

2020 APALA CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

Successes, Lessons, and the Work Ahead for All of Us



SUMMARY NARRATIVE

The 2020 election and 2021 Senate runoffs were a critical turning point in mainstream recognition of AAPI political organizing. When workers' rights, healthcare, immigration, and racial justice were definitively at stake, APALA and our partners turned out an unprecedented AAPI vote for progressive causes by engaging early and often through multiple modes of contact that totaled **more than 6 million voter outreach attempts** across phones, texts, and doors. We cut through the opposition's false narratives such as the integrity of voting systems, the intimidation of election workers and voters of color, and inaccessibility to voting.

In the face of once-in-a-lifetime challenges, **we mobilized record AAPI turnout** to win the presidency and win the Democratic trifecta. Our communities alongside other BIPOC communities showed up because of everything that was at stake and for the chance to begin undoing the damages wrought to our communities by the Trump administration. If not for the work of APALA and other partners that effectively framed the choice for voters of color between resurrecting progressive policies that address priority issues *or* four more years of divisive conservatism, the stakes for communities of color, immigrants, and workers were clear.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1-2:
**SUMMARY
NARRATIVE**

3-5:
**TOPLINE
STRATEGIES**

5:
2020 GRANTEES

6-7:
**MAPPING OUR
ELECTIONS AND
CENSUS IMPACT**



This cycle tested the resilience of our communities as we had to adapt quickly once the pandemic hit. Many AAPIs are not only essential workers facing the dangers of COVID-19, but they're also dealing with racism on the job and in public. COVID-19 devastated AAPI communities—31.5% of nurse deaths due to COVID were Filipina nurses, despite being only 4% of the workforce. Pacific Islander communities had some of the highest COVID mortality rates of all racial groups. **Our work to train and lift up AAPI volunteers, staffers, and partisan organizations has created an incredible organizing infrastructure.** We must continue to invest and leverage it if we hope to build up the progressive AAPI electorate across geographic regions, ethnicities, and language groups.



Our team has been able to build local and national infrastructure to scale our political work for deep year-round engagement with our members and communities in partnership with national and local unions in and out of the AFL-CIO. Our work has been data-driven, strategic, and intentional in how we want to build power for our Asian American and Pacific Islander working community. An immediate result of our successes in the 2020 general led to the partnership with the Asian American Advocacy Fund in Georgia, where staff deployed in-state to help flip the Senate by mobilizing AAPI voters.

Tom Bonier of TargetSmart has called AAPIs the unheralded voting bloc of 2020 - his analysis of turnout data shows that “in every single battleground state, the AAPI turnout surged (relative to 2016) by more than any other group.” Recent articles in the *Washington Post* and *New*

York Times have specifically honed in on the power of the Asian American vote in Georgia specifically. None of this is by accident: APALA and dozens of community groups around the country have been planting seeds for this work by advocating and fighting for resources in mainstream spaces for years. Without APALA showing up for racial justice and pushing for investment in AAPI civic engagement, our partners would not have had the resources, capacity, or connections necessary to break through the noise and turn out AAPI voters on the scale needed to win. The election results—especially given the extremely close margins in battleground states like Pennsylvania, Michigan, Georgia, and Minnesota—would likely have turned for the worse.

As we recognize our successes, we must also acknowledge that in 2020, a higher percentage of AAPIs voted for Trump and down-ballot Republican candidates than did in 2016, even in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic and waves of anti-Asian racism. There are powerful forces of disinformation and class-based appeals that broadened the base of Asian rightwing conservatism. **Our work to persuade and galvanize AAPI voters for progressive, pro-worker priorities is even more urgent now.** In 2018, APALA (with support from the AFL-CIO) commissioned a survey to assess where Asian American voters fell on a range of issues. When asked, Asian American voters overwhelmingly supported each priority of the AFL-CIO Workers Bill of Rights. But when we asked about union familiarity, the majority of respondents were not familiar with unions at all. At APALA, we are doing this work specifically because we have an analysis of how we win as working people and part of that strategy is getting AAPI voters to understand the deep connection between the issues that matter to them and the labor movement that fights alongside them. We must continue to support and expand AAPI civic engagement work if we want to build upon the slim victories we won this year.

The vision for the 2020 AAPI civic engagement program was to expand and turn out AAPI electorates in solidarity with other communities of color for pro-worker candidates and issues. Our program built on several years of relationships and infrastructure-building with organizations. We must continue the necessary deep organizing and issue-based advocacy to protect and strengthen our gains from this year.

We know that AAPI communities should not be taken for granted. The invisibilization of AAPIs in messaging and voter contact, on top of the under-investment in outreach to AAPI communities, means that there are greater barriers to earning the AAPI vote compared to white voters. We also know that AAPIs are the fastest-growing racial group in the country, and that they are a reliably progressive voting bloc once invested in. Thus, our program was implemented in six core phases:



1

START EARLY TO STRENGTHEN INFRASTRUCTURE, CONDUCT INOCULATION MESSAGING, AND BASE-BUILD (AUG 2019-FEB 2020)

- We started our Census program in 2019: given the misinformation and systematic intervention by the Trump administration, we needed to start early and inoculate our communities against attacks like the citizenship question and political interference at the Census Bureau itself
- Census outreach ramped up: we conducted multiple touches by SMS and email to Census pledge-takers, moving them up the ladder of engagement and using relational organizing to spread our messages through historically undercounted communities
- Invest in new AAPI c4 organizations and staff roles to ensure that the infrastructure and skillset will remain in the community beyond 2020
- Fold partners into mainstream electoral spaces to access tools and broaden network connections

2

RAPID STRATEGY SHIFT AND WORKER ADVOCACY AROUND COVID-19 (FEB-APR 2020)

- Dealing with early impacts of COVID-19: anti-Asian racism first hit our communities in February before the shutdowns and community spread of cases started rising. We began mutual aid to communities that were impacted economically and to essential workers facing dangerous conditions as health and food workers
- A quick pivot to virtual organizing allowed us to foster new relationships and reach people for whom our organizing became more salient due to COVID-19

3

EXPERIMENT WITH NEW ORGANIZING STRATEGIES THAT CONNECT TO WORKERS' LIVES (APR-NOV 2020)

- We hosted a variety of innovative virtual outreach events that laid the groundwork for us to iterate and refine in the general. Our textbanking in the primaries, when vote-by-mail was being increasingly tested, established early contact with AAPI voters in 11 battleground states.
- Positioned APALA as one of the first organizations for AAPI volunteers to seek out; we continued to build our volunteer and supporter bases through Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, Census enumeration, and racial solidarity in the movement for Black lives.

4

CUT THROUGH THE NOISE OF SATURATED MEDIA BUBBLES AND TAP INTO RELATIONAL ORGANIZING FOR PERSUASION AND VOTER REGISTRATION (AUG-OCT 2020)

- Scale-up digital outreach and targeted messaging to combat disinformation
- Overcome election fatigue by crafting unique, culturally specific messages and using relational organizing to organically increase footprint
- Deploy high-quality ethnicity data models to address the major gap in voter data for AAPI communities
- Direct voter contact: we engaged in mass voter education, persuasion, and supported vote-by-mail requests through a combination of phonebanking, textbanking, digital organizing, relational organizing, mailers, and media. Across 10 battleground states and 20 undercounted Census states, we established relationships with voters that broke down barriers to voting rights and language access. We created a statewide coalition in California to advance pro-worker ballot propositions and increase capacity for nonpartisan and partisan groups to strategize

5

REACH OUT TO AAPI VOTERS ON RELEVANT ISSUES BY USING CONTINUOUS, IN-LANGUAGE, CULTURALLY COMPETENT OUTREACH (JULY-NOV 2020)

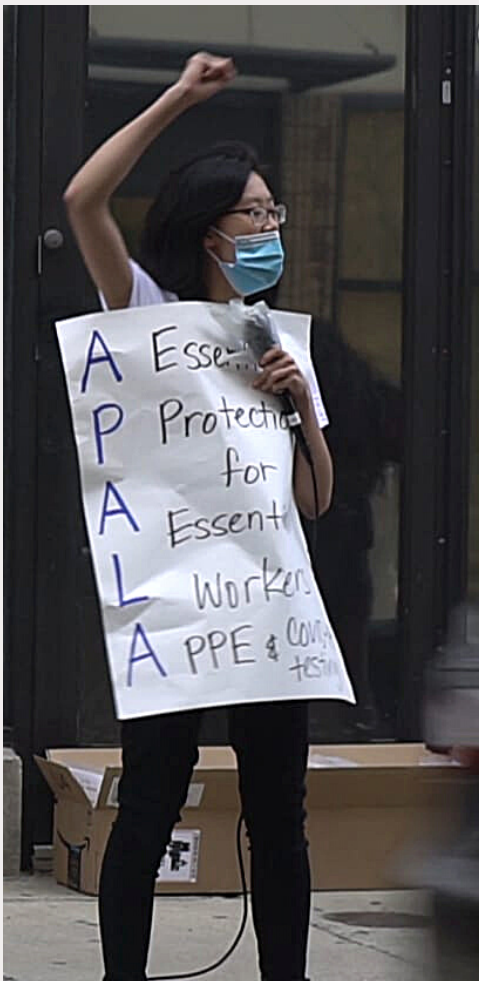
- Lead with messaging on critical issues such as: COVID-19 relief, racism, workers' rights and worker protections in a pandemic, healthcare
- Early voting and GOTV: we ramped up our volunteer operations to encompass more than 100 events by November in a program that added dozens of volunteers daily
- After Election Day, we continued to mobilize around #CountEveryVote rallies to ensure that the election results would be protected against interference by the Trump administration
- Mobilize AAPI communities on multiple fronts for 2020 civic engagement: Census, COVID-19, racial justice protests, and voting

6

LEVERAGE NEW AND PROVEN STRATEGIES FOR THE SENATE RUNOFF ELECTIONS (NOV 2020–JAN 2021)

- Build canvass teams and phonebank platforms based on language (Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese, Urdu, etc.), to facilitate targeted voter outreach and peer learning
- Concurrently, create opportunities for out-of-state volunteers to leverage the high media coverage of the election. Experiment with digital voter outreach such as Instagram, WhatsApp, KakaoTalk, to break through a heavily saturated media market and neutralize election fatigue
- Pilot outreach strategies that are typically too costly for AAPI organizations that don't garner mass media or donor attention: digital sign trucks, billboards, video testimonials from voters, patch-through in-language hotlines, ethnic media outreach on a much larger scale, hotspot canvassing, local artist commissions for hyper-targeted mailers

2020 GRANTEES' WORK



We re-granted to six organizations in ways that deepened relationships and strengthened local organizing infrastructure with API PA, AAPI Power Caucus (Pennsylvania), Asian American Advocacy Fund (Georgia), Asian American Organizing Project (Minnesota), AAPI Force, and Grassroots Asians Rising.

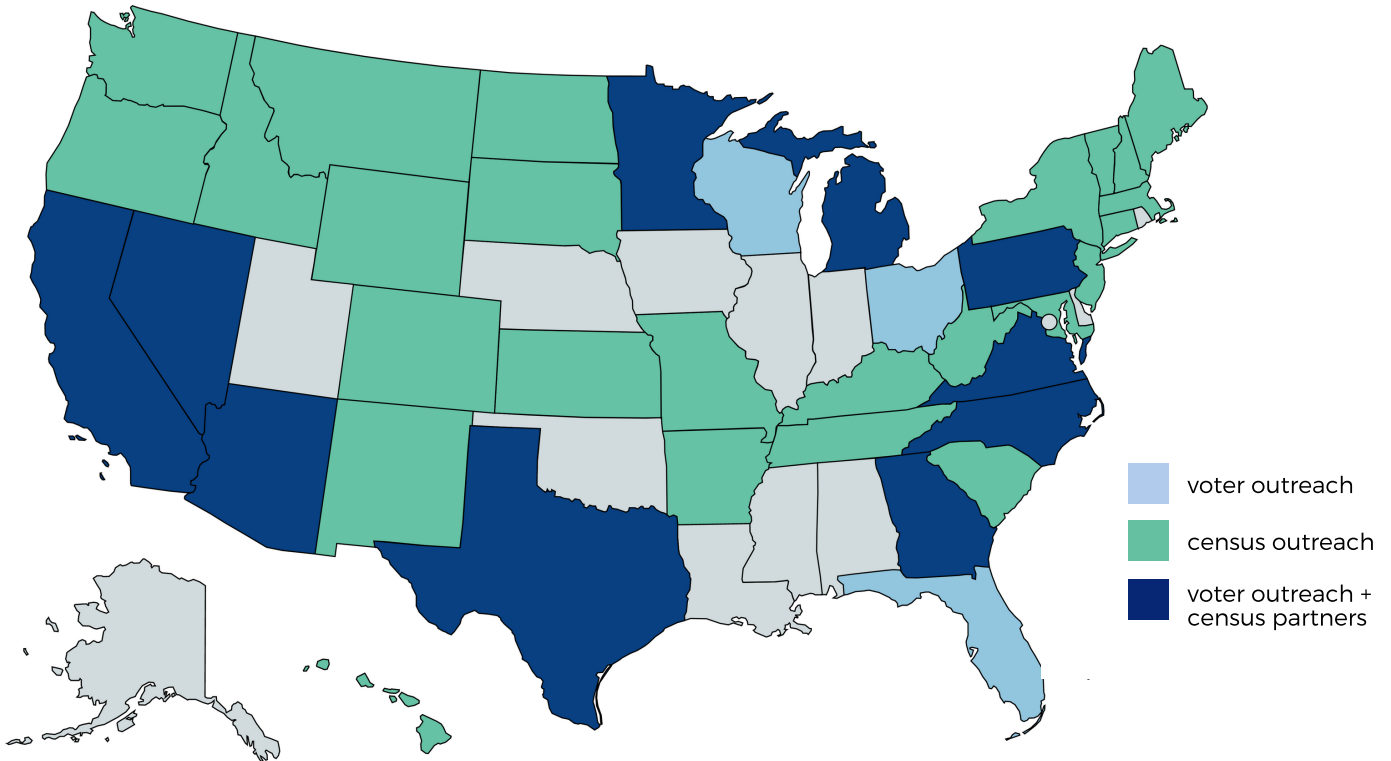
Together with our partners, we made more than **6 million voter contact attempts** and helped flip Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, as well as protect our pro-worker strongholds in Minnesota and Nevada. **We recruited and trained nearly 1,800 volunteers across diverse geographic regions, ethnicities, and language groups.** We hosted more than 100 voter outreach events for the 2020 primaries, general election, and 2021 Senate runoff and partnered with more than a dozen organizations spanning Lao, FilAm, Japanese American, Southeast Asian, South Asian, Muslim, Black, Latinx, and women-led communities. We championed pro-worker and pro-racial justice ballot propositions in the face of corporate campaigns backed by hundreds of millions of dollars from Uber/Lyft and greedy gig bosses. We fought hard in the battleground states of Florida, North Carolina, and Texas, and we are solidifying critical infrastructure for AAPI worker power in such states where the deck is stacked against them.

MAPPING OUR ELECTIONS AND CENSUS IMPACT

Achievements

*includes c4 achievements

- 6 million voter contact attempts
- 3 million persuasion and mobilization calls
- 1,733 volunteers engaged



Total Metrics (C4 partisan)

TEXTS
915,000

MAILERS
1.1 million

EVENTS
20

CALLS
2.5 million

DOORKNOCK ATTEMPTS
104,984

VOLUNTEERS
1,116

DIGITAL IMPRESSIONS
3.5 million

Total Metrics (C3 nonpartisan)

| STATE | TEXTS |
|--|------------------|
| Arizona | 57,145 |
| California | 101,926 |
| Florida | 231,938 |
| Georgia | 93,302 |
| Michigan | 89,520 |
| Minnesota | 60,413 |
| Nevada | 93,981 |
| New York | 880 |
| North Carolina | 65,414 |
| Pennsylvania | 295,663 |
| Texas | 249,374 |
| Wisconsin | 34,877 |
| Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wyoming | 67,322 |
| Total | 2,005,875 |

NATIONAL AGGREGATE METRICS

C3 Calls: 565,141

Mailers: 80,277

Census Pledges: 4,200

Voter Registrations*: 660

Vote-by-Mail Requests*: 4,874

Volunteers: 617

Events: 98

Media Hits: 10+

*This is an undercount due to several factors. The shift to all-online voter registration and vote-by-mail request assistance meant that groups that directed voters to a state website were not able to track 100% of their outreach. We found that voters were warier of short links and responded better to official-looking URLs, which further reduced the ability to trace voter follow-through.