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Resource Paper

Community-Based Asian American and Pacific Islander Organizations and Immigrant Integration

Erwin de Leon

Abstract

An Urban Institute study examined immigrant integration through the lens of community-based organizations. Based on interviews with nonprofit leaders and an analysis of financial data, the study found that immigrant-serving nonprofits provide a wide range of programs and services that promote the social and political mobility of newcomers. Findings also suggest that Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) organizations in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area are smaller than other immigrant-serving nonprofits. AAPI groups also lack access to political networks that are crucial to securing policy and funding support. Moreover, different political and administrative structures affect the ability of these nonprofit organizations to serve their constituents.

Introduction

The United States has undergone unprecedented demographic shifts in the past four decades and is close to becoming a majority minority nation (Dougherty, 2011). In 1960, 5.4 percent of the U.S. population was foreign-born; by 2010 this figure stood at nearly 13 percent (Grieco, 2010).

Latinos and Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are the two largest immigrant groups in the U.S. Fifty and a half million people identified as Hispanic or Latino in 2010, composing 16 percent of the total population. Over 14.6 million people identified as Asian in 2010, a 43 percent increase from 2000. Another half a million people identified as Pacific Islander, an increase of 35 percent over the same period. Moreover, an estimated 2.6 million

people identify as part Asian (Humes, Jones and Ramirez, 2011). Altogether, the AAPI community is the fastest growing minority group in the U.S.

These national patterns are mirrored in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, which is one of the emerging twenty-first-century gateway communities for receiving immigrants (Singer, 2009). By 2010 it had more than 1.2 million immigrant residents¹ and ranked as the eighth largest metropolitan concentration of immigrants in the U.S. (Singer, 2010). Twenty-two percent of Washington, D.C. metropolitan area residents are foreign-born, compared with 12.8 percent nationwide.²

Public discourse around immigration has focused on unauthorized immigrants even though less than one-third of the foreign-born population is without legal documentation (Hoefer, Rytina, and Baker, 2011). While politicians and other stakeholders focus on border control and law enforcement, and to a lesser extent employment and access to public programs, they give little attention to how immigrants make their way into the civic and political fabric of U.S. society.

Like immigrant groups before them, current newcomers are faced with the need to acquire basic skills (such as finding a job), access basic services (such as education and medical care for themselves and their children), and acquire a voice in the political process. Negotiating this unknown path and becoming familiar with new customs and social expectations can be challenging.

Community-based nonprofit organizations are instrumental to the integration of newcomers. Immigrants gain the social and economic resources, and learn the civic skills necessary to establish themselves through these nonprofits (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman, 1995; Fung, 2003; Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001; LeRoux, 2007; Lim, 2008). They also tend to be the ones that work on behalf of the socially and economically disadvantaged members of society, including immigrants (Berry, 2005).

This paper examines community-based nonprofit organizations in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area that serve immigrant populations as they adjust to and integrate into their new communities and U.S. society. AAPI organizations in particular are compared to Latino organizations to highlight similarities and differences, which have implications for both communities.

Data on immigrant-serving organizations were collected in 2009 as part of a larger Urban Institute study of nonprofit organizations serving the immigrant population in the D.C. region (De Leon et al, 2009). Organizations were identified through the institute's National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS), a repository of nonprofit organizations that file with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS).³ Forty organization leaders were interviewed, representing thirty-four agencies in Washington, D.C., Maryland (Montgomery and Prince George's counties), and Northern Virginia. Within this group, there are seventeen Latino-serving and eight AAPI-serving organizations, which are the core group of respondents for this analysis.⁴

Growth of Organizations Mirrors Immigration Flows

In many ways, the creation and activities of today's immigrant-serving organizations reflect U.S. immigration history during the second half of the twentieth century.

Fidel Castro's rise to power in Cuba in 1959 initiated an exodus of Cuban refugees to the U.S., and by 1966 Congress passed the Cuban Refugee Act granting permanent residency to Cubans. A year earlier, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was enacted, ending national quotas on immigrants from all parts of the world. This made it easier for immigrants from Asia, Central and South America, as well as other parts of the world, to come to the U.S. Numerous refugees from Southeast Asia also entered the country during this period and in the 1970s, following the Vietnam War.

During the 1970s and 1980s, political upheavals in Nicaragua, Peru, and El Salvador created another wave of authorized and unauthorized immigrants to the U.S. In response, Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, raising the number of immigrants and refugees that could be admitted annually.⁵ A decade later, the Immigration Act of 1990 again boosted the number of legal residents allowed into the U.S. each year and expanded the admission of immigrants from regions of the world where visas were not traditionally granted through the diversity visa program.

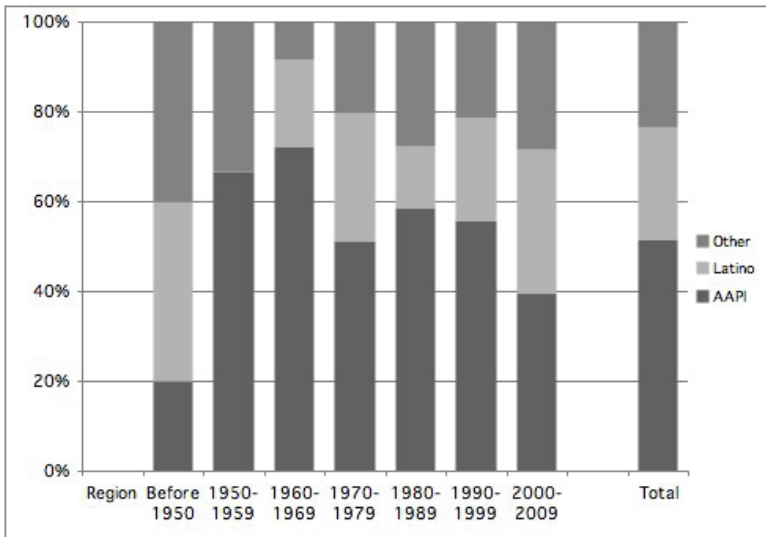
The USA Patriot Act, aimed at stopping potential terrorists, was signed into law in 2001, six weeks after the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. It has profoundly altered U.S. immigration policy by shifting the emphasis toward restricting immigration, and focusing on enforcement and border security.

The founding of many AAPI and Latino immigrant-serving organizations reflects these historic periods (see Figure 1). Twenty-two percent of AAPI-serving organizations were founded in the 1960s and 1970s while fewer than 20 percent of the region’s Latino-serving organizations were founded before the 1980s. A majority of AAPI (62 percent) and Latino (74 percent) organizations were formed during the last two decades in response to an increase in the number of immigrants and their needs.

Although some community-based organizations have ceased operations during this 40-year period, they have been replaced by new ones. The data show the on-going commitment of community-based organizations to assist new immigrants to the D.C. region.

A number of nonprofit organization leaders interviewed for this study spoke of the dynamic nature of immigrant-serving organizations and how groups have adapted over time to changing circumstances. For example, as immigrants from Southeast Asia began to settle into the U.S, some feared that successive genera-

Figure 1. Distribution of Immigrant-Serving Organizations in the D.C. Region by Founding Decade and Ethnic Group



Source: The Urban Institute National Center for Charitable Statistics Core File and the Internal Revenue Service, Exempt Organization Business Master File, (2011).

Note: “Other” includes organizations that serve other and multiple ethnicities.

tions might lose their cultural heritage and identity. Beginning in the late 1970s, organizations within the metropolitan region were founded to allay this fear. The Vietnamese Youth Educational Association of Washington, for example, was established in 1979 to sustain Vietnamese culture and language. The association started with ten pupils; today over 300 students a year receive language instruction.

Distribution of Immigrant-Serving Organizations in the D.C. Region

Immigrant-serving organizations can be found throughout the D.C. region, though they are concentrated in Washington, D.C. and Maryland (see Figure 2). Ninety percent of nonprofit organizations that serve AAPI immigrants and 67 percent that serve Latinos, however, are dispersed throughout the nearby suburbs of Maryland and Virginia (see Table 1).

Programs and Services

Immigrant-serving organizations offer an array of services and programs to their communities. AAPI and Latino-serving organizations are generally associated with religious entities. Six of ten AAPI and Latino organizations have religious affiliations (see Figure 3). Congregations are often the first and primary point of

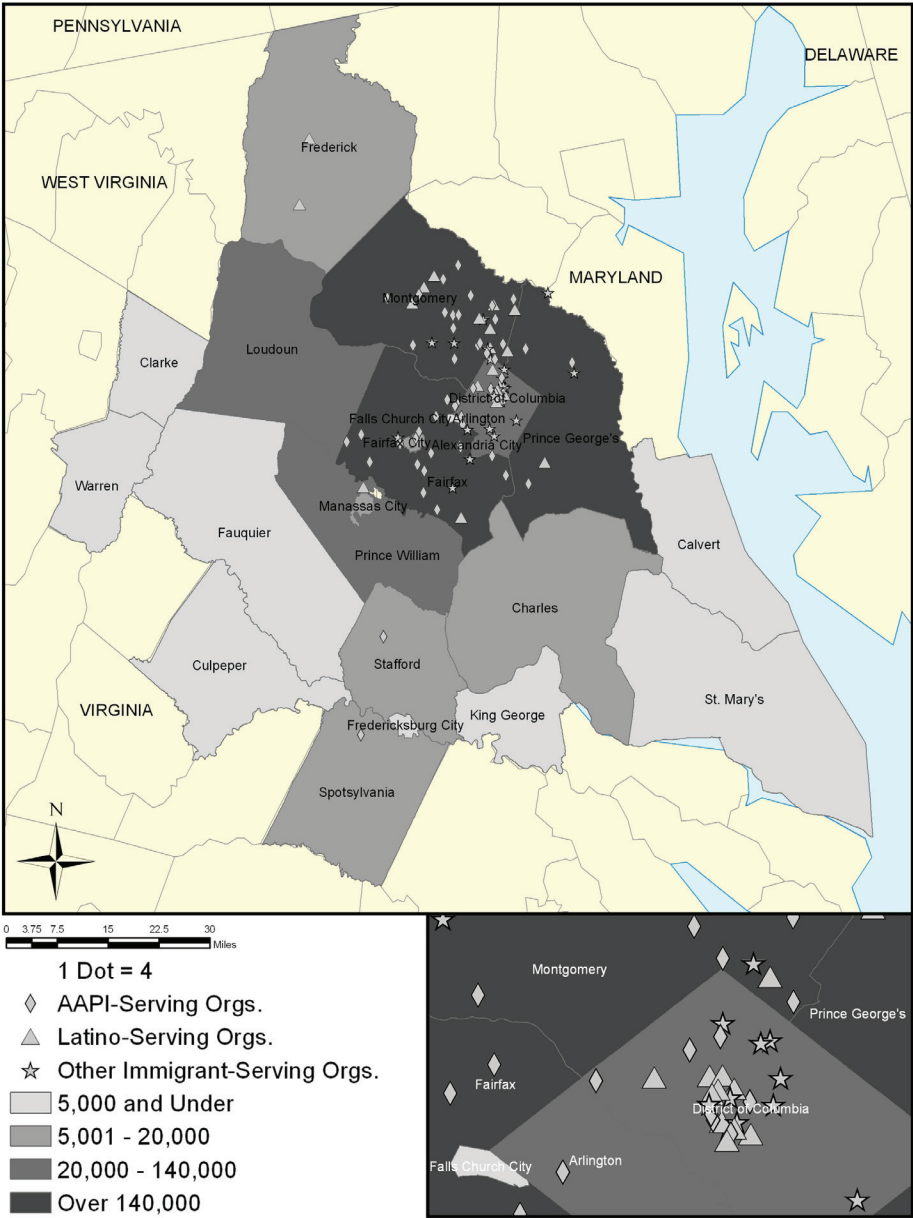
Table 1. Distribution of Immigrant-Serving Organizations in the D.C. Region by Ethnic Group

Region	AAPI		Latino		Other	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
District of Columbia	25	10.0	40	33.3	45	39.5
Maryland	108	43.4	56	46.7	33	28.9
Inner Virginia Suburbs	93	37.3	15	12.5	25	21.9
Outer Virginia Suburbs	23	9.2	9	7.5	11	9.6
Total	249	100.0	120	100.0	114	100.0

Source: The Urban Institute National Center for Charitable Statistics Core File and the Internal Revenue Service, Exempt Organization Business Master File, (2011).

Note: "Other" includes organizations that serve other and multiple ethnicities.

Figure 2. Foreign Born Population in the DC/MD/VA Metro Area, 2009

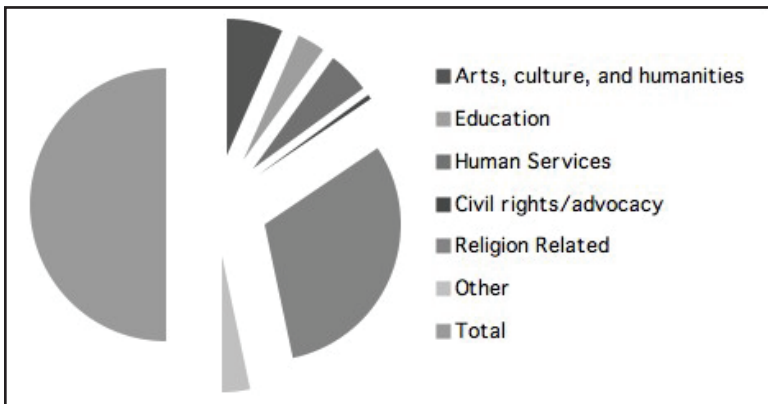


contact for new arrivals. They provide a ready-made community with shared religious values, language, culture, and social norms. Because of this close contact, religious community leaders are keenly aware of newcomer needs.

AAPI and Latino nonprofit organizations, however, differ in other areas. About 10 percent of AAPI-serving organizations are human service agencies while almost 20 percent of Latino-serving organizations provide social services. These programs run the gamut of housing assistance, meal and food distribution, health care, substance abuse treatment and prevention services, domestic violence counseling, and family counseling.

Thirteen percent of AAPI organizations offer arts and culture programs compared to 4 percent of Latino organizations. Similarly, 7 percent of AAPI organizations focus on education compared to 4 percent of Latino organizations. Four percent of Latino organizations identify their primary purpose as advocacy while less than 1 percent of AAPI organizations claim a similar focus. Although a relatively small segment of all immigrant-serving nonprofits, these organizations play an important role in encouraging civic participation and creating a voice for Latino and AAPI immigrants in the political arena.

Figure 3. Immigrant-Serving Organizations in the D.C. Region by Primary Type of Activity



Source: The Urban Institute National Center for Charitable Statistics Core File and the Internal Revenue Service, Exempt Organization Business Master File, (2011).

Staffing and Volunteers

Among the eight AAPI organizations interviewed, three have no paid employees, relying instead on volunteers. Four organizations have between eleven and fifty staff members. Among the seventeen Latino organizations interviewed, six employ less than ten staff members, seven reported between eleven and fifty workers, and four have more than fifty employees at any given time.

Six of the eight AAPI organization executives in the study have been with their organizations for less than ten years. Only two, both founders, have been running their organizations for over a decade. One-half of Latino executive directors, in contrast, have been with their organizations for more than ten years; one has been at the helm for over thirty-seven years. Among these long-time Latino executive directors, most are founders of their nonprofit organizations.

All organizations rely on volunteers for various tasks, for example, to complete administrative duties, teach English and computer classes, run special events, and assist in afterschool programs. Most nonprofit organizations in the study have less than a hundred volunteers, though a few have as many as 300 volunteers on occasion (such as special events). Most volunteers participate in the programs and services offered by the organizations, therefore they are familiar with the goals and services of the organization.

Size and Finances of Immigrant Serving Organizations

Compared with all immigrant-serving organizations in the D.C. region, AAPI organizations are considerably smaller. An average budget for AAPI organizations in 2009 (the latest year available) was \$276,000. In comparison, an average budget for Latino organizations in 2009 was \$2.9 million.

Revenue to support immigrant-serving organizations comes primarily from three sources: private donations, government grants, and program service revenue, which include fees for service and government contracts.

The Recession's Impact

Interviews with nonprofit organization leaders in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area suggest that immigrant-serving organizations felt the dual impact of declines in revenue and increases in demand for services in light of the current recession.

Among AAPI organizations, few leaders reported a drop in funding from all sources and budget shortfalls. By the start of 2009 however, most nonprofit organization leaders anticipated funding cuts and the need to trim their budgets though a few took a “wait-and-see” attitude, hoping they would be able to keep the current level of programs and services.

Demand for services, however, has grown. One organization reported a dramatic 200 to 300 percent increase in demand for legal assistance. There is also a rising need for employment services and English-language training. Job losses have also resulted in greater demand for health care, food, and housing. Community-based organizations that charge fees for services noticed that more clients were unable to pay. As funders and donors scale back on their support, leaders worry that they will be unable to meet rising demand. Sustainability of programs amid rising demand was a major concern for most people interviewed for this study.

Political Context

Because local governments play a critical role in providing financial support for immigrant-serving organizations, the political context of each jurisdiction has a strong influence on the work of immigrant-serving nonprofit organizations. How well newcomers are accommodated often reflects local attitudes and policies, and the resources allocated to serving immigrants and their families.

The District of Columbia

The District of Columbia has historically been most responsive to immigrant communities. Washington, D.C., offers many culturally appropriate referral services and has implemented city-wide legislation meant to increase language access to minority groups. In 1976, the District government began creating offices for different ethnic groups to educate minorities about available services and the most effective ways to procure those services.

With regard to federal immigration policies, the District has refused to assist U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents in the detention of suspected unauthorized immigrants and does not permit city police officers to collaborate with federal agencies for the purpose of immigration enforcement.⁶

Social services are also available to all residents of the District, and agencies do not ask about the immigration status of those seeking city services unless required by state and federal laws (Emerling, 2007).

Northern Virginia

Arlington County and the neighboring city of Alexandria are regarded as immigrant friendly; both eschew harsh immigration policies. In the debate over unauthorized immigration, both jurisdictions have publicly supported immigrants without legal documentation.

Arlington County has developed a multicultural advisory commission that acts as a community liaison and advocate for ethnic minorities within the county and has been vocal in tailoring services to the needs of ethnic populations and immigrants.⁷ The city of Alexandria does not have a cultural advisory commission, but connects with the local immigrant community through a multicultural coordinator. This position oversees projects that improve language access for non-English-speaking city residents.

While Alexandria and Arlington County are characterized as welcoming of immigrants, Prince William and Loudoun counties have not been as hospitable to newcomers. Both counties have shown considerable reluctance to provide government resources to support immigrant-serving nonprofit organizations and have instituted punitive measures to prevent access to county services for unauthorized immigrants. With a small number of nonprofits in the area and almost no government support for immigrant-serving nonprofit organizations, immigrants in Prince William and Loudoun counties reputedly travel to Arlington County and Alexandria to access nonprofit services.

Maryland

Montgomery and Prince George's counties in Maryland have been historically seen as havens for ethnic minorities and have retained governing councils friendly toward immigrant interests.

With the largest immigrant population in Maryland, Montgomery County has been at the forefront of many efforts to provide government resources and culturally appropriate services to ethnic minorities over the past decade. As an extension of existing bilingual services and growing channels of communication with area minorities, Montgomery County created the Office of Community Partnerships in 2007.⁸ Representatives of this office provide outreach to the minority populations within the county and seek to redress their grievances with the county executive.

Montgomery County has also enacted legislation tailored to the interests of immigrant populations. One such statute requires residents to negotiate written employment contracts with domestic workers and provide them with certain mandated benefits. Montgomery County also supports two day-labor centers at ethnic enclaves in Wheaton and Silver Spring, both unincorporated areas, that serve foreign workers, and the county provides considerable grants to bolster the services of immigrant-serving nonprofit organizations.

Prince George's County has more people living in poverty than any other area in the D.C. region, and nonprofit organization leaders see its network of resources and nonprofit referral sources as inadequate and undercapitalized to sustain the needs of the community. As a consequence, Prince George's immigrant populations go without services or seek assistance in thriving nonprofit hubs outside the county where services are more readily available.

Despite its strained social service system, however, Prince George's County still reaches out to immigrant and underserved groups through its Office of Community Relations, which serves as a liaison to the immigrant population and the leadership of minority groups within the area.

Community Voice

An important function of nonprofit organization leaders is to advocate and give voice to their communities and constituents. The immigrant-friendly atmospheres in Washington, D.C., Alexandria, and Arlington, Montgomery and Prince George's counties can be attributed in part to the efforts of immigrant leaders and community-based organizations to advocate on behalf of their constituents, and to engage both elected officials and the general public. The need to advocate and establish professional relationships with policymakers is even more critical in relatively hostile environments such as Prince William and Loudoun counties.

Several AAPI and Latino leaders explained that they do most of the direct advocacy activities themselves, often on their own time and using social capital within their networks, rather than relying on their organizations and staff. These individuals are ardent and committed voices for the people they serve.

They want to keep their constituents' needs and issues in front of policymakers and other stakeholders. Although they have many responsibilities and demands associated with managing their organizations, these leaders make time to speak with and educate elected officials, media, the wider community, and other advocates. A considerable amount of time is spent in political and community participation.

The commitment and longevity of organizational and community leaders are key elements in promoting any immigrant group's interests. The Latino community has a long history of political involvement within the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, and several of their more visible representatives are leaders of community-based organizations that serve immigrants. This gives them access to elected officials and helps secure resources for their organizations. These Latino organizations have the networks, size, and influence to compete successfully for and demand resources for their communities and constituents.

AAPJ organizations in contrast are smaller and their leaders do not have the social and political clout of their Latino counterparts. The AAPJ community does not have the long history of engagement with the political establishment. Some AAPJ nonprofit organization executives pointed to the challenge of a community made up of many groups siloed within their own ethnicities. All of these conditions impede access to scarce and much needed resources.

Most of the organizations interviewed are affiliated with coalitions, mostly regional or local, which focus on community concerns or particular social service issues. Among those that participate in regional coalitions, some are involved in regional roundtables, a few have ties with health care coalitions and inter-faith networks, and others are involved in regional associations tied to core missions or programs (such as legal services and economic development).

Other nonprofit organizations belong to national advocacy groups that lobby for specific issue areas. Interviews with the directors of these organizations revealed that they are more concerned with their particular issue area, for example, health care, economic development, and community asset building, than with national immigration policy reforms.

Main Roles of Immigrant-Serving Organizations

Community-based immigrant-serving organizations help integrate immigrants through the programs and services they provide. These nonprofit organizations serve seven main functions.

1. They act as community centers where newcomers and succeeding generations can interact in their native languages and within the comfort zone of their cultural norms, retain their ethnic identities, find stability, and maintain solidarity crucial to economic mobility and political participation.
2. They are essential social service providers that fill the gaps in government provision, particularly in jurisdictions with shrinking budgets or where newcomers are unable to access public programs. These organizations meet the varied needs of immigrants, including legal representation, employment and health services, childcare and youth development, financial literacy, and housing, thereby helping individuals and families find stability and establish themselves in their new community.
3. They encourage the economic viability and advancement of individual immigrants and immigrant communities by offering programs and initiatives that stress financial independence. They also employ immigrants.
4. They act as advocates, and civic and political representatives of immigrants and racial/ethnic minorities. They promote civic engagement and train individuals to be advocates and leaders of their own communities.
5. They act as government liaisons. Community-based organizations help government agencies reach immigrant populations with culturally and linguistically appropriate services.
6. They partner with other organizations and associations within the community to build networks beneficial to their constituents and to their communities.
7. They are channels through which funders, elected officials, and government agencies can reach immigrants. Community-based organizations are good at reaching individuals and families, while coalitions are good at reaching organizations and decision makers.

Studies of ethnic participation stress the pivotal role of ethnic community-based organizations, arguing that the denser the network of associations of a particular ethnic group, the more political trust they will have and the more they will participate politically.

This is because participation in voluntary associations facilitates social trust, which can lead to political trust and, ultimately, more political participation (Fennema and Tillie, 1999; Jacobs and Tillie, 2004).

Wong (2007, 457) writes: “Thus, while it is true that, for the most part, political participation does not take place overnight, there may be ways for U.S. civic institutions to speed up that process through direct mobilization and the provision of information that helps immigrants to feel more comfortable and confident taking part in the political system. Trusted community-based institutions represent a vital potential force in promoting political inclusion for immigrant newcomers who contribute to so many other aspects of American life.” She contends that ethnic community groups have long played an important role by incorporating immigrants into the political process.

Some of the nonprofit organizations we interviewed consider it vital to educate their constituents about the U.S. political process, and their individual rights and responsibilities. They encourage immigrants to speak up for themselves to school administrators and city council members.

In various ways, community-based organizations are central to immigrant integration as they provide much-needed services, educate newcomers on civic and political processes, and empower individuals to participate and contribute to society. However, these nonprofit organizations face a number of challenges that impede their work.

Interviews with organization leaders and an analysis of the local political, social, and economic landscape identified the following key issues faced by AAPI organizations.

w **Misinformation about immigrants.** Most government officials, policy makers, and the general public hew to the myth of the model minority that AAPIs are well-educated and affluent, and therefore, do not need assistance. AAPI organizations, which are smaller and have less political influence than Latino organizations, are further disadvantaged. It is a challenge for AAPI organizations to get the resources and support they need from governments and the general public to meet the needs of the AAPI community.

w **Lack of capacity.** AAPI-serving organizations have on average smaller budgets than other immigrant-serving organizations in the region. Their limited resources are stretched

to meet increasing demand amid declining revenues. Their leadership, pressed to focus on meeting this greater demand, has less time to advocate for the community and seek support for programs and services.

w **No common policy for providing services to immigrants across regions.** Jurisdictions within the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area have varied attitudes and approaches to newcomers, and immigrant policies are not consistent between jurisdictions. Even within municipal or state governments that are welcoming of immigrants, there is no coherent or coordinated system for serving the population. Immigrant-serving organizations are thus left with the additional challenge of navigating through varied and disparate bureaucracies to identify possible resources and solutions for problems that arise.

w **Opposition to unauthorized immigrants in some jurisdictions is reflected in policies negatively affecting immigrant populations and the organizations that serve them.** This is especially the case if an organization serves individuals or families whose main providers are without legal documentation. Most funding sources stipulate that grant dollars be used for clients who can provide adequate documentation. Organizations are faced with the challenge of how to meet the needs of people who come to them without status.

w **There is disconnect between community-based nonprofits and larger organizations.** A few interviewees believe that national and large nonprofits ignore the potential of working closely with community-based groups. National and large organizations could harness smaller groups embedded in neighborhoods and communities to collaborate on mutual goals if they took more time to listen and learn from community-based groups.

Conclusion

Asian American and Pacific Islander community-based organizations in the D.C. region help foster the integration of AAPI immigrants. They are embedded in the region's AAPI communities, sharing histories and a cultural affinity with the particular needs and concerns of newcomers. AAPI organizations provide programs in arts and culture, education, language skills, human services, religion, and a range of other services. They belong to a deep network and broad base of community nonprofits and associations that act as a local safety net for individuals and families whose

needs are not readily met by public programs and government agencies. Led by dedicated women and men, often immigrants themselves who work for the best interests of their constituents, the organizations educate and encourage newcomers to become financially independent and politically active. These community-based organizations adapt to population and political changes as best as they can given their resources and networks. For most, the goal is to educate and empower newcomers to claim their place and become productive members of U.S. society.

These organizations currently face the twin challenges of growing demand for services and tighter budgets as the economic recession takes its toll on both government and nonprofit resources. AAPI organizations are at a disadvantage due to limited capacity and lack of access to entrenched political networks.

In some ways, the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area is a microcosm of the nation. As seen in the multiple jurisdictions in the region, there is no agreement on how best to address immigrant integration. Some jurisdictions have been welcoming; others have taken a harder stance. There are no easy answers, but community-based organizations play a central, though often, unacknowledged role in helping newcomers find their way into the fabric of U.S. society. Bringing these organizations more fully into the public debate is an initial step in sorting through the mechanisms that can be used to integrate AAPI, Latino, and others immigrants into our local communities.

Notes

1. U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey.
2. U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey.
3. NCCS data include nonprofit organizations that submit the Form 990, an annual financial report for nonprofits with \$25,000 or more in gross receipts, and those that complete the Form 990-N, also known as e-postcard, that confirms contact information about the tax-exempt organizations with less than \$25,000 in gross receipts.
4. Data on the nonprofits identified for the study have been updated to reflect the most current available information.
5. The Refugee Act reformed U.S. immigration policy and began admitting refugees to the United States using specific, well-defined criteria. A 1985 ceiling of 70,000 refugees and 270,000 immigrants, with 20,000 from any one country, was established.

6. The District however, along with all states, is expected to comply with the Secure Communities program by 2013. From the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement: <http://www.ice.gov/doclib/secure-communities/pdf/sc-activated.pdf>, accessed December 4, 2011.
7. From Arlington County Multicultural Advisory Commission, <http://www.arlingtonva.us/DEPARTMENTS/Commissions/ParksRecreationCommissions/ParksRecreationScriptsCommissionsMulticulturalCommission.aspx>, accessed December 4, 2011.
8. From Montgomery County Office of Community Partnerships, <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgtmpl.asp?url=/Content/EXEC/partnerships/oco.asp>, accessed December 4, 2011.

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