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Dismal Outlook on Philanthropy to AAPI Groups

Sharon Her, Jun 29, 2007

Despite being one of the fastest-growing populations in the country with a national population of 4.5 percent, AAPI-led organizations receive less than 0.5 percent of foundation funding, according to a news report by Asian American Islanders in Philanthropy.

The report, entitled "Growing Opportunities," was unveiled at the Ford Foundation in New York City last week and covered a 13-year period. It found that, in 1983, funding to APA groups represented 0.2 percent of the philanthropic giving by the nation's 20 biggest foundations. The number grew to only 0.4 percent by 2004.

"We hope this report will help strengthen and build a more just and equitable philanthropic community," said Peggy Saika, the group's president and executive director.

The report launch featured a panel of foundation leaders, discussing and responding to key questions raised in the report. One suggested remedy was change on the executive level.

"What we really need is leadership to take some risks to do things really differently," said Sara Gould, president and CEO of the Ms. Foundation for Women, who noted that women's program funding saw a similarly stark disparity.

A need for more accurate data with mandatory ethnicity reporting was also suggested as a way to help dismiss the "model minority" myth, and generate a deeper understanding of the uniqueness and diversity of AAPI community needs.

"Having more nuanced data will benefit the story we can tell ... and help funders," said Steven Lawrence, senior director of research at the Foundation Center.

Irene S. Lee, senior associate for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, offered her perspective by questioning the need for direct funding of AAPI-led organizations.

"It's not necessarily strengthening the nonprofit infrastructure and sector that's AAPI-led. For us, [it's] what's going to make a difference to ensure that vulnerable AAPI children are better off," Lee said.

Pronita Gupta, lead researcher for the report, offered the finding that "during times of crisis, such as Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, AAPI communities turned to trusted, culturally competent service providers within their communities who could speak their language."

Optimism reigned in the hopes that "Growing Opportunities" would generate more dialogue about funding API groups.

"[This report] is not an end of the work ... rather it's the beginning to show the conditions and complexities of the API community that can help bring it into the sunlight," said Ford Foundation Senior Program Officer Dr. Christopher Harris.

Saika offered the reminder that the need for change is immediate, and API funding disparities prove to be a persistent problem.

"This isn't just an Asian American report; it's really a reflection of a much broader condition that exists with this field," said Saika.

Note: Corrections have been made to this article.



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