? And also what kind of resources do you need from philanthropy and from partnerships in order to practice transformative solidarity?

Phi Nguyen (AAAJ-Atlanta):

Thanks, Deepa. Thanks for the question. I think this is a theme that others have already touched upon too, but one thing that we wanted to be really intentional and thoughtful about in the aftermath of the

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shootings was our framework. We wanted to approach our messaging from the framework of weaving in connections to other communities and finding ways to uplift the ways that other communities have also been impacted by white supremacist violence. I think that was particularly important to us because as others have named, anti-Blackness is an issue within the Asian American community and we wanted to make sure that we were addressing that as well. And so that was really important to us certainly in the initial statement that we put out after the spa shootings.

And then it was also really important to us at the one-year mark when we marked the one year anniversary by holding a remembrance for our community and coming together to grieve. We wanted to make sure at that stage we were also continuing to have calls for solidarity and bringing in leaders from the Black community. We invited in a leader from the Sikh community to speak as well. And so just continuing to find those opportunities whenever possible to weave in connections between different communities.

I also wanted to uplift a couple of examples of solidarity that I think that we engaged in and that other communities engaged in with us in the aftermath of the shootings. One example is that I talked about this earlier in terms of trying to balance our positions on carceral solutions and those principles against centering the needs of directly impacted folks and making space for different opinions.

And so one of the things I did was I called a colleague of mine, a Black woman who worked at the Southern Center for Human Rights. She was the former public policy director, and they do a lot of work around the criminal legal system. And so I called her and I talked to her about her experience on navigating that issue and saying, "How do you it? How do you both hold steadfast to your values as an organization and the work that you do around the criminal legal system with holding space for family members and other community members who do want to use the criminal legal system for accountability?" She walked me through their analysis and the way that they handled that. It was reciprocal because maybe about a month later when our DA did announce that she was going to pursue the death penalty in the small shooting case, Marissa called me back and she asked for my input. She wanted to know how to speak out against the death penalty while still being sensitive to any differing viewpoints within the Asian American community, especially among those who were most directly impacted.

And so it was just sort of this reciprocal exchange between us. I think that the reason why we were able to have that conversation is because we've been in community with each other between crises, right? I don't think that conversation would've happened if we weren't already in relationship in community with each other, which is why I think that it is really important to have those relationships and those touchpoints in between crises as well. And I think-

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Can I ask you to wrap up?

Phi Nguyen (AAAJ-Atlanta):

Yeah. I wanted to get to the funding question. And so I do think that one way to help facilitate solidarity between community member communities is by facilitating those co-learning spaces that you mentioned earlier so that we can be in community with each other, we can specifically learn from each other, and we can just build relationships with each other.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Yeah, and that came up time and again, that the importance of building these relationships before you need them. And the only way to do that is by being in strategy and relationship building spaces together for the long term. Thank you, Phi.

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So we're nearing the end of our conversation with our panelists, but that means we also want to lift up some of your questions. And I also want to encourage our panelists to look at the chat because there are some specific questions that you might be able to answer that we can bring up in the big group. So if you see those, please go ahead and respond.

So I want to ask, finally, I want to bring Aarti back in. Aarti, I really want to ask you this question that I think you actually said earlier when you spoke, but that keeps coming up around the importance of supporting a diverse ecosystem of organizations that can play different roles in advancing shared values. You've been seeing a lot of these new groups perhaps emerge over the past few years. Many have joined the table because it's been a great place to share and learn and exchange information. Can you share a little bit about what is needed to support this diverse ecosystem of Asian American organizations both in the short and the long term?

Aarti Kohli (Asian Law Caucus):

Yeah, absolutely. I will just say I've spent a lot of my career in the immigrant justice movement and came to work at Asian Law Caucus eight years ago. We are the first Pan-Asian civil rights org in the country. I was pretty shocked at the lack of just infrastructure and resources, not just for our organization, but the entire API movement space. It's just decades of underinvestment. Now's not the time to explore why. But what's really clear to me now is that that's not sustainable, especially given the demographic shifts of our community. We're going to be 10% of the population in a majority/minority country. We're the most rapidly growing ethnic group in the country.

And so I already see what's happening, which is our communities are being courted by anti-democratic forces. And you've got these organizations on the ground, all of our partners who spoke today and many others who are trying to respond and be proactive with just very limited resources. So the table came about because... And I want to thank Deepa because she was pivotal in helping found the table in 2020. I'm South Asian, I saw the rhetoric Kung flu, I saw the anecdotal evidence of what was happening to particularly East Asian communities, and I just knew it's going to get worse before it was going to get better. And when I talked to Deepa about should we gather people and she said yes, and I talked to a bunch of other leaders and they said, "Yeah, we should come together and have a space to learn from each other to strategize," it's now become this table with over 70 organizational members and a place where we see organizations like OPAWL, which is the Ohio Progressive Asian Women's Leadership Organization, SRU for Solidarity, which provides healing circles.

And so you have organizers, you've got movement lawyers, you've got policy people, you've got folks who are looking at mental health. It is a diverse ecosystem, and that's exactly what we need. One of the challenges, I think Ben pointed and then others pointed to this, which is that we don't have enough of a pipeline. And so part of what we're also trying to do is support each other's leadership and bring more leaders into the movement space. That's something that we've been really fortunate. I know that Sebastian shared from the Open Society Foundation, and they gave us an initial grant for the table where we were able to sub-grant to a lot of the partners, the small partners. I'm talking organizations with one or two staff. Many of those people have told me that those grants were really pivotal in helping them get more established.

I think this is one of the challenges, which is that particularly for larger funders, they have a hard time giving resources to smaller organizations. And so how do we do that? How do we help facilitate that? That's something that's really important because in our community we don't have a lot of large organizations. And so this is something that I think we've going to have to work with philanthropy to solve. I think no matter what issue funders may be interested in, whether it's criminal legal reform, whether it's healing, whether it's racial equity, if our communities are not at the table, we're not going to

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be able to have the social change that we need, right? It's really acute at this moment, and I'm really concerned about 2024. I think with the elections coming, the rhetoric against China is really ramping up. The house has a special committee on China. You will see the impacts of that rhetoric on the ground with our communities.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Right. Thank you. Thank you, Aarti. It's sobering, but it's also true. And really appreciate how you have been able to lead this table to provide some of those resources, whether it's subgrants or also bringing in folks who do healing, which we keep hearing and know is so important, as well as I see in the chat even narrative change that Renee is putting in. Also such an important part of doing all of this work. So we're almost at close. We are going to take some questions before we close out. So I'm going to ask UyenThi if there is a question that you are seeing in the chat or in the questions that you want to lift up and we'll see who might be able to answer it.

UyenThi Tran Myhre (BMP):

Yeah, thanks so much, Deepa. So we've gotten a couple questions coming in through the chat. One of the ones I'd like to lift up at this moment reads that, "Since so much movement work requires relationship and trust building over time, what are some tips you have for organizations that mobilize short-term volunteers?" I might also add any tips you have for places that don't have infrastructure already or groups on the ground. So I'll open it up.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Can you raise your hand if you're interested in answering this question? We'll take maybe two folks and then there's another question that's come up that I want to lift up too. So who works with volunteers and short-term volunteers the most? I'm going to have to call on you then. Okay. Ben and Phi, can you both answer that? All right. Let's start with Ben.

Ben Wang (AHS):

Okay. I'll try my best.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Right. Okay.

Ben Wang (AHS):

I think a lot just depends on the type of program. There's maybe not one size fits all, but I do think that... I mean, I've had negative and positive experiences, I think, with volunteers. And so I think for one, it requires investment. It requires setting up an infrastructure to actually provide the support, the training for the volunteers, and to have a space for that. If the expectation is just that the person comes into the organization is going to magically integrate and accomplish X, Y, Z objective, I think that's maybe not always the case. So I would say make sure to have an infrastructure from the beginning.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Thank you. Anyone else want to take this question? Okay. UyenThi, another one you want to lift up?

UyenThi Tran Myhre (BMP):

Yeah. So someone said, "My organization was able to receive a lot of funding in 2020, 2021. They've done their best to redistribute it to smaller groups, but they're worried that sustaining this momentum on API issues might be difficult to sustain that momentum. So do you have any advice on that in terms of funding and kind keeping our issues at the front, knowing that they're long term, right?"

Aarti Kohli (Asian Law Caucus):

I can take a shot at that. So I think it's really important to let the people who gave the funding know what came of it. When we get funding from anyone, we reach out especially if it's unsolicited, and we

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ask them, "What motivated you to do this? What is driving this?" And we try to keep them apprised. I mean, this is the challenge. This is labor-intensive, but this is like any other relationship. It's a relationship that you want to cultivate and build. Funders are partners. You have to understand what are their goals in the funding. And you have to show them that the work that you're doing will help achieve those goals. I think it's also great to bring in the folks you sub granted to and have them present to the funder if the funder is open to that.

And so it is really hard. I think a lot of people in the API community, a lot of organizations, 2019, 2020, there was just a huge spike in donations because of anti-Asian hate being so prominent. But it's this whole conversation we're having about infrastructure and having people understand that harm and violence unfortunately is not going to go away and that we need long-term investment for it. That's a story that needs to be told over and over again.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Thank you. Anyone else feel like they want to weigh in on this? I also want to lift up what Myra has put into the chat if folks want to take a look at that around what is happening in parts of the country where there are very few groups or they're not organized and where there is that sets up this competition for funding. And also I think Aparna [inaudible 01:09:38] from Russia earlier in the chat had said the importance of, I think what you all did Phi in Atlanta, which is that you actually received funding that you dispersed to smaller organization, which is smaller organizations in the area which is so helpful.

Ben Wang (AHS):

Can add one thing real quick?

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Yes.

Ben Wang (AHS):

So I think for me, one strategy might be to think about how can we break out of a certain silo. So funding often gets siloed, and right now there's this attention to anti-Asian hate. But I would say that really these issues, to address these issues, it's a mental health issue, it's a public health issue, it's a violence prevention issue. So there's different funding strategies that we can broaden and tap into that I think is more sustainable.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Absolutely. Thank you. Sasha, did you want to add something?

Sasha Wijeyeratne (CAAAV):

Yeah, I agree with both have said so far. I think sometimes the funders themselves don't realize that multiple funders or multiple streams of funding are ending at the same time and that it can actually cause crisis. And so I think even just telling people like, "Hey, it's actually not just your grant. It's these three others and this is the impact this has on the organization" can help funders then help troubleshoot. Are there other ways? Are there other ways that they can keep funding you? Are there other places you could pursue funding? Could funders actually work together to figure out some more sustainability? But I think sometimes that transparency actually really helps. And I think sometimes what's really clear to us is actually not clear on the funding side. And it's helpful for us to say the things that we're uniquely positioned to know.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Great. Thank you. Anyone else? I did put a call out in the chat that we know that there are funders in this who have joined us, which is wonderful. If you have any practices that been using over the past couple of



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years or beyond, because some of you have been funding and supporting Asian American communities for quite some time, please feel free to add those as well into the chat. We'd love to hear your voice.

Hey, last words from anyone? Okay. All right. So we're going to wrap up with some final slides. And then, I wanted to let folks know about some next steps in terms of how can you use this valuable information that has been shared on this call today as well as the report that we've released. So I just wanted to talk a little bit about next steps, but we geared this in terms of the audience or who you might be, right?

And so we want to start off with organizations in terms of next steps. Obviously creating an ecosystem for rapid response before a crisis begins and hopefully using this tool that we've created as a jumping off point. We also wanted to recommend and it's in the report, building in rapid response as a budget line. Again, it's something that many organizations just have to get ready to build the muscle to do it. So what does it mean to have staff and other resources, hotlines, et cetera that you need to create and building it into the budgets? Also, utilizing the case studies that UyenThi wrote so beautifully in the beginning of this report as part of community conversation starters. And then as Ben and Phi mentioned time and again, providing that support for frontline responders staff in terms of various organizational policies and practices that might be helpful.

Also, some recommendations and next steps for government in terms of how to use this report. We know that we had some folks from local, state and federal government join us. So following the community's lead around transformative justice and the use of legal systems, supporting and investing more in victim support and services, particularly around victim compensation offices. And of course, especially with Asian American communities, the vital importance of following the law and translating materials into languages that are spoken by our community members.

We also have some next steps for media and want to thank resource media and other media partners for their support with this report as well. So building relationships with Asian American community spokespersons is important beforehand. Reporting on communities regularly after crises, not just sort of when the crisis happens, and reframing from narratives that pit communities against each other. There's a lot of information in this report actually on media and communication, so hopefully folks can take a look at that and it can be helpful.

And then finally, the last set of recommendations for funders. We've heard a lot, but just wanted to repeat some. Sasha mentioned the importance of changing metrics, also funding rapid response ecosystems regionally. Going beyond crisis funding, right? We've said this I think time and again. And I think that Ben was getting to this, recognizing and resourcing issues beyond the anti-Asian hate umbrella. There was a sense in the interviews we did that a lot of the funding right now is sort of conflated into that one bucket. And clearly, there are so many issues that affect our communities. Exercising philanthropic influence is another next step. So how to influence peers in philanthropy to support our communities. And finally, specifically supporting strategies, spaces, and solidarity work as Phi mentioned. So there's a lot more in the report than this, but we wanted to leave you with this image, this slide. So maybe there's one thing that you could take away with you after this conversation.

And as we close, again, just reminding you that you can find the report at this Bitly, we'll drop it into the chat again. I want to thank all of our community partners for joining us. Aarti, Ben, Sasha, and Phi. It has been great to work with you for actually many, many years and to be in community with you. And I'm so grateful for being able to learn with you and advocate with you. And also, I want to thank our amazing team at the Building Movement Project, particularly UyenThi, who's been such a tremendous partner in this entire project and has brought so much thoughtfulness to it.

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So with that, thank you for joining us. We will be sharing out the webinar recording. We will be sharing out some more resources. So you're on our list now, so you'll get the information. So as you leave, please leave with a word or a phrase that you are thinking of as you are leaving this conversation. And with that, I think we're going to come to a close. So thank you everyone.

Love seeing all the gratitude. Collective power, yes. You all can say something too if you want, a phrase.

Aarti Kohli (Asian Law Caucus):

Well, I think we all have to thank you Deepa. We wouldn't be here if [inaudible 01:16:45].

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

No, no, not that. Thanks. Connection. Thank you, Aarti. I love that we all don't want to leave.

UyenThi Tran Myhre (BMP):

All right. Thank you so much everybody. Last call for chat messages and I will end the recording. We'll send you resources next week. So grateful for all of you and all that you do. We appreciate you.

Aarti Kohli (Asian Law Caucus):

Thanks. Bye.

Deepa Iyer (BMP):

Thank you for joining.

Sasha Wijeyeratne (CAAAV):

Thank you.