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Activities of The White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (2009-2011)

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## Activities of The White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (2009–2011)

Throughout the past two years, The White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) has conducted numerous roundtables, hosted special events, engaged in direct and indirect outreach to the community, and advised on policy creation and reformulation to fulfill its presidential mandate and increase community usage of programming and resources from various federal agencies. Charged with the mission to improve the quality of life of AAPIs through increased access to and participation in federal programs in which they may be underserved, the initiative has traveled from coast to coast and city to city in order to engage the community and determine what the growing AAPI population needs. Extensive research and outreach and coordinated collaborations with government agencies have allowed the initiative to assess the needs of the population and implement solutions. With the dedication of the commission and the Federal Interagency Working Group, the initiative has made significant progress in connecting the community with needed programs and protections and pushing policy reforms to create stability and remove barriers for AAPIs.

### Initiative Key Policy Areas

The initiative has structured its efforts into five “pods,” or areas of focus: civil and immigrant rights, economic growth, educational opportunities, healthy communities, and sustainable neighborhoods. These priorities have played an important role in informing the development of federal agency plans submitted to the initiative and ultimately to the president. As mandated by the executive order, agencies are required to outline specific steps they will take and the measures of success they will use to better serve the AAPI community. In February 2011, these plans were made public for comment in accordance with President Obama’s Open Government Initiative, and the release of the plans was met with

great enthusiasm from community leaders. These federal agency plans, revised to incorporate community feedback, have been the momentum behind the development of AAPI-specific policies and programming, thereby increasing the government's transparency and accountability to the AAPI community. In conjunction with the pod structure, these agency plans have allowed the initiative to effectively channel its efforts in focused, actionable, and measurable ways. We highlight a few examples of our goals, activities, and deliverables below. (See Table 1)

### Civil and Immigrant Rights

The civil and immigrant rights pod focuses on efforts to ensure that all AAPIs have equal access to government programs and services. For example, building upon President Obama's campaign to end bullying in our schools and realizing that bullying is a major problem among AAPI students, the initiative is working with the Department of Education (DOE) Office for Civil Rights, the Department of Justice (DOJ) Civil Rights Division, and community advocates to mitigate the issue by using strategies such as (1) convening roundtables and a national summit to hear from the community on its concerns and inform the community about government efforts to address bullying, (2) providing webinars on filing complaints of bullying and harassment with the federal government, (3) creating public-service announcements on antibullying in multiple languages, and (4) incorporating special populations such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) AAPI voice into existing initiatives. The Initiative worked closely with the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools at the Department of Education to disseminate school curriculum from grantees addressing the tenth anniversary of 9/11. Additionally, the Initiative is working to engage the Muslim community in federal services and programs.

With nearly 60 percent of the community foreign-born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009), AAPIs comprise nearly one-third of annual legal immigration to the United States (Batalova, 2006). Under the direction of the White House Domestic Policy Council, the initiative is working with other federal agencies to facilitate immigrant integration through the civil, economic, and linguistic integration of new Americans, including the revamping of a comprehensive federal Web site to access federal programs and services. The initiative created the model for roundtables and has hosted immigration

Table 1: The White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders—Deliverables and Accomplishments

Pod	Accomplishments
<b>Civil and Immigrant Rights</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Convened stakeholders and federal officials on immigrant integration issues.</li> <li>2. Brought AAPI stakeholders and federal officials together to stop bullying and harassment.</li> <li>3. Convened AAPI LGBT youth and stakeholders and federal officials to discuss bullying, comprehensive sex education, and HIV/AIDS prevention.</li> <li>4. Convened AAPI women’s groups around the country to discuss and relay recommendations to federal agencies.</li> <li>5. Participated in the first Senior Executive Service Development Program to improve the representation of AAPIs in federal employment.</li> </ol>
<b>Economic Growth</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Helped spur economic growth through AAPI businesses. As of September 2010, AAPI small businesses have secured more than \$1 billion in new government contracts.</li> <li>2. Promoted safe and secure jobs for AAPI workers.</li> <li>3. Advised the federal relief effort during the BP oil spill.</li> </ol>
<b>Educational Opportunities</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthened the AANAPISI Program and helped increase the number of AANAPISIs from 23 to 52.</li> <li>2. Facilitated the creation of the Asian Pacific Islander American Association of Colleges and Universities.</li> <li>3. Supported English Language Learner programming with the DOE.</li> <li>4. Helped build the AAPI teacher pipeline.</li> </ol>
<b>Healthy Communities</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Engaged the AAPI community on the implementation of the Affordable Care Act.</li> <li>2. Improved data-collection policies for AAPIs.</li> <li>3. Promoted the prevention of chronic viral hepatitis B infections in AAPI communities.</li> <li>4. Increased AAPI access to health care services.</li> <li>5. Encouraged healthy eating and increased physical activity among NHPI youth.</li> </ol>
<b>Sustainable Neighborhoods</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthened AAPI housing choices by providing fair housing education and certified the first network of AAPI-serving housing counseling organizations.</li> <li>2. Engaged AAPI communities nationally on sustainable growth</li> <li>3. Created the first interagency working group on nail salon worker health and safety.</li> </ol>

integration conversations with AAPI and other community groups in Honolulu, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and Seattle.

In May 2011, the initiative and the White House Office of Public Engagement brought LGBT Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) youth together with representatives from the DOE, DOJ, and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in order to incorporate the specific needs of this community into federal antibullying, comprehensive sex education, and HIV-prevention programs. This pod also addresses the experiences of AAPI women across a broad range of intersecting issues including physical and mental health, domestic violence, and workplace safety. In February 2011, the initiative hosted a women's inter-agency roundtable with the White House Council on Women and Girls and raised issues of language access for victims of sexual and domestic violence and nail salon worker health and safety. Similar events were held in New York, San Francisco/Oakland, Atlanta, Texas, and Minnesota. The initiative is producing a comprehensive set of recommendations for agencies on how to move forward with specific policy issues that affect AAPI women.

#### Economic Development (Economic Growth and Sustainable Neighborhoods)

The economic growth and sustainable neighborhoods pods together promote the economic development interests of the AAPI community. Economic-growth initiatives have included the promotion of entrepreneurship and small-business growth opportunities, AAPI federal employment opportunities, and the protection of workers' rights. The sustainable neighborhoods pod focuses on promoting sustainability as a channel for AAPI economic development by connecting housing to the generation of new jobs and by the creation and encouragement of green growth.

AAPIs play a critical role in driving economic growth across the United States. A 2005 Census Bureau report identified more than 1.5 million Asian American-owned businesses generating more than \$500 billion in receipts and employing nearly three million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). However, an overreliance on such figures tends to exaggerate the economic successes of the AAPI community while obscuring serious issues pertaining to their economic/financial well-being, including linguistic and cultural challenges when it comes to accessing federal programs, dif-

difficulty obtaining loans, and unfair or discriminatory treatment in the workplace. AAPIs continue to face discrimination in the workplace; in one Gallup Poll, 30 percent of AAPIs surveyed reported incidents of employment discrimination, the largest of any group, but filed only 2 to 3 percent of the total employment-discrimination complaints received by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission against private employers (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2005).

To expand the AAPI community's access to and utilization of federal resources, in early 2011, the initiative, with the Department of Commerce (DOC) and the Small Business Administration (SBA), hosted the Summit on Entrepreneurship and Small Business Growth in Silicon Valley, California. Secretary of Commerce and Initiative Co-Chair Gary Locke, Commissioner Dilawar Syed, and other top advisors from the White House National Economic Council, Council of Economic Advisors, DOC, SBA, Department of Treasury, and the Export-Import Bank provided hands-on advice and counseling to AAPI entrepreneurs and business owners.

In May 2011, the initiative formed the first working group on the health concerns of nail salon workers. Spanning workers' rights and sustainable neighborhoods/healthy communities concerns, the working group brought the White House Council on Women and Girls, the DHHS, the Department of Labor, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the initiative together with the community to address the toxic exposure of AAPI workers to nail salon chemicals (see Table 1). The initiative has collaborated with federal agencies in designing a national green-certification process for nail salons. The certification promotes an eco-friendly, sustainable, and healthy environment for employees and clients through the establishment of standards for waste reduction, water and energy conservation, air quality, and the use of safe, green products.

Finally, acknowledging that AAPIs have an important role to play in promoting sustainability and in benefiting from the growth of green technology, the initiative partners with federal agencies and the community to explore sustainability as a channel for economic development. In July 2011, the initiative hosted a Sustainable Growth Summit in Seattle to examine ways that AAPIs can build neighborhood infrastructure that is environmentally and technologically sustainable while economically beneficial.

## Educational Opportunities

The educational opportunities pod focuses on issues impacting education and AAPIs, including access to federal educational opportunities and programs to assist students in reaching their full career potential. Building upon President Obama's prioritization of education under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the initiative's efforts include the promotion of data disaggregation by federal agencies in order to yield more reliable AAPI data, decreasing bullying and student harassment, advising on English language learner education, increasing community outreach to recruit more AAPI educators, increasing the number of AAPIs in federal service through internships and fellowships, and increasing resources for AAPI students.

In collaboration with the DOE, the initiative has played an important role in promoting and strengthening the Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) program. This partnership achieved a significant policy victory and clarified that AANAPISIs are minority-serving institutions and including them on the DOE official listing of minority-serving institutions, which will enhance their access to funding and services. The initiative has also worked with the department to host a number of teacher-recruitment events in Los Angeles and Seattle, organized six English language learner stakeholder meetings across the country in collaboration with Office of English Language Acquisition, and partnered with federal agencies in order to increase partnerships with AANAPISIs and the recruitment of AAPIs for federal fellowships and internships.

## Healthy Communities

From high rates of childhood obesity in the NHPI<sup>1</sup> community to the high incidence of HIV/AIDS infection in recent years,<sup>2</sup> health issues impacting the AAPI community are as complex and diverse as the community and require solutions that are collaborative and innovative. The healthy communities pod is focused on policies and initiatives to improve the overall health of AAPIs. These include ensuring that information about the Affordable Care Act is appropriately and effectively communicated to AAPI communities, increasing awareness of and addressing policy issues about the health disparities affecting AAPIs, and increasing



the number of culturally and linguistically appropriate health care access points for the traditionally underserved AAPI community.

In March 2011, the initiative worked with AAPI community leaders to present policy recommendations to DHHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. Following this meeting, the initiative has continued to work with stakeholders on policy recommendations related to data disaggregation, culturally and linguistically competent workforce development, and health disparities, among other issues. It has also hosted events and facilitated collaborative efforts between federal agencies and state, local, and community groups in order to advance specific objectives, including the prevention and treatment of hepatitis B viral infections in the AAPI community and expanding language access to nutrition information. To address the increased need for AAPI-serving health care access points, the initiative is working with community partners and DHHS on innovative strategies to integrate or connect culturally and linguistically relevant services and to provide appropriate technical assistance to community health organizations interested in accessing federal resources.

To engage the AAPI community on health care reform, the initiative has hosted various roundtables and plenary sessions throughout the country in order to provide opportunities for federal, state, and local officials to engage in dialogue with the AAPI community on the benefits of the Affordable Care Act.

### Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders

Though Native Hawaiians have been formally recognized as a separate group by the U.S. Census Bureau since 1970 and Pacific Islanders (by ethnicity as Samoan or Guamanian) since 1980 (Grieco, 2001), NHPIs have often been overlooked or amalgamated with the larger Asian American community for policy purposes (Ponce et al., 2009). The initiative has prioritized NHPI policy formulations that recognize their unique demographic and sociocultural factors while ensuring that NHPI voices are integral in all efforts.

The initiative works with key NHPI community organizations and federal agencies to ensure that the unique interests and concerns impacting NHPIs are addressed. In October 2010, the initiative hosted a Pacific Policy Forum at the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement (CNHA) convention in Honolulu with more than one hundred community organizations and several agency representatives. The community recommendations were relayed

to federal partners. The initiative also convened a follow-up meeting at the CNHA 2011 gathering on Public-Private Partnerships to help organizations leverage federal resources with private foundation dollars.

On April 2, 2011, the initiative and Commissioners Sefa Aina and Hines Ward hosted the first-ever NHPI Youth Health and Fitness Day in Los Angeles. More than 1,500 NHPI youth and family members attended the event that included appearances by Congresswoman Judy Chu, celebrity fitness trainer Jillian Michaels, and professional athletes Troy Polamalu and Marcus McNeil. With one in five NHPI high school students obese and with high rates of diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease in the community, it is critical to address access, prevention, and treatment of these health concerns for NHPIs (Eaton et al., 2009). The program complemented First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! campaign to battle childhood obesity in America.

These policy areas cover a broad array of issues impacting the everyday lives of AANHPIs. Though certainly not a comprehensive review of all AAPI concerns, this overview provides a window into the initiative's policy priorities and the efforts being made to advance AAPI community interests and improve the quality of life for AAPIs.

For more information on the initiative, please visit <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/aapi>.

The initiative can also be reached at:

White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

## Notes

1. Data from the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey data indicate that about 1 in 5 of NHPI high school youth (20.4%) were obese (defined as being in the 95th or higher percentile for body mass index), with this percentage being possibly the highest among all racial groups in the United States. Together, about 1 in 3 of all NHPI high school youth (33.5%) were likely to be overweight (defined as being in the 85th percentile or higher, but less than the 95th percentile) or obese. See Eaton et al., 2010 for more information.

2. Despite the relatively low prevalence of HIV/AIDS for AAPIs, between 2001 and 2004, this population had the highest estimated annual percentage increase in HIV/AIDS diagnoses of all races and ethnicities (8.1% for males and 14.3% for females). See Prejean et al., 2006 for more information.

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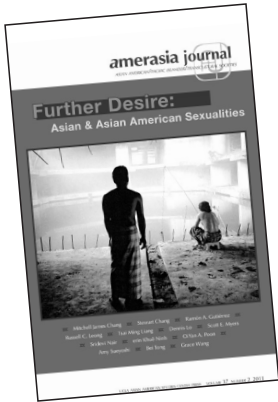
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