

**Asian American Giving Circles:  
Building Bridges between  
Philanthropy and Our Communities**

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**DRAFT REPORT**

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## **Abstract**

The popularity of giving circles in the past 10 years has spawned a small but growing number of Asian American giving circles. Groups of Asian Americans pool their funds together and collectively decide to give back to community organizations benefiting Asian American community organizations in cities across the United States. While Asian American giving circles are relatively small and give modest grants, what they do give is highly appreciated by Asian American communities. Eleven prominent Asian American giving circles formed the basis for this research. These giving circles were categorized according to a lifecycle of giving circles consisting of four stages: emerging, growing, mature, and adaptation. Each stage represents different characteristics and organizational needs in the life of a giving circle. Giving circles faced many common challenges, including volunteers' lack of time to devote to building the giving circle, leadership succession, attracting members not already familiar with philanthropy, and educating members about philanthropy. Asian American giving circles, as a vehicle for philanthropy, are effective for bridging philanthropy to the community. The potential for increased Asian American philanthropy is clear from demographic trends, but tapping into this potential remains elusive. More research is needed to further the knowledge of Asian American philanthropy in all its forms, in order to build a greater body of knowledge to benefit the philanthropic sector.

**Keywords:** philanthropy, Asian American, giving circles, private donations

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

“I am a philanthropist.”<sup>2</sup> Were these the words of a multimillionaire, happy to announce his good intentions to the world by announcing his foundation grants? No, these were the words of a giving circle participant.

Giving circles have gained wide attention over the last 10 years; it is a means for ordinary people to participate in philanthropy with others like themselves. Referred to as a way of ‘democratizing philanthropy’, giving circles are an opportunity to extend participation in philanthropy to the middle class. For many, it is a great way to not only give away money but also learn about the giving process and the organizations and communities where the giving circle is making a difference.

Several factors contribute to the rise in the popularity of giving circles. People, and in particular women, want to be more involved in their communities.<sup>3</sup> They want to build relationships within the community, learn about community needs, and find ways to serve the community. Population trends also play a role. The leisure class of baby boomers is looking for ways to give back. However, there is also increased interest from the millennial generation (born between 1980 and 2002). Steeped in volunteering throughout their schooling, giving circles are natural extensions of this engagement with the social sector.<sup>4</sup> Technology also has a role as well in popularizing giving circles. The increased usage of online donation sites to give small amounts also has helped giving circles to gain greater acceptance as a legitimate philanthropic activity capable of having genuine impact.

According to the Giving Circles Network, there is an estimated 800 giving circles across the United States.<sup>5</sup> Of these 800, less than 2% are giving circles started by Asian Americans, for Asian American communities. Started first by the Asian Giving Circle of Chicago, and later led by efforts from Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP), an affinity group of Asian American professionals in the philanthropic sector, Asian American giving circles have increased in number to at least eleven just in the past three years.<sup>6</sup> As Sandy Kajiyama of AAPIP and manager of the AAPIP giving circles says, “AAPIP is creating this habit of giving in our communities, helping people identify why they want to give, where they want to give, and how best to make an impact. The giving circles have been one vehicle for that.”<sup>7</sup>

While Asian American giving circles are relatively small and give modest grants, what they do give is highly appreciated by Asian American communities. It brings “new money” to the nonprofit sector, especially to small and medium-sized organizations.<sup>8</sup> These giving circles give to social services, arts, women’s empowerment, and immigrant services, all in the local Asian American community. Giving circles have become a bridge between philanthropically inclined Asian Americans, and the Asian American communities that often have difficulty securing funds. Beyond the monetary grants, the fact of Asian Americans giving back to Asian American communities means even more to grantees.

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<sup>1</sup> Special thanks to Alvin Chu, Sonia Segarra-Law, and Dien Yuen for their editorial support.

<sup>2</sup> Rucker, Philip. A Circle with a Deep Center.

<sup>3</sup> Rucker, Philip. A Circle with a Deep Center.

<sup>4</sup> Stannard-Stockton, Sean. “Social circles with a square deal for charity.”

<sup>5</sup> Givingcircles.org.

<sup>6</sup> The exact number of Asian American giving circles is unknown.

<sup>7</sup> Faces – Sandy Kajiyama. Cultures of Giving

<sup>8</sup> Eikenberry, Angela. “Giving Circles and Fundraising in the New Philanthropy Environment.”

These Asian American giving circles are working in a gap left by larger foundations and wealthy individual donors: giving to the Asian American community organizations, often with very small budgets. Often overlooked and overshadowed because of the ‘model minority’ perception, these Asian American community organizations work in the trenches of providing critical services and programs for elderly, children, immigrants, and other at-risk populations.

This researcher sought to learn from leaders and participants of Asian American giving circles. How are the community and the members of giving circles affected by their giving circle activities? Where are the gaps the giving circle is trying to fill that is left behind by wealthy donors and mainstream foundations? What distinctions do these giving circles have? Finally, what does the future hold for giving circles to increase influence, both to increase philanthropy by Asian Americans, and to Asian Americans?

This paper attempts to answer these questions through first providing background on giving circles, on Asian American philanthropy, and then exploring the findings from interviews, surveys, and research literature, and concluding with implications for giving circles and for the philanthropic sector.

## 1.1 Methodology

For this research, I selected eleven prominent Asian American giving circles as the core component of my research. These giving circles were selected based upon guidance from AAPIP, and relationships with Asian American philanthropy professionals about their perceptions of well-known giving circles. The giving circles all have the similar characteristics of having majority Asian American founders and participants, and a mission to give back to Asian American community organizations. The eleven selected are not an exhaustive or complete list of Asian American giving circles.<sup>9</sup> After selecting the list of giving circles, I interviewed 15 people by telephone. All the interviewees were either founders or current leaders of these giving circles.<sup>10</sup> Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Additionally, I conducted an online survey of the Asian American giving circle participants to gauge their experiences and thoughts about their participation in the giving circle.<sup>11</sup> There were 24 responses to the survey, all of which are anonymous. Given the small sample sizes, the intention was not to show statistical validity with the results, but rather to infer potential patterns and trends in philanthropy among Asian Americans that may expand the data and knowledge of the philanthropic sector. Finally, a literature review of current articles, reports, and other publications about Asian American philanthropy and giving circles complements the interviews and survey.

## 1.2 Giving Circles and Community

Americans are some of the most the most generous people in regards to philanthropy and charity. In 2005, Americans’ individual charitable contributions were equal to 1.7 percent of the country’s GDP—a greater proportion than any nation in the world, according to the UK-based

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 2 for profiles of each of the giving circles included in the research. There are several other Asian American giving circles in development, including one in Philadelphia, and one in San Francisco.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 3 for the list of interviewees.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 4 for questions from the giving circles participant survey.

Charities Aid Foundation. (The next closest was Britain, at approximately 0.73 percent.)<sup>12</sup> The giving circle is just a small part of the \$306 billion Americans gave away to charity in 2007.<sup>13</sup> However, it is one of the few giving vehicles involving a community aspect of giving.

This is one of the fundamental tenets of a giving circle. Without a community, or a group of individuals, there is no giving circle. There are many definitions of giving circles, but at its core, a giving circle involves three basic elements: 1) a group of individuals, 2) a pool of their funds, and 3) a group decision on how to give away those funds. Giving circles, by their nature, have an “independent spirit and collaborative operations.”<sup>14</sup> Giving circles usually start organically and spontaneously<sup>15</sup> by a small group of individuals, and these individuals make the decisions together with all donors typically having an equal say in the giving decision about how the giving circle will operate, who will be a part of it, what causes to fund, and how much to fund. It is in these decisions that giving circles have an incredible diversity.

Pooling funds together empowers giving circle members to do more collectively than individually and to leverage philanthropy.<sup>16</sup> By doing so, a giving circle achieves scale faster, leading to greater grantmaking, which raises the visibility and credibility of the giving circle, which attracts more donors, and ultimately creates a virtuous cycle of giving.<sup>17</sup>

Part of the appeal of giving circle is that compare to individual check writing, it is a more engaged, proactive, and personal experience of philanthropy. The other appealing aspect is that giving circles are not limited to only the wealthiest to participate. By contributing modest amounts, individuals of less wealthy means can actively participate in organized philanthropy at a more significant level.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.3 The Size and Scope of the Giving Circles Movement

Traditionally philanthropy is perceived as an intensely private and individual activity. Collective charity — individuals united through the act of giving — has a strong history in the United States and internationally through voluntary fraternal or mutual benefit societies. As early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, forms of the giving circle were evident among Mexicans living in the Southwest, and then later among Chinese Americans, and African Americans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup>

Hometown Associations, or HTAs, were also popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries particularly among Asian immigrant populations. HTAs are very similar to giving circles. They raise funds from members and pool funds to undertake projects, geared toward the hometowns they came from. Projects are often related to education, health, and infrastructure development.<sup>20</sup>

Giving circles first gained prominence in philanthropy during the 1990s, most likely because of several factors. These include the increase in women’s philanthropy, which included and encouraged many forms of shared giving; the rise of new donors and high net worth individuals

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<sup>12</sup> Foster, Lionel. “The Philanthropist’s Toolkit.”

<sup>13</sup> Giving USA Foundation. Giving USA 2008

<sup>14</sup> Bearman, Jessica. Giving Together.

<sup>15</sup> Clark, Jane Bennett. Giving Back through Giving Circles.

<sup>16</sup> Wright, Christian. Giving Circles: Putting Their Heads Together, Then Their Cash.

<sup>17</sup> Lindsey, Kristin. Racial, Tribal, and Ethnic Philanthropy: A Scan of the Landscape.

<sup>18</sup> Eikenberry, Angela. “Giving Circles and Fundraising in the New Philanthropy Environment.”

<sup>19</sup> See Bearman, Jessica. Giving Together for a more extensive history of giving circles.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, Paula. Diaspora Philanthropy: Influences, Initiatives, and Issues.

who sought engaging ways to give back to society; and the increasing desire by individuals to have a greater say in and ownership over their charitable giving.<sup>21</sup>

In her research report “More Giving Together”, Jessica Bearman showed that “in 2006, the 160 circles that responded to her survey had raised more than \$88 million for community needs, granted nearly \$65 million and engaged more than 11,700 donors. In 2006 alone, giving circles granted \$13 million for community needs.”<sup>22</sup> Bearman continues by citing four primary benefits of giving circles: they provide grantmaking and other support to the community; they allow donors to learn together; they cultivate philanthropists; and they build community.<sup>23</sup>

#### 1.4 Common characteristics of giving circles

As diverse as giving circles are, there are several common characteristics of all giving circles:

- By their nature, giving circles tend to attract groups of similar individuals. Whether it is by ethnicity, by hometown, or by cause, giving circles are ideal conveners and relationship brokers;<sup>24</sup>
- Most giving circles stick to local issues in the community or ethnic group.<sup>25</sup> As Walter Wright, founder of the *Cleveland Colectivo* giving circle says about his giving circle, “We have an understanding of what’s going on in the community and can build relationships;”<sup>26</sup>
- Strong volunteer leadership is necessary for initiating a circle and incubating it through the start-up period;<sup>27</sup> and
- While it is not necessary for a giving circle to have a host organization, it certainly helps to get a circle off the ground quickly because it brings instant credibility, compatibility of mission, and staff administrative support to the circle.<sup>28,29</sup>

#### 1.5 Learning through Giving Circles

Helping giving circle participants learn about the community needs and about their philanthropy is a crucial aspect of joining a giving circle. For giving circle organizers, it is important to plan for growth and incorporate strategies that keep members connected to one another and foster participation in the grantmaking and educational opportunities.<sup>30</sup> Sometimes this forces members to think about issues they would not have otherwise.<sup>31</sup>

Some giving circles, like Social Venture Partners of Seattle, has a highly developed system of organizational capacity building to educate and utilize the talents of giving circle participants in areas such as “board development and governance, leadership development, program

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<sup>21</sup> Bearman, Jessica. Giving Together.

<sup>22</sup> Bearman, Jessica. More Giving Together.

<sup>23</sup> Bearman, Jessica. Giving Together.

<sup>24</sup> Dulany, Peggy, and Adele Simmons. “Individual Giving: Making It Count”

<sup>25</sup> Also reported in Eikenberry, Angela. “Giving Circles and the Democratization of Philanthropy.”

<sup>26</sup> Clark, Jane Bennett. Giving Back through Giving Circles.

<sup>27</sup> Rutnik, Tracey. Growing Philanthropy through Giving Circles.

<sup>28</sup> Rutnik, Tracey. Growing Philanthropy through Giving Circles.

<sup>29</sup> Bearman, Jessica. Hosting a Giving Circle.

<sup>30</sup> Rutnik, Tracey. Growing Philanthropy through Giving Circles.

<sup>31</sup> Eikenberry, Angela. “Giving Circles and the Democratization of Philanthropy.”

evaluation and performance management, financial management, marketing, public relations and communications, strategic planning, and legal.”<sup>32</sup>

## 2. Asian American Giving Circles

Asian American giving circles, as I define them, are a group of majority Asian American individuals living in one city or associated with one city, pooling together their funds in a consistent manner, usually in the same city (but not limited to) where the giving circle originates. Some common characteristics of giving circle participants are that they consist of participants who are young, female, and well educated. Many of them are also second or third generation Asian Americans. Most of these giving circles also choose to give back to communities with many recent immigrants, which is unusual for donors.

The Asian American giving circles I studied share common characteristics of most giving circles. Participants are mostly young and female. Eighty percent of the giving circle participants surveyed consisted primarily of young professionals in their 20s and 30s, and 84% of the giving circle participants surveyed was female.<sup>33</sup> Interviews, news articles, and case studies suggest that a substantial portion of giving circle participants is relatively young and female as well.<sup>34</sup>

Giving circle members are primarily second or third generation Asian Americans giving back to Asian American communities consisting of first generation immigrants. A study done at City University of New York in 2004 found that that older Asian Americans tended to focus on their respective ethnic community, while younger generations have a broader, less racially and ethnically circumscribed view of community.<sup>35</sup> These giving circles choose to give to ethnic communities’ needs and goes against this trend.

Asian Americans, over the last 15 to 20 years, are increasingly seeing themselves more as a pan-Asian group and less by specific ethnic backgrounds, such as Chinese, Japanese, or Korean, for example. The giving circles studied have only continued this trend. The founders and leaders of giving circles do not see the ethnic differences when it comes to membership, grantmaking, or fundraising. Rather, it is a breakthrough to have a pan-Asian perspective in philanthropy, and to break out of your own community. As Sandy Kajiyama of Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy puts it,

I think one of the challenges in many ethnic communities is to break barriers and get outside of your community. Just because we are building these models in an Asian organization does not mean we are building them only for that community. I think it goes both ways. Many Asian organizations do not do outreach to other communities and sectors, and many of the corporations and donors do not feel that they can approach the Asian organizations. Rather than passing money around only in our own community, I think the challenge is to figure out how to create a true culture of giving where everyone plays in the same space and is not separated.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Our Model – Social Venture Partners Seattle.

<sup>33</sup> Twenty of 24 of those surveyed were female.

<sup>34</sup> Eikenberry, Angela. “Giving Circles and the Democratization of Philanthropy.”

<sup>35</sup> Mottino, Felinda, and Eugene Miller. Pathways for Change.

<sup>36</sup> Faces – Sandy Kajiyama. Cultures of Giving

Another factor making Asian American giving circles distinct is that though many participants may work in the city, they are not part of the communities they give grants to and rather are living either in the suburbs or in the more upscale parts of the city. This is also true of the often wide gulf between suburban Asian Americans and those living in the city, in the Chinatowns or Korea towns, often because the ones that have 'made it' to a certain socioeconomic status tend to "distance themselves....to blend in with the mainstream. They don't go back to Chinatown."<sup>37</sup> Not only do most Asian Americans not go back, they do not give back either because they no longer have social ties to the community they once belonged. The giving circles are an attempt to bridge this gap and to bring financial resources to a community otherwise ignored by its own people just a few miles away.

## 2.1 Why study Asian American giving circles?

With only 11 prominent giving circles, some may wonder what the point is of studying Asian American giving circles when there are so few to investigate. There are several reasons for pursuing this research.

Given the expanded coverage of philanthropy and more specifically giving circles in the past several years in news media, it is important to include detailed research about this segment of giving circles having an impact in the community, however small, into the larger body of philanthropic research. The increasing attention toward Asian Americans' economic influence and the rising influence of China and India in the global economy spur thinking about philanthropy among Asian Americans. Articles in *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* in the past two years featured Asian American philanthropists giving major gifts.<sup>38</sup> In part, this research is one small attempt to debunk myths about Asian Americans and their lack of generosity or interest in philanthropy.

A broader goal of this research is to educate Asian Americans about philanthropy in hopes of encouraging even greater philanthropy among Asian Americans. Anecdotal research shows that "the majority of philanthropy by [Asian] Americans has been in less formal methods, away from the charitable foundation model. Giving is mainly centered on providing for the family first, then the ethnic community, and then beyond that to mainstream society. Most giving has come in the form of remittances and community giving circles."<sup>39</sup> Many Asian Americans are still uneducated when it comes to charitable giving and philanthropy, and giving circles provide individuals a great way to learn about their own philanthropy and establish their own giving.

## 2.2 Statistics on Asian American Giving

"In Asian cultures, money is not something spoken about or dealt with in the open. It's discussed at the family dinner table or whispered about over drinks...Asian American philanthropists are virtually invisible."<sup>40</sup>

Just because philanthropists are often unseen does not mean they are not there. In recent years, there has been a growing body of work around Asian American philanthropy, as

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<sup>37</sup> Bernstein, Nina. "Class Divide in Chinese-Americans' Charity".

<sup>38</sup> See articles by Nina Bernstein (NYT) and Teresa Watanabe (LAT).

<sup>39</sup> Ho, Andrew. Asian-American Philanthropy.

<sup>40</sup> Giving, the Asian Way. AsiaWeek.

evidenced by media coverage of philanthropic gifts of relatively modest amounts of \$1 million or less to academic programs, medical institutions, and museums.<sup>41</sup> There are still only scatterings of anecdotal reports of philanthropy by Asian Americans. Traditionally Asian Americans have given to social services as a means to assimilate new immigrants through community centers, churches, temples, and mosques.<sup>42</sup> It is difficult to draw out what philanthropic activity comes out of these institutions. It is also generally true that older, first generation immigrants tend to be more cautious when it comes to disposable income and their charity, preferring to give it to family, their local community, or back to their homeland.<sup>43</sup> Much of this type of philanthropy will likely go unreported.<sup>44</sup> However, in a survey of Asian business owners, 52% of first generation respondents said they hope to create positive change through their family's sustained commitment to philanthropy.<sup>45</sup>

Asian Americans have a strong sense of philanthropy but its forms can vary depending on age, generation, level of identity with American values, and association. Two examples of this type of philanthropy among Asian Americans is commercial investment in their home country and charity through professional associations. Paula Johnson of The Philanthropic Initiative, a consultancy, explains:

The Chinese-American community invests heavily in China, accounting for 70% of foreign direct investment in the country. Yet in interviews with members of the Chinese American community, it becomes clear that some of this commercial investment reflects a deeply rooted ethos of giving. Chinese Americans often believe the best way to “give back” to their community and country is through commercial investment that creates economic opportunity for the local population.<sup>46</sup>

Professional associations also have a role [in philanthropy]. They are most common among legal, medical, academic, and IT professionals. In...communities they are often established initially to counter perceived discrimination within a professional field. The primary goal of these professional association organizations is professional networking and advancement for the members. However, many associations have developed unique and substantial philanthropic programs, and such groups may represent an important constituency for...giving over the next decade.<sup>47</sup>

While one might argue the merits of whether investment constitutes philanthropy, the spirit of philanthropy lives on among Asian Americans in various forms and has great potential.

### 2.3 Asian American Demographic Trends

An analysis of Asian American demographic trends shows that the philanthropic potential is significant based on continuing growth in population, education, and wealth.

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<sup>41</sup> Watanabe, Teresa. “Chinese Immigrants Give Back to the U.S.”

<sup>42</sup> Vogelsang, John. Developing Resources for the Community.

<sup>43</sup> Asian Giving Circles.

<sup>44</sup> Ahn, Bekay, et al. “For Fundraising Purposes, How Best Can the Asian American Community be Utilized?”

<sup>45</sup> Asian Families: Emotional Aspects of Wealth Transfer and Inheritance

<sup>46</sup> Johnson, Paula. Diaspora Philanthropy: Influences, Initiatives, and Issues.

<sup>47</sup> Johnson, Paula. Diaspora Philanthropy: Influences, Initiatives, and Issues.

As of July 2006, there were 14.9 million Asians, or about 5% of the U.S. population, according to the Census Bureau, with roughly one third, or 5 million, residing in California. By 2050, the Census Bureau estimates there will be 33.4 million Asian Americans, or 8% of the population. Forty-nine percent of Asian Americans have at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 27% overall, and a median household income of \$64,238.<sup>48</sup>

Although the most recent estimates for wealth in the United States and for Asian Americans show increases through 2007<sup>49</sup> it would be imprudent to mention these now as accurate statistics after a stock market decline of approximately 40% in the past year. However, as a group, Asian Americans are achieving levels of wealth that are impressive. While still not at an equal wealth status to non-Hispanic whites,<sup>50</sup> Asian Americans have a higher proportion of households earning \$100,000 or more, and have about \$434 billion in buying power, or 4.7 percent of the total buying power of American consumers.<sup>51</sup>

While the numbers sound impressive, wealth is very unevenly distributed due to ethnic disparities among Asian Americans. Indians and Chinese Americans earn far more than Southeast Asians do.<sup>52</sup> Poverty still abounds in most large cities among Asian Americans. In New York City, home to one of the largest Asian American populations in the United States, 19 percent of Asians lived below the poverty line, compared to 17% for Asian Americans across the U.S.<sup>53</sup> In Boston, the poverty rate for Asian Americans is second only to Latinos.<sup>54</sup> Giving circles are taking action to give back to communities struggling with poverty.

### 3. Lifecycle of Giving Circles

I have categorized the eleven Asian American giving circles into a framework of the "lifecycle" of giving circles<sup>55</sup>. There are four main stages of development a giving circle goes through, each with different characteristics and organizational needs.

1. **Emerging:** The giving circle formulates its values, goals, and structure. Founders are intimately involved, a core group of volunteers is established, and policies and procedures are developing in a fluid manner. Initial fundraising goal is established, and money is raised or in process of being raised. No grants have been issued yet, but plans are setting in place for deciding grant areas and specific grantees.
2. **Growing:** Policies and procedures for the giving circle are in place. Founders are still very much involved, but now a core group of members is established and volunteers on a longer-term basis. A wider band of membership forms, more serious fundraising

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<sup>48</sup> Facts for Features.

<sup>49</sup> World Wealth Report 2008. In the United States in 2007, there were just over 3 million high net worth individuals holding at least US\$1 million in financial assets, excluding their primary residences. This is an increase from 2.92 million individuals in 2006.

<sup>50</sup> Ong, Paul. Asian Americans and Wealth.

<sup>51</sup> "Asian-Americans' Most Affluent Consumers Report"

<sup>52</sup> Ong, Paul. Asian Americans and Wealth.

<sup>53</sup> Profile of New York City's Asian Americans 2006.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, Adam. Report Reveals Poverty Among Asian Americans.

<sup>55</sup> Most, if not all, nonprofits go through a similar organizational development. Giving circles are no different in this respect. Aspects of this model are adapted from models described in Paul Connolly's book, Navigating the Organizational Lifecycle: A Capacity Building Guide for Nonprofit Leaders (2006). Another example of a giving circle lifecycle is from New Ventures in Philanthropy. See more at [http://www.givingforum.org/s\\_forum/doc.asp?CID=48&DID=5132](http://www.givingforum.org/s_forum/doc.asp?CID=48&DID=5132)

begins, and funding cycles are becoming more established after completing one or two cycles of grants. Volunteer sub-committees may be established with sufficient numbers of members.

3. **Mature:** Several grantmaking cycles have been completed, there is leadership transition/succession planning, and the giving circle is known in the community and in the field. The giving circle is established with policies and processes in place, but hard work remains to keep participants engaged and reaching out to new participants.
4. **Adaptation:** Because of changes in the needs of either the community or the members of the giving circle, the giving circle adapts characteristics that no longer define it as a giving circle. The organization is not necessarily defunct or in decline, but rather it adapts characteristics of other types of giving vehicles.

While this model fits with the evidence collected from interviews and literature about the giving circles, its design is not deterministic or linear in time.<sup>56</sup> I chose the framework in which to present the findings because it is helpful to identify the progress of Asian American giving circles by these organizational markers. Additionally, for future Asian American giving circles, the findings categorized by the lifecycle model offer a roadmap of what to anticipate and what to expect in forming a giving circle. The following section describes in detail the eleven giving circles according to their lifecycle stage.

### **3.1 Stage One: Emerging Giving Circles**

Three of the giving circles researched were in the first stage of the lifecycle: the emerging giving circles. The Los Angeles Asian Pacific Islander Giving Circle, the Lunar Giving Circle, and the Asian American Giving Circle of Greater Houston all fit in this stage. The founders had established the giving circle, policies and procedures were in process of being decided, and no grants have been given yet. The three giving circles had issues in common, including deciding the leadership structure, weighing the costs and benefits of working with a host organization, and recruiting a diverse yet stable membership that would be willing to get involved in the giving circle. The following describes each of the three giving circles and how they got started.

#### Los Angeles Asian Pacific Islander Giving Circle

About four years ago, friends Jean Miao and Leslie Ito, both working in fundraising at Asian American nonprofits, were chatting over an informal lunch about how difficult it was to find individual Asian American donors to give back to the local Asian American community, despite the increase in the Asian American population. Their central question they had was how do we cultivate Asian American giving? Over time and through numerous discussions, they started a giving circle in June 2007, now known as the Los Angeles Asian American/Pacific Islander Giving Circle (LAAPI). The vision they had was to increase the number of Asian American donors from the corporate sector, while creating opportunities to make change in “our own communities and support the innovate, risk-taking work being done to improve the lives of Asian Americans in L.A.”<sup>57</sup> So far, growth has been very organic.

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<sup>56</sup> Connolly, Page 2.

<sup>57</sup> LAAPI Brochure.

The circle already has 15 members, nine of which participate in the grantmaking process. The giving circle is mostly women, with a consistent mix of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese members. The initial goal was to raise \$12,000 in the first year, but the giving circle has already raised over \$15,000. This figure is impressive especially considering that the minimum donation is \$500 per year, with a commitment for two years.

The giving circle's grantmaking goal is to invest in small community-based organizations engaged in social change work serving Asian Americans in Los Angeles not supported by traditional funding sources. Their first grants are scheduled to be given in December 2008, which will likely be three grants of \$5,000 each.

While surpassing the financial goals seems impressive, Miao, the co-founder, says that they have not quite reached their original goal of attracting corporate donors. The majority of the giving circle members work in the nonprofit sector. Recruitment for additional members is very much still in progress, and news of the giving circle is spreading mainly by word of mouth. The giving circle has more visibility through its affiliation with AAPIP, and that should help with attracting more members.

One of the major aspects in the development of LAAPI has been AAPIP's involvement. AAPIP serves as a fiscal sponsor for LAAPI. In this capacity, AAPIP helps with the administration of the giving circle, and gets a 10% administration fee. This is more than offset with providing a 25% match for all funds raised for the giving circle. One of the challenges LAAPI faces is that since AAPIP's involvement, the organic culture the giving circle started with has shifted to a more formal culture, and it is a challenge now is keeping the casual "vibe" going. It's "exciting to be able to fund risk-taking innovative work that they can't normally do. We're trying to stress the fun."<sup>58</sup>

Another challenge is leadership development. As Leslie, one of the founders put it: "I'm hoping that people aren't just looking to Jean and me for leadership, but rather that it's more collective. How do we codify the leadership development process?"

Even with these challenges, the giving circle is on track with raising funds to complete the first year of grantmaking, and building up the membership base and developing leaders of the giving circle.

### Lunar Giving Circle

The Lunar Giving Circle (LGC), based in San Francisco, seeks to fund local Asian American community organizations with a focus on social justice philanthropy. The AAPIP-hosted giving circle has a minimum donation is \$250 per year, with a two year commitment. So far, the giving circle has raised approximately \$6,000 since starting in 2007 from 12 members, mostly female young nonprofit professionals. The giving circle has yet to give its first grant, but grants will be announced by the end of this year.

As a giving circle just starting, LGC already faces several challenges as identified by the founders, Dien Yuen and Dee Dee Nguyen: a lack of time, and the inability to attract corporate sector professionals to join the giving circle. As an all-volunteer giving circle, it is difficult to run

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Leslie Ito.

the giving circle because everybody is so incredibly busy, and there is not enough time to devote to setting the structure and policies of the giving circle.

In an effort to promote the giving circle to Asian Americans working in the corporate sector, LGC set up a group in Facebook, and promoted itself at the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival. However, as Yuen says, "It's hard to build momentum. I would really like to get somebody famous onboard - like a Steve Chen (founder of YouTube, now part of Google) or Jerry Yang (founder of Yahoo!). If one of them joined, 800 people would join."

To get that momentum, and ultimately harvest the philanthropic potential is difficult. Nguyen states, "There is disconnect between what seems possible, and what the reality is. How do you attract people to the giving circle who have the financial means, but simply are not interested? The giving circle has tremendous potential, and a case for a tremendous amount of return on investment could easily be made. [The giving circle] could be highly productive, strategic, and effective, but in reality, it doesn't work." LGC is working through these starting challenges and seeking to build momentum for the giving circle.

### The Asian American Giving Circle of Greater Houston

The Asian American Giving Circle of Greater Houston (AAGCH) formed in November 2007 to "encourage philanthropy in the Asian American/Pacific Islander community, to contribute to the community in a strategic and meaningful way and to bring a new source of funding to nonprofit organizations serving the APA community throughout the Greater Houston area."<sup>59</sup> AAGCH currently has 43 members. According to one of the founders, Rogene Calvert, it is the only Asian American giving circle in metropolitan Houston, and possibly in all of Texas<sup>60</sup>. The majority of members are female, and it is not limited to young professionals but rather has a wide age spectrum.

AAGCH requires a minimum donation of \$300 per year per member. The founding members decided on this amount because it was at a level that was affordable for young professionals, and have the potential to attract more donors. Starting the giving circle came pretty much through word of mouth to family and friends. AAGCH set an initial goal of granting \$10,000 the first year to fund projects that could really use the money, and keep about \$3,000 in reserves. Therefore, a goal was set to raise about \$13,000.

AAGCH has not given out grants yet, but is in the midst of a grant review process. A grantmaking committee conducts site visits, conducts workshops for applicants to explain the grant application and review process, and teaches giving circle members about the needs in the Asian American community. This education component of the giving circle is not taken lightly, according to Calvert; part of the education is also knowing and understanding philanthropy, and how to have accountability for your philanthropy. The grantmaking committee makes recommendations on three finalists, and the total membership will vote at annual meeting in September on the final grantee.

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<sup>59</sup> 2008 Giving Circle RFP Brochure.

<sup>60</sup> Duong Mauricio, another founder, said the giving circle might be the only Asian American one in Texas. See Burt Levine's article under References.

The giving circle's greatest challenge thus far has been overcoming the perception of the "model minority" – that there are community needs not being met by the more established foundations and donors in Houston. When the idea of a giving circle was introduced in January 2007, the initial group of Asian Americans did not want to do it because "we didn't want to do it ourselves. We tend to help ourselves, and not get others to help us. We're not the model minority in so many ways—we don't get a lot in funding when it comes to established funders funding Asian American community organizations."<sup>61</sup>

Calvert gave an example of how Asian Americans helped their community. In the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Asian American community pitched in to help Southeast Asians by helping to set up a help center at the Hong Kong City Mall, with the help of ethnic churches, families, temples. Because of the circumstances, no records were really kept of how much was donated or who donated what. Consequently, the perception persisted that the Asian American community do not have needs.

### **3.2 Stage Two: Growing Giving Circles**

The next stage of giving circles is what I describe as "growing" giving circles. They have moved beyond the issues of starting up, and are managing growth and increased expectations. These are giving circles that:

- Have been established for at least one or two years;
- Have given at least one grant and completed one grant cycle;
- Have experienced growth in membership and perhaps change in leadership; and
- Are faced with challenges in membership retention and leadership succession

Three of the giving circles profiled fit this stage: the Hmong Women's Giving Circle in Minnesota, the Saffron Giving Circle in Boston, and the AAPIP National Giving Circle, based in San Francisco.

#### Hmong Women's Giving Circle

The Hmong Women's Giving Circle began in 2004 with a mission to "promote philanthropy within the community, encourage activism and create social change for Hmong women and girls" in Minnesota.<sup>62</sup> Entirely run by volunteers, it currently has a core of eight members ranging from their mid 20s to 40s, mostly working in the nonprofit sector.

Most of the fundraising efforts come from informally speaking to family and friends about the circle, and from going out in the Hmong community. Sandy Vue, the current co-chair of the circle, says that the main challenge of the circle is balancing the different roles while keeping the focus on fundraising. "It's difficult", she says, "Because we're all volunteers. How do we get ourselves out there when we are spread thin already?"

Many have left the giving circle because they felt there was just no time to devote to the giving circle. However, Vue is still upbeat about the giving circle. The Hmong community is so new to giving money to organizations (as opposed to individuals). The giving circle is "going beyond

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Rogene Gee Calvert.

<sup>62</sup> Hmong Women's Giving Circle brochure.

community norms, to try to help women be more independent, and to improve our [Hmong] community. The giving circle reaches different generations in the community. The giving circle provides a way to meet and understand them... particularly the older generation.” In that sense, Vue says, “the money the giving circle gives away can go a long way by affecting families and their views across generations. Older generations are more generous than younger ones, so the organization is here to assist everyone.”<sup>63</sup>

### Saffron Giving Circle

The Saffron Giving Circle of Boston was born in early 2006 after the initial group of five founders decided to start a giving circle modeled after one begun in Chicago (the Asian Giving Circle). Because the founders recognized that charitable giving is low by Asian Americans, the circle was started to educate Asian American professionals about Boston philanthropic organizations, and to highlight Asian American neighborhoods in Boston. I spoke to Martin Son, who was one of the founders of the circle.

In the beginning, the founders decided that instead of coming up with all the by-laws first, they would use it as an educational opportunity for members interested in taking a greater role to help write the by-laws and to be involved as much as possible. According to Son, things took a bit longer to get started. In retrospect, Son says, “If I were to do it all over again, I would have a better balance of substance upfront with the structure. I would also identify a number of options and suggest recommendations. We erred on the side of more important decisions with member input.”<sup>64</sup>

The circle currently meets on a bimonthly schedule, and requires a minimum contribution of \$250 per year for two years. The founders wanted to make the giving circle broadly accessible to young professionals and still make it a meaningful contribution, and so the \$250 amount was selected. The initial goal was to raise \$10,000 the first year, or to get 40 contributors giving the minimum amount.

One challenge for the giving circle has been to find better ways to continue engaging the membership, and to provide value for the members. “The potential is there, we are trying to do more than just social gatherings.” Some individuals of the giving circle have been more involved, and have since become board members of the grantee organizations.

A related challenge is finding ways of fostering new leadership for the giving circle. After the first year, the circle is established, and “now we are trying to mature as an organization in the second year...hopefully we’re here to stay. At this point we can really take advantage of the potential of Asian American philanthropy, to explore partnerships with other Asian American professional organizations”, says Son.

For Son, participating and leading the Saffron Circle has been an interesting and worthwhile way to learn more about philanthropy and the Asian American community in Boston. He hopes that the circle will be “an easy way to give to the community, to become more involved, and to highlight organizations to better establish the level of awareness of community needs.” He has seen firsthand the grantees that have great satisfaction and gratitude for the grants the Circle has provided. He realized that “it’s not really about the money [the grant funds] but it’s more

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with Sandy Vue.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Martin Son.

that we present ourselves as Asian Americans supporting Asian American community organizations in the neighborhoods we live in. The recognition means that much more to them.”

### AAPIP National Donor Circle

This national giving circle started in 2005 as an effort to expand the pool of high net worth donors in order to grow and demonstrate new models of philanthropy for Asian Americans in the form of giving circles.<sup>65</sup> It operates with the core principle of increasing the pool of assets to match and support the resources raised at the regional giving circles so that more donor resources can be redirected to Asian American communities across the country.

Currently the giving circle has a core of about 10 to 15 donors committed to giving \$10,000 per year with a one year commitment. AAPIP supports four regional giving circles, and has plans to support more with an eventual 100% match of funds raised regionally. The organization is planning growth to about \$1 million per year by 2010, with the help of matching funds from foundations, with an increase from 35 to 50 committed donors. The framework and possibilities of individuals participating are growing, but so is the amount of work it takes to get the circle truly sustainable.

I spoke to Joe Lucero, Communications Director of AAPIP, about the AAPIP national giving circle. He says the challenge is “trying to figure out the active content, identifying prospects, and how the circle functions. Also at the national level, it is sometimes difficult to grasp the community needs. We want to have them predisposed to the opportunity it represents. We provide national dollars they know will go to local communities. It's a very strong appeal [of the giving circle] - how resources go directly to the [Asian American] communities.”

For members of this giving circle, this is one of the primary motivations for joining the giving circle, according to Lucero. Another reason is that donors see the effects of their contributions doubling the amounts raised by regional giving circles. As AAPIP engages more donors, it wants them to be more than just writing checks and to see donors be a part of the community-based grantmaking process. Lucero admits though, that there are more questions than answers: What is the operational and structural process of the giving circle? How can donors be engaged in a community-based grantmaking process at a national level?

The national giving circle represents an ambitious vision for AAPIP to create new models for philanthropy in the Asian American community. As Lucero stated, “It's more than just a vehicle for giving, more than the sum of its parts. It is an opportunity to reframe what philanthropy is. It is a chance to participate in reframing the result - to try to drive resources to communities that need it but cannot leverage resources to institutional philanthropy. Institutional philanthropy remains challenged to be responsive, to drive resources to the communities...we are not waiting anymore on the glacial pace of institutional response. We know how [to do it]; we have developed a model of philanthropy that works and we want to define the process of meeting the needs of Asian American communities.”

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<sup>65</sup> AAPIP National Donor Circle Overview.

### **3.3 Stage Three: Mature Giving Circles**

The third stage of the lifecycle of giving circles is mature giving circles. These giving circles have successfully transitioned leadership from the founders; have completed two or more grant cycles, and have an active leadership and membership engaged in furthering relationships in the community that have been established. Mature giving circles have an established organization, established procedures, and the giving circle can continue to grow in size and influence. The three Asian American giving circles that fit closest to this profile are Asian Giving Circle of Chicago, AsiaNextGen, and the Asian Women's Giving Circle.

#### Asian Giving Circle of Chicago

The Asian Giving Circle of Chicago was the first Asian American giving circle dedicated to raising money from Asian Americans to give back to the local Asian American community. The giving circle began in December 2002 with two goals in mind: one was to increase funding to Asian American nonprofit organizations, and the second was to develop a new generation of Asian American donors. The founders wanted the circle to engage participants in a cultural shift in attitude towards philanthropy – to give in a pan-Asian way. The giving circle focused on attracting diverse Asian American young professionals in their 20s to 40s. The founders realized that their parents gave in the community, but the younger generation did not because it identified less with the Asians living in the city center and more with the middle to upper class suburbanites.

From the beginning, AGC knew it wanted to focus on the Asian American community in Chicago. By taking a survey of participants and of the Executive Directors of the Asian American organizations, it gained the knowledge of what is important to members of the giving circle, and what is important to nonprofits. They asked, what are your needs? What is hardest to get funding? What is valuable and why?

Even as one of the most well established giving circles, AGC remains an all-volunteer giving circle. Only a certain core of volunteers who are more interested in participating beyond just writing a check. The leadership structure consists of several committees with co-chairs who serve two year terms. Every year there is a planning meeting during the summer to generate ideas for the coming year. Each year the challenge (and the key) is raising money to give it all away in the same year. For the volunteer leaders, there are three overarching goals: to reach financial goals, educate and develop donors, and recruit donors.

The leaders of AGC have experienced growth and success with the giving circle, but they believe the giving circle still has its best days ahead. Said one of the co-founders, "We are giving, but we still don't know the impact of giving can have on our communities."

#### AsiaNextGen

The AsiaNextGen giving circle formed in 2004 with five members in New York City. Michelle Tong, one of the co-founders, hosted a party at her father's house to launch the project, and 15 people attended. Early on, the giving circle wanted to really place a serious emphasis on philanthropy—and not on the social aspect of giving circles. Members had been a part of other social organizations, and they wanted this to focus on philanthropy and the community. It took two years for the giving circle to establish itself enough to give its first grant in 2006. In 2007, an

article in *The New York Times* brought many interested in joining the giving circle.<sup>66</sup> Now the giving circle has 14 members and growing.

One of the challenges AsiaNextGen faced in starting up was that there is no one model of giving circles. The founders wanted participants to have ownership in figuring out what the model would be for the giving circle. However, many participants, being business-minded, already wanted a structure or system in place. So not having one scared off some people. As Michelle Tong put it, “The formation process was a lot of trial and error. It was scary as a leadership team because we did not want to impose our thoughts on others, and wanted everyone’s input. It took two years to figure voting rights, committees, how to structure membership. We even called in experts to talk about philanthropy.”

In 2006, after two years of working out the initial challenges, AsiaNextGen gave their first grant of \$20,000. Thanks to AsiaNextGen’s donation, the Child Center of New York’s Asian Outreach Program was able to hire two Chinese-American social workers part-time to reduce the waiting list for services. It also received free computers and a much-needed paint job for its offices.<sup>67</sup>

One lesson learned was in terms of setting the minimum amount for a member to contribute. At first AsiaNextGen decided on a minimum contribution of \$5,000 per year. Says Tong, “We wanted to set an amount that would “hurt” initially, but that showed the level of commitment to philanthropy. Soon we realized this made it difficult to attract additional members. So we lowered the minimum to \$1,000 to try and get more members to join.” Currently AsiaNextGen has a one year commitment. While the minimum is still high at \$1,000, over half of the members give more than \$1,000. In 2007, the giving circle gave \$25,000, and this year AsiaNextGen anticipates giving \$30,000.

Beyond the significant dollars given, Tong envisions AsiaNextGen could do more in educating its members, both to develop their knowledge of philanthropy, and educating about Asian American community needs. As Tong says, “It’s rewarding for me to get others involved in philanthropy, to teach them to think about what they really care about, and seeing them grow in the knowledge of themselves about philanthropy.”

But because of the economic downturn directly affecting many of the giving circle members working in finance, there is so much work to do and no time to give to the giving circle, says Tong. “Fundraising is not our main issue; it is more a matter of people’s time and commitment to making this work.”

### Asian Women’s Giving Circle

The Asian Women’s Giving Circle (AWGC) of New York City began with a mission to involve Asian American professionals to philanthropy and to expose this group to organizations working with Asian women in New York City. AWGC funds Asian American women-led projects in arts and activism. The giving circle started from a project of the New York Women’s Foundation, eventually started in June 2005 with 10 people, and grew rapidly from there. It currently has 100 to 150 total donors, of which 18 people are the leaders of the giving circle. The giving circle is diverse in its Asian ethnicities – Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Indian, and its age – this was one of the few Asian American giving circles that was not only young professionals.

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<sup>66</sup> See Nina Bernstein’s article in References.

<sup>67</sup> Bitti, Mary Teresa. “The Give and Take of Giving Circles.”

The age range was between 22 and 70 years old. I spoke with Hali Lee, one of the founders of the giving circle, to learn more about the Asian Women's Giving Circle.

With such a diverse, large group of donors, one of the challenges the Asian Women's Giving Circle faces is balancing the needs of philanthropic professionals, versus young learners about philanthropy (which Lee refers to as "philanthropy virgins"). It is difficult deciding on what are the basics or minimum of amount of knowledge that a member should know and learn about philanthropy.

AGWC has been highly successful in recruiting new members. This has come largely on the strength of networks – members bringing in other members, which bring in still more members that are new. AGWC is now at the size where the giving circle is considering a half-time position to administer the circle, but there are concerns about the circle changing in culture once it becomes 'professionalized'. Lee does not want to recreate a big foundation with AGWC. As Lee says, "It has been a fun experience, and we want to keep it fun. What is the tipping point of being a giving circle versus becoming something else? Is it a hybrid of a giving circle and a foundation? With a giving circle, we want to keep the sense of immediacy, and we are not interested in building endowments."

Grants from AGWC are small, between \$7,000 and \$15,000 per organization. AGWC wanted to give to good ideas – not to well-established organizations that would not appreciate the grant. In some cases, AGWC has given to individuals. Through a short RFP process (2 pages, plus a budget), and site visits and a voting process including all donors, grantees are selected once a year. Grantees have come mainly from Asian women in the arts, and activism.

The grantees are "totally grateful" that Asian women are raising money for them. As one grantee told Lee, "It felt like a body of sisters and elders behind her. It was so meaningful that it was Asian women giving to Asian women."

For Lee, it is fun to educate others about their own philanthropy through the giving circle. "It's fun to give money away, but it's so much more fun to do it collectively." She has big goals for AWGC – to give away a lot more. Through her involvement, she sees that "philanthropy isn't just for wealthy white people." She sees in the participants growth and change in their attitudes toward giving – one of the participants weeps during the awards ceremony because she is so moved by the grantees' art.<sup>68</sup>

AWGC has carved a niche for itself in funding arts and activism by Asian women. However, that is not the reason women come and join the giving circle. The motivating thing is that Asian women are doing the giving—and giving back to Asian women in the community.

#### **Stage Four: Adaptation of Giving Circles**

While it would be ideal for a giving circle to maintain its maturity stage in perpetuity, it is also not realistic given changes in leadership and in goals. Two other giving circles I interviewed belong to a fourth stage beyond maturity, to what I term as the adaptation stage. What began as a giving circle has now adapted characteristics that no longer describe it as a giving circle. One group, the Filipino American Fund, began as a group of donors committed to funding Filipino youth programs but adapted to being a loose group of individuals that give sparingly to the

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Hali Lee.

cause. The other, the Association of Asian American Yale Alumni (AAAYA) adapted from being a giving circle dedicated to funding scholarships into a permanent endowment which participants could vote to select students to give fellowships for summer internships with Asian American community nonprofits around the country.

### Filipino American Fund

The Filipino American Fund (FAF) never started as a giving circle. The original idea, born in 2000, was to raise money to fund Filipino youth programs in the San Francisco Bay area. Gail Kong, the Executive Director of the Asian Pacific Fund, was not enthusiastic about it in terms of fundraising, and neither was the board. Then in 2005, a major donor on the board offered \$1 million matching gift. Therefore, the board wanted to start a restricted fund to encourage people to give. They did not necessarily want a giving circle mechanism, but could give a restricted gift. Kong and others involved tried to motivate Filipino-Americans to give, and had several cultivation events, but it was not very successful. In the first two years, it was active, but relatively inactive in the past two years.

Part of the challenge, Kong says, was that although the Filipino population is the second largest Asian group in the Bay area<sup>69</sup>, there are no real stable nonprofit organizations serving this population, particularly Filipino youth. So the money that was raised was given to a local government program instead that focused on family counseling and intergenerational conflict.

The other challenge FAF faced was that it was hard to find the 2nd generation Asians and Filipinos that would be willing to give. Kong found that many Asian American young professionals do not have time for philanthropic activities. The ones that do have time do it through professional associations, but this is a “painfully slow” way to raise money.

Because of these experiences, Kong concluded that for the Filipino American Fund, a giving circle was ineffective, and is no longer active.

### Association of Asian American Yale Alumni

The Association of Asian American Yale Alumni (AAAYA) also was a group that started out like a giving circle, but then over time was able to raise enough money to establish a permanent endowment, and so the giving circle model terminated. The Tina Yeh Fellowship (TYF) began to provide funding for community service fellowships to give opportunities and stipends for Yale undergraduate students to work with Asian American community organizations. Each year TYF provides \$2,500 to \$5,000 for 1 to 3 students to work throughout the country. Students find organizations to work with, and apply to receive funding. A selection committee, composed of self-selected alumni volunteers, chooses the students who will receive the fellowships each year.

The fellowship was named after Tina Yeh, a Yale alumna who died tragically in a plane crash in Taiwan in 2000. After that, AAAYA started a goal of raising a \$150,000 fund. Tina's mother gave about half of the initial amount, and the rest came from donations from friends and colleagues, but the bulk of funding came from AAAYA. It took until 2005 to raise enough funds to reach the goal of \$150,000. Currently the TYF has an endowment of approximately \$170,000

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<sup>69</sup> The Filipino American Fund.

managed by the Asian Pacific Fund, according to Grant Din, one of the officers of AAAYA who spoke with me about the fund.

Din was pleasantly surprised at how quickly the money was raised. "It's rewarding to see people give. People were generous. For a while, people gave every year. It definitely made it much easier, and people really support the cause. We have over 100 donors this year, and 300 in total." When asked about how this experience has shaped his perception of philanthropy by Asian Americans, he says that he has "always been impressed by people's generosity." Many Asian American alumni would rather give to this than Yale's large endowment (nearly \$23 billion<sup>70</sup>), because it is more tangible. The success...is probably because we [Asian Americans] put so much emphasis on education -- examples like Charles Wang giving to SUNY."<sup>71</sup>

## **Implications for Giving Circles**

The findings from the eleven Asian American giving circles offer conclusions for multiple audiences including giving circles, Asian American donors, philanthropic researchers, and the larger philanthropic sector. The following section covers implications for all giving circles, including working with host organizations, community response to giving circle grants, increasing educational opportunities within the giving circle, increasing participation in giving circles, and member recruitment and leadership transitions.

### Working with Host Organizations

All of the giving circles interviewed are housed within a larger nonprofit, because they do not have their own nonprofit status. This presents both advantages and disadvantages, according to those I interviewed. The advantages include credibility and management support while the disadvantages include the perception of a lack of priority on the host organizations part, and the lost sense of fun for giving circles.

One main advantage is that the hosting organization provides instant credibility to the giving circle. The Chicago Community Trust hosts the Asian Giving Circle, so donors write checks to the Chicago Community Trust. "Since we are a new organization, donors feel more comfortable writing their checks to the Chicago Community Trust; the connection with a more established organization helps our credibility," says Kathy Im, one of the founders. This comfort level for donors is critical especially when the giving circle is beginning, and the giving circle has little credibility beyond the word of its founders. A similar case is occurring with the Greater Houston Community Foundation, which administers the Asian American Giving Circle of Houston. Rogene Calvert, one of the founders of AAGCH, says that affiliation to the community foundation gives the giving circle a "seat at the table along with the established funders, which also helps to get invitations to other philanthropic and community groups and events." She believes this is an important part of Asian American donors to build credibility with larger, more established donors in the community.

In addition to credibility, the hosting organization also provides administrative and grants management support, which is a tremendous advantage of having a host organization. For the

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<sup>70</sup> "Yale endowment rises 2% in fiscal 2008, climbing to almost \$23b"

<sup>71</sup> Charles Wang donated \$50 million to build an Asian Arts and Culture Center at SUNY-Stonybrook in 2002. See [www.stonybrook.edu/sb/wang/about.shtml](http://www.stonybrook.edu/sb/wang/about.shtml).

Asian Giving Circle, the Chicago Community Trust helps collate RFPs (request for proposals), assists with organizing events, and handles all of the financial aspects of collecting donations and giving out grants. AAPIP is host to a number of giving circles, and it provides assistance with financial reporting, donor acknowledgement letters, access to give online donations, and marketing and communications services, all for a 10% administrative fee.<sup>72</sup>

Interviewees also described two disadvantages of working with a sponsor organization. One was the perception of the host often seeming impersonal, that the giving circle is not necessarily a priority for them. Sometimes this resulted in not getting information in a direct or timely manner, or having to overcome administrative issues such as not being able to write checks under a certain amount or not having enough supplies for an event.

The other larger challenge interviewees described was the loss of the sense of casualness, of informality, of having fun the moment the giving circle entered into a relationship with a host organization. The host organization required regular updates from the giving circle on progress, including the number of new members, and how much funding was raised. One anonymous interviewee described it being “like a book club with required book reports, where Barnes and Noble is the book club sponsor. All good intentions, of course, but... things change. Sometimes money messes things up. It lost some of the sense of authenticity. Once an organization gets involved, it changes the culture of the giving circle.”

This raises important questions for giving circles. Is gaining the services of a host organization and the credibility of such a relationship worth the risk of damaging a giving circle’s culture and reducing the appeal for potential members? Do giving circles need to consider increasing volunteer support so that administrative services are not outsourced to a host? These are questions that giving circles need to consider when thinking about establishing a relationship with a host organization.

The difficulty for giving circles is finding the balance of a host that provides assistance without interfering with the organic growth and development of the giving circle over time.

### Community Response to Giving Circle Grants

As seen from all of the giving circles, the community response to grants received from these giving circles is tremendously valued and meaningful. The community attends the annual grantee celebrations, and grantees take it seriously. As the Saffron Circle of Boston experienced, the response is not so much about the grant funds but more about the recognition that Asian Americans are supporting their communities through financial support. For the Hmong Women’s giving circle, the money and presence of Hmong women helping other Hmong women reaches generations in the community, and affects families in those communities. Several giving circle participants shared how impressed they were with the community grantees -- “They are amazing and are cutting edge with little support... [It is rewarding for me] to see the groups that are thrilled with what in the philanthropic community would be seen as a very modest grant.” A grantee of the Asian Giving Circle said, “In 25 years, the AGC grant was the first we received from an Asian organization. Though the grant was small, it was a big step for the Asian community.”<sup>73</sup> Kathy Im, one of the founders of the Asian Giving Circle puts it, “Even

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<sup>72</sup> “AAPIP Regional Giving Circles Frequently Asked Questions”. The 10% fee is collected as a percentage of all funds donated in one year in the giving circle.

<sup>73</sup> AGC 2008 Brochure.

though our grants are small, organizations that are turned down by us are very disappointed. They want to be acknowledged and supported by Asian American donors. It's the only pan-Asian source of philanthropy [in Chicago] and it is a new source of support."<sup>74</sup>

These and other stories like it confirm the demand for funding from Asian Americans is strong. Giving circles are stepping into the gap to provide financial and social support to these organizations that desperately want funding from Asian Americans to show that their own people support them. While these organizations could go out and get funding from other foundations, it is that much more meaningful when Asian Americans come together to give to Asian American communities. As Gene Lee, a member of the Asian Giving Circle put it, "When you come together and form a group, when you pool your resources, actions sometimes speaks louder than words."<sup>75</sup> The Asian American giving circle, in a greater sense, builds a bridge between the Asian American communities and neighborhoods that need philanthropic funding and the Asian Americans who have the means to give back to these communities.

Giving circles cannot underestimate the value communities place on grants from local communities of philanthropists back into the community. The monetary funds are only a part of the returns generated to nonprofits serving the local area. There is great power in local philanthropists coming together to give back to the community in which they live.

### Educational Opportunities

Giving circles provide numerous opportunities for education to its participants about philanthropy, the grantmaking process, and the community. The data suggest that there is more to do to educate Asian Americans about these areas. In the survey of giving circle participants, a majority said they learned the most about philanthropy and about the grantmaking process through their participation in the giving circle. While some have had success with site visits, going through the grantee selection process, and bringing in outside speakers, the majority of giving circle participants do not have the time to really engage in running the giving circle to go beyond writing the annual check to the giving circle. Not only did the participants not have time; the leaders themselves had no time and could not learn as much about philanthropy as they wished.

Several giving circles are exploring the possibility of bringing on dedicated staff to help but none of the giving circles is financially able to support paid staff. One solution may be to utilize technology platforms to inform and educate donors about philanthropy and the community to the giving circle as one way to educate participants. This may be in the form of webinars, recorded videos, or virtual site visits of nonprofits.

Developing participants at different levels of knowledge and experience in philanthropy is also a challenge for giving circles. Some have never given before, others do not understand philanthropy, and there is a lack of understanding about community needs. Contrast this with a nonprofit professional with highly developed knowledge about philanthropy. How can the two co-exist in the same giving circle and have their needs met?

It is important for giving circles to manage volunteers and members actively and to be aware of the different levels of experience in philanthropy. One method is to create informal mentoring

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Kathy Im.

<sup>75</sup> Asian Giving Circle: The Art of Asian Giving Video.

relationships by pairing up a more experienced donor with a new one in order to help newer members learn about philanthropy and to explore their personal philosophy of philanthropy.

### Giving Circle Participants: No Time = Lost Opportunity

In order for giving circle participants to learn about philanthropy, participants need time to do so, which often was lacking. Findings from the survey showed that while many had intentions to give back to the community and be part of a philanthropic group of Asian Americans, there was simply not enough time on the part of many participants to do more and learn more about philanthropy. One survey mentioned that 50% of all giving circles cited the lack of time as the number one barrier to philanthropic opportunities.<sup>76</sup>

The lack of time also precludes more efforts to fundraise and find new giving circle members. As one giving circle participant stated, “A great number of people in our community have no understanding of philanthropy, giving, and why we are passionate about fairness and equal access to scarce resources.” Another participant said, “Many people are already tapped out or more interested in giving directly [to the community] rather than via another channel.” The data show that the potential for giving is certainly there, but time to devote to the giving circle, to fundraising, and ‘friend-raising’ is a major impediment to the growth and development of Asian American giving circles.

To overcome this challenge, giving circles can think strategically about encouraging members to participate in smaller volunteer roles or to take part in educational opportunities that are accessible. For example, instead of engaging a member through a full grantmaking process, a member could receive a short profile and summary of one grantee and be asked to fill out a short response form about the grantee. By thinking creatively about ways to engage members and make giving circle participation more accessible but still a fun and rewarding break from work, giving circles remain an attractive way to engage people in their philanthropy.

### Member Recruitment and Leadership Transitions

Asian American giving circles also faced challenges of member recruitment and leadership transitions. Giving circles going through the emerging and mature life stages are usually the most aware of the difficulty of a smooth leadership transition. Founders have worked hard for several years to start and establish the giving circle, and now they are ready to pass it on. The leadership transition is especially difficult since founders often bring the vision, connections, and contacts in the community that often enable the giving circle’s success in the first place.

The Asian Giving Circle and Saffron Giving Circle both are dealing with this very issue. For the Asian Giving Circle, they decided to get participants involved first in one of their three committees: membership, events, or grantmaking. If after serving for at least a year in the committees, a participant can be considered for the co-chair position. Having two co-chairs with staggered two-year terms helps in the leadership transition process.

After two years in operation, the Saffron Circle’s original members’ commitment is expiring (the initial commitment was two years), and the circle has had to work hard to encourage existing members to continue, while reaching out to new members. The initial decision two years ago

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<sup>76</sup> Siegel, Dan. Philanthropy’s Forgotten Resource.

did not take into consideration the difficulty of getting members to renew their commitment. Meeting bimonthly has also made it difficult to have regular, meaningful interaction with existing members, which also does not solidify relationships with members that will encourage them to renew their membership and participation. The Saffron Circle is putting in place a leadership structure similar to that of the Asian Giving Circle. It is also seeking to expand its membership through exploring partnerships with other Asian American professional organizations.

The member recruitment and leadership development tasks never really stop for successful giving circles. It is an ongoing task to recruit new members, develop their sense of philanthropy and leadership, and create opportunities for members to exercise volunteer leadership while building strong relationships with the giving circle and the community. By formalizing leadership succession plans, encouraging membership development, and maintaining regular contact with members to strengthen relationships, giving circles can overcome these challenges.

### **Implications for the Philanthropic Sector**

The analysis of data gathered from the interviews, survey, and current literature suggest four conclusions:

1. Giving circles work for the Asian American community; it is creating connections and creating awareness of resources and needs
2. The potential of Asian American philanthropy is clear, but tapping into this potential remains elusive; and
3. Philanthropy still has a role in helping Asian American community organizations.
4. More research is needed to further the knowledge of Asian American philanthropy: the motive, the means, the identity, and the future

Each of these conclusions is explained in further detail in the following sections.

#### Giving Circles work for the Asian American community

“It’s an empowerment track for us. It is we raising our own money and deciding where that money should go. We must change the culture and the practice of giving in our communities.”<sup>77</sup>

Asian Americans are empowered to raise money for their own communities and there is great enthusiasm among individuals involved in the giving circles. Giving circles are bringing Asian Americans together to learn about philanthropy and more importantly, increasing a common desire to give back to Asian American communities in need. As seen from the findings, the Asian American community’s enthusiastic response to giving circle funding and participation also sends a powerful signal that giving circles are creating an awareness of the needs in the community. This in turn feeds the energy and enthusiasm behind many of the giving circles and is a harbinger that working through the challenges of starting up and sustaining a giving circle is worth it. As Dee Dee Nguyen, co-founder of the Lunar Giving Circle says, “I love seeing giving circles harnessing energy and intelligence of really talented, extremely intelligent individuals to figure out what matters to you, and what matters to you in the community. The impact may be small, but at the end of the day, people around the table learn from each other.” Giving circles

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<sup>77</sup> Giving, the Asian Way. AsiaWeek.

are creating networks that may have existed before in other contexts, but now are galvanized toward a goal to increase the common good for the community.

By building community through learning together, giving together, and serving the community together, giving circles bring Asian Americans together and increase philanthropy in a way that other forms of philanthropy have not done.

### Tapping the Potential of Asian American Philanthropy

The findings also clearly highlight the potential of Asian American philanthropy to do more in communities. The growth in population, education levels, and wealth all point to a great potential for Asian American philanthropy to be a collective force for good not just in Asian communities but in education, the arts, and social services. Giving circles are one very small slice of philanthropy by Asian Americans. How can giving circles, and more broadly other nonprofits, begin to turn this potential philanthropy into reality?

Attempting to answer this question requires a greater analysis into the Asian American donor. Trying to identify the philanthropic characteristics of someone that looks Asian is complicated by differences in the degree of influence on one's philanthropy from ethnicity, culture, language, education, generation, and family background. There may be lingering stereotypes of frugality, greed, and a general disdain for social service and welfare. There is no 'generic' model of what an Asian American donor looks or acts like.

Whatever the combination, it is clear from evidence collected in the survey that the perception remains of Asians are still far behind in understanding the meaning of giving. As one survey participant stated, "I think [Asians] understand philanthropy as "social or human services" but they lose sight of the many other things philanthropy is about, for example: public policy. They are still far from understanding why we have local elected officials and how can we use our grant dollars wisely to get our officials to tune into our disparities. Asians only give if there is a great sense of return. It's not that they're greedy, it's just that they want to make sure it's going to benefit someone for a good cause."

A source of this challenge is also overcoming generational and ethnic differences. First generation immigrants view philanthropy and charitable giving very differently than a second generation Asian American growing up in the United States. Just as a Chinese American has very different attitudes towards philanthropy and community than someone living in China now, so the generational divides can loom large as well. "There is definitely a difference between the older and younger [Asian American] generations. The younger have more interest, passion, and knowledge about giving; they really understand this notion of giving back."<sup>78</sup>

Today's second generation Asian Americans are still getting used to the idea of seeing themselves as pan-Asian Asian Americans. Chinese-Americans, Korean-Americans, Vietnamese-Americans, and other groups, all saw themselves very distinctly from one another, and did not want to come together. Ideological differences, cultural stereotypes, and histories of conflict between Asian ethnic groups all feed into these distinctions, which in many parts of the country are still very real via influences of family and culture. Not all Asian Americans have acculturated to being comfortable being with Asians of different ethnicity.

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<sup>78</sup> Interview, Michelle Tong, AsiaNextGen.

Over time, each individual determines his or her level of Asian and American identity and to what extent the identity will influence his or her philanthropy. This is influenced by family, friends, and the environment one is raised. The level of identity in one's "Asian-ness" also affects the difficulty of getting donors to give to their own communities and/or organizations reflecting their racial group.

As one giving circle participant suggested, the "potential to tap more high net worth Asians and have them support the work of giving circles would be helpful to increasing impact and visibility." Moreover, like philanthropist Leslie Tang-Schilling, a well-known Asian American philanthropist, "Because I can operate in both worlds- Asia and the US - I don't feel obliged to just give in the Chinese world. Some people of Chinese descent give to Chinese-only projects. In a way, I can understand that, but I think that kind of focus is narrow. I see philanthropy as a worldwide endeavor."<sup>79</sup>

The reality remains that many Asian Americans are not conscious about charitable giving and not interested in giving. Some give to church, to family, or when asked to give. A systematic commitment to philanthropy is lacking for many Asian Americans. Asian American giving circles demonstrate that instilling an ethos of philanthropy in young professionals is one of the keys to tapping the full potential of Asian American philanthropy when these participants enter the peak of their career earnings potential.

### Philanthropy's Role in Asian American Communities

There are still many needs in Asian American communities that could benefit from additional philanthropic investment. As we have seen, giving circles provide a very small portion of philanthropic funds to community organizations. The larger, established independent foundations continue to have a role to help fund Asian American communities, particularly in cities where the foundation is established and there are large segments of underserved Asian American populations, such as New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle.

Foundation giving to Asian American communities has been inadequate in meeting these community needs. In the 2007 report on independent foundation assets and the Asian American population, Pronita Gupta found that foundation giving to Asian American communities has not kept pace with the growth of these communities or with foundations' asset growth. The Asian American population has grown to comprise 4.5% of the U.S. population, yet 2004 foundation funding to nonprofits serving Asian American populations represented just 0.4% of all U.S. foundation dollars.<sup>80</sup>

It will be difficult if not impossible to convince larger foundations as a group to give large grants to meeting the needs in the Asian American community without concerted efforts to show how large amounts of funding can make a difference. There is far too much variation in approaches to grant making from foundation to foundation in order to expect such a rapid shift.<sup>81</sup>

The greatest probability of foundation funding to Asian American community organization will be from a foundation started or funded by an Asian American. By developing relationships with Asian American community organizations, providing solid justification for giving back to the community (if they are not already personally invested in giving back), and showing a clear

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<sup>79</sup> "Leslie Tang Schilling on Giving Back." Asian American Giving, December 2007.

<sup>80</sup> Gupta, Pronita, and Stephanie Ritoper. Growing Opportunities.

<sup>81</sup> Profiles in Foundation Giving to Communities of Color, Volume 1.

return on investment in the community, Asian American donors can take the lead to show its commitment to the health and social fabric of the community. The significant transformative force of philanthropy for communities of color may take 100 years to occur, but changing the perception of community needs is critical to philanthropy's success in meeting those needs.

### Open Questions, Future Research, and Conclusion

Asian American giving circles bring together donors to pool together their funds and give back to a community grateful for their support. What is powerful about giving circles is the collective voice of Asian Americans making statements about philanthropy and community needs. Collectively the giving circles are still a small slice of all giving circles and all philanthropic activity by Asian Americans. More research is needed to increase the understanding of Asian Americans and philanthropy. The following questions arose during the course of this research that are valuable for further thinking, discussion, and research for the philanthropic sector.

As Asian Americans continue to assimilate into American society, and interracial marriages increase, the degree to which Asian Americans identify themselves as distinct in their philanthropy will be a crucial factor. From the research on giving circles we see that Asian Americans bring a blend of individual and communal style of giving. Will these distinctions disappear over time as Asian Americans establish themselves in the United States? Will Asian American philanthropy continue to exist in 50 or 100 years as we know it now? If so, what does it look like and how is it different from what we think of today?

Giving circles expressed a challenge of educating their members about philanthropy. The underlying motives for charitable behavior are complex for any group of people. More research is needed to see whether Asian Americans have distinct motivations and if so, what these motivations are. What is the underlying philosophy of philanthropy? Is this philosophy distinctly Asian American? What can be done to educate greater numbers of Asian Americans about their personal philosophy of philanthropy?

The wealth transfer from one generation to the next over the following 40 years represents opportunities for continuing research on Asian American philanthropy in all its forms – foundations, giving circles, donor advised funds, informal giving, and remittances. Additionally the increasing economic influence of China and India also represents significant opportunities for tracking philanthropic activity among Chinese Americans and Indian Americans active in building wealth in those respective countries over the coming decades. How much will China and India's economic ascendancy affect the perception of Asian Americans and their wealth?

All of these questions require further attention and research in order to build a greater body of knowledge to benefit the philanthropic sector. The paucity of data on Asian American philanthropy is a hindrance to further research and answering these questions. While researchers have relied almost solely on anecdotal evidence, a larger source of data is needed in order to make any substantial conclusions about Asian American philanthropy. Increasing the data set of Asian American donors, foundations, and philanthropic activity is critical to any efforts to increasing the viability of research in this area. Foundations and philanthropic research organizations need to come together to fund a planning process to create data that is usable and beneficial for the philanthropic sector. What can be done to further foundation interest in funding data collection efforts?

How long will it take Asian Americans to gain philanthropic influence? Will political or corporate success pave the way to greater philanthropy? These and other questions need more research and attention by practitioners, researchers, and most importantly, donors that can provide the resources to advance the practice of Asian American philanthropy. With the models of philanthropy provided by Asian American giving circles, it may increase the chances that Asian Americans can utilize philanthropy for the good of its communities around the country.

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**Appendix 1: Profiles of Giving Circles Included in Research** (in alphabetical order)

<b>Name</b>	AAPIP National Donor Circle
<b>Start Date</b>	2006
<b>Number of Members</b>	10 to 15 members
<b>Grants by Year</b>	So far, grants to 4 Asian American giving circles. AAPIP National Giving Circle provides a 25% match of whatever is raised at the regional giving circle
<b>Donor Commitment</b>	\$10,000 per year with a one year commitment
<b>Grantees</b>	As of 2008, grants to: Los Angeles API Giving Circle Asian Women's Giving Circle (NY) Hmong Women's Giving Circle (Twin Cities) Lunar Giving Circle (San Francisco)
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.aapip.org/cp">www.aapip.org/cp</a>
<b>Contact</b>	Joe Lucero, AAPIP Director of Communications <a href="mailto:aapip@aapip.org">aapip@aapip.org</a>

<b>Name</b>	Asian American Giving Circle of Greater Houston
<b>Start Date</b>	November 2007
<b>Number of Members</b>	30
<b>Grants by Year</b>	2008: \$4,500 to Vietnamese Food Bank \$4,500 to the Hope Clinic for diagnostic equipment
<b>Donor Commitment</b>	\$300 per year minimum with a 2 year commitment
<b>Grantees</b>	To be announced
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.asianamericangcgh.org">www.asianamericangcgh.org</a>
<b>Contact</b>	Rogene Gee Calvert, Co-Founder <a href="mailto:info@asianamericangcgh.org">info@asianamericangcgh.org</a>

<b>Name</b>	Asian Giving Circle of Chicago
<b>Start Date</b>	December 2002
<b>Number of Members</b>	50+
<b>Grants by Year</b>	<p>Since 2004, the members of the Asian Giving Circle have awarded grants totaling \$78,000 to 18 community organizations in the Chicago area. In 2008 (Total grants of \$22,000):</p> <p>Chinese American Service League Volunteer Program (\$6,000)  Hamdard Center for Health and Human Services Strategic Planning (\$4,500)  Japanese American Service Committee Sr Wellness Outreach Program (\$4,500)  Silk Road Theater Project Fundraising and Capacity Building (\$7,000)</p> <p>Learn more at <a href="http://www.aapip.org/pdfs/AGC2008GrantRecipients.pdf">www.aapip.org/pdfs/AGC2008GrantRecipients.pdf</a></p>
<b>Donor Commitment</b>	\$250 per year minimum with a 2 year commitment
<b>Grantees</b>	<p>Asian Human Services  Cambodian Association of Illinois  Center for Immigrant Resources and Community Arts  Coalition of African, Arab, Asian, European and Latino Immigrants of Illinois (CAAAELI)  Indo-American Center  Japanese American Service Committee  Korean American Resource and Cultural Center  Vietnamese Association of Illinois  Young Asians with Power! (YAWP)  ZAM's Hope</p>
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.asiangivingcircle.org">www.asiangivingcircle.org</a>
<b>Contact</b>	Christine Plautz, Co-Chair, <a href="mailto:asiangivingcircle@cct.org">asiangivingcircle@cct.org</a>

<b>Name</b>	Asian Women's Giving Circle
<b>Start Date</b>	June 2005
<b>Number of Members</b>	Between 100-150 donors
<b>Grants by Year</b>	2006: \$55,500 to six organizations 2007: \$74,000 to six organizations 2008: \$72,000 to eight organizations
<b>Donor Commitment</b>	No minimum
<b>Grantees</b>	<u>2008 grantees:</u> Asian American Writer's Workshop Center for the Study of Asian American Health Girls Write Now Katie Quan Sakhi for South Asian Women Slanty Eyed Mama / Kate Rigg Tea & Justice Maria the Korean Bride See the entire list at <a href="http://www.asianwomengivingcircle.org/grantees.htm">www.asianwomengivingcircle.org/grantees.htm</a>
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.asianwomengivingcircle.org">www.asianwomengivingcircle.org</a>
<b>Contact</b>	Hali Lee, <a href="mailto:info@asianwomengivingcircle.org">info@asianwomengivingcircle.org</a>

<b>Name</b>	AsiaNextGen
<b>Start Date</b>	2004
<b>Number of Members</b>	14
<b>Grants by Year</b>	2006: \$20,000 2007: \$25,000 2008 est.: \$30,000
<b>Donor Commitment</b>	\$1000 per year minimum with a one year commitment
<b>Grantees</b>	2006: The Child Center of NY's Asian Outreach Program 2007: IndoChina Sino-American Community Center
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.asianextgen.org">www.asianextgen.org</a>
<b>Contact</b>	Michelle Tong, <a href="mailto:info@asiannextgen.org">info@asiannextgen.org</a>

<b>Name</b>	Association of Asian American Yale Alumni/Tina Yeh Fellowship
<b>Start Date</b>	2001
<b>Number of Members</b>	Over 100
<b>Grants by Year</b>	\$2500 for summer fellowships to Yale undergraduates, 1-3 given out each year
<b>Donor Commitment</b>	No minimum
<b>Grantees</b>	Tina Yeh Community Service Fellowship Learn more at <a href="http://www.aaaya.org/st_tey.html">www.aaaya.org/st_tey.html</a>
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.aaaya.org">www.aaaya.org</a>
<b>Contact</b>	Grant Din, <a href="mailto:grantdin79@aya.yale.edu">grantdin79@aya.yale.edu</a>

<b>Name</b>	Filipino American Fund
<b>Start Date</b>	2000
<b>Number of Members</b>	N/A
<b>Grants by Year</b>	2005: \$60,000
<b>Donor Commitment</b>	No minimum
<b>Grantees</b>	Grants to family counseling programs in the Bay Area
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.asianpacificfund.org/donors/filamfund.shtml">www.asianpacificfund.org/donors/filamfund.shtml</a>
<b>Contact</b>	Gail Kong, <a href="mailto:info@asianpacificfund.org">info@asianpacificfund.org</a>

<b>Name</b>	Hmong Giving Circle of Minnesota
<b>Start Date</b>	January 2004
<b>Number of Members</b>	8
<b>Grants by Year</b>	2004: \$15,000 2005: \$30,000 2008: \$36,000
<b>Donor Commitment</b>	\$500 per year minimum with 2 year commitment
<b>Grantees</b>	<u>2008 grantees:</u> Shades of Yellow (SOY) Hmong Youth Education Services (HYES) Professional Hmong Women's Association (PHWA)
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.aapip.org/cp">www.aapip.org/cp</a>
<b>Contact</b>	Sandy Vue, <a href="mailto:sandy.vue@gmail.com">sandy.vue@gmail.com</a>

<b>Name</b>	Los Angeles Asian Pacific Islander Giving Circle (LAAPI)
<b>Start Date</b>	2007
<b>Number of Members</b>	15
<b>Grants by Year</b>	First grant to be given in December 2008
<b>Donor Commitment</b>	\$500 per year minimum with 2 year commitment
<b>Grantees</b>	To be announced in 2008
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.aapip.org/cp">www.aapip.org/cp</a>
<b>Contact</b>	Leslie Ito, lito_arts@yahoo.com

<b>Name</b>	Lunar Giving Circle
<b>Start Date</b>	2007
<b>Number of Members</b>	12
<b>Grants by Year</b>	To Be Announced
<b>Donor Commitment</b>	\$250 minimum per year for 2 year commitment
<b>Grantees</b>	To Be Announced
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.lunargivingcircle.org">www.lunargivingcircle.org</a>
<b>Contact</b>	Dee Dee Nguyen, deede@changemakers.org

<b>Name</b>	Saffron Circle
<b>Start Date</b>	May 2006
<b>Number of Members</b>	37
<b>Grants by Year</b>	2007: \$15,000 2008: \$16,000
<b>Donor Commitment</b>	\$250 minimum per year for 2 year commitment
<b>Grantees</b>	2008 Grantees Asian Center of Merrimack Valley Chinese Progressive Association Massachusetts Asian and Pacific Islanders (MAP) for Health Matahari: Eye of the Day Nepali Rights and Resources Alliance Odaiko New England Phillips House Brooks Association
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.saffroncircle.org">www.saffroncircle.org</a>
<b>Contact</b>	Martin Son, info@saffroncircle.org

## Appendix 2: List of Interviewees

The following individuals were interviewed by telephone between August 11, 2008 and September 3, 2008.

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Giving Circle</b>
1	Joe Lucero	AAPIP National Giving Circle
2	Rogene Gee Calvert	Asian American Giving Circle of Greater Houston
3	Kathy Im	Asian Giving Circle of Chicago
4	Christine Plautz	Asian Giving Circle of Chicago
5	Alice Lee-Osborne	Asian Giving Circle of Chicago
6	Hali Lee	Asian Women's Giving Circle
7	Michelle Tong	AsiaNextGen
8	Grant Din	Association of Asian American Yale Alumni
9	Gail M. Kong	Filipino American Fund
10	Sandy Vue	Hmong Giving Circle of Minnesota
11	Jean Miao	Los Angeles API Fund
12	Leslie Ito	Los Angeles API Fund
13	Dien Yuen	Lunar Giving Circle
14	Dee Dee Nguyen	Lunar Giving Circle
15	Martin Son	Saffron Giving Circle

## **Appendix 3: Giving Circles Interview Guide**

Thank you so much for taking time to speak with me today. Please know that all of your answers can be quoted to you directly in my paper unless you tell me specifically.

### **Background**

1. When was the giving circle formed?
2. How many members does your giving circle have?
3. Composition of giving circle (female/male)
4. Composition of giving circle (ethnic categories)
5. Composition of giving circle (age)

### **Starting Up**

1. What were the circumstances that led you to begin a giving circle?
2. What aspect of starting the giving circle was most challenging?
3. How long did it take from the time you started the giving circle to giving out your first grant? What happened in that in-between time? What was the reaction of the organization to which you gave your first grant?
4. What aspect of keeping the giving circle going is the most challenging?
5. If you were to start another giving circle, what would you do differently?
6. To what degree do you feel like your Asian-American culture has affected the way you view giving circles?

### **Financial**

1. Total amount raised by donors so far (for 2008 if applicable; if not, the most recent year, or total):
2. What is the minimum amount for donor to participate in the giving circle?
3. How did you decide on minimum amount?
4. Total amount granted to date:
5. Largest gift amount and to who?

### **Grantmaking**

1. Where, geographically, does your circle fund?
2. What are your circle's funding priorities?
3. Describe some practices to help educate giving circle participants about philanthropy and the community to which you give.
4. How have you seen your communities appreciate the funding provided by your giving circle?
5. Describe the due diligence process of selecting grantees and organizations to fund.  
(How does the giving circle identify the organizations it wishes to fund?) Do you look at financial statements, brochures and/or websites of the organizations to fund?
6. Do members conduct site visits to the organizations they might fund? Do members conduct interviews of staff and/or of board members of the organizations to fund?
7. What best describes the grant decision process?
8. Do you give grants based on instinct or purely by analytical methods? Or both?
9. Do you give your money exclusively to Asian-American organizations?
10. Do you maintain a formal relationship with your grantees? Or is it a more casual, social relationship?

### **Management**

1. What were some of the most effective ways of recruiting new members?
2. Do you target specific people to join the giving circle? Why?
3. Do you find out why people choose not to participate in the giving circle? What are the reasons they do not participate?
4. What were some of the best ways for participants to get more involved beyond just writing a check?
5. (if appropriate) What advantages/disadvantages do you have from having your giving circle hosted?

### **Governance**

1. Who chooses the leadership of the giving circle?
2. Does leadership rotate or change? If so, how often?
3. Do you find yourself reprioritizing and reassessing the value of the giving circle?
4. Does the membership (of the giving circle) change? How often?

### **APA Perspective**

1. How has being a part of this giving circle shaped your perception of philanthropy and charitable giving by APAs?
2. How effective would you say the giving circle has been in increasing education and participation in philanthropy by APAs?
3. What distinctions do you believe your giving circle has that others do not?
4. How have the social networks you or others have been part of influence the direction and composition of the giving circle?
5. In your estimation, how effective is a giving circle to establishing and maintaining a connection to the needs of Asian American community organizations?
6. How do Asian American community organizations respond to your giving?

### **Final**

1. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the giving circle?
2. What do you see in the future for APA philanthropy?
3. Last thing: I also have a separate survey that if possible, if you could share with the members of the giving circle and ask them to fill it out; I would really appreciate that as well!

Thank you so much for your time. I will be sure to send you a copy of the report when it is finished.

#### **Appendix 4: Giving Circle Participant Survey (N=24)**

1. What is the name of the giving circle you are involved with?

2. When did you join the giving circle? (Month and Year)

3. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Decline to answer

4. Please choose the appropriate age bracket: (select one)

- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50 or better

5. What is your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)

- Chinese
- Korean
- Japanese
- Indian
- Caucasian
- African-American
- Hispanic
- Other, please specify

6. How have you participated in the giving circle? (Select all that apply)

- Financially
- Grantmaking decision process
- Site visits
- Leadership

7. How much have you donated as part of the giving circle?

#### Participant Reflections

8. What motivated you to join the giving circle?

9. What have been some of the challenges of being part of a giving circle for you personally?

10. What has been the most rewarding aspect of your experience in the giving circle?

11. Please rate the amount of learning you have gained from being part of the giving circle in the following areas (1 to 5):

	<i>Nothing</i>	<i>Very little</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Tremendous</i>
<i>Philanthropy</i>					
<i>The grantmaking process</i>					
<i>The evaluation process</i>					
<i>Your community</i>					

12. How has being a part of this giving circle shaped your perception of philanthropy and charitable giving by Asian Americans?

13. In your estimation, how effective is a giving circle to establishing and maintaining a connection to the needs of Asian American community organizations?

14. Do you think the giving circle is effective in its philanthropy? How could be more effective?

15. Please share any other comments/reflections about your experience in the giving circle.

16. Would you like a copy of the report emailed to you when it is completed?

- Yes
- No