



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ASIAN PACIFICS IN POLITICS & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

2024 NAAPPPA

40 UNDER 40



2024 NAAPPPA 40 UNDER 40 LIST

The National Association of Asian Pacifics in Politics and Public Affairs (NAAPPPA) is proud to present the 2024 list of the top 40 AAPI political operatives and public affairs professionals under 40 years of age.

NAAPPPA established this list in 2016 to highlight the growing number of AAPIs who are rising stars in the professional unelected side of politics. These honorees represent trailblazing AAPI campaign strategists and operatives, lobbyists, legislative staff, and corporate public affairs professionals on all sides of the aisle that work behind the scenes to elect and advance AAPI candidates and the AAPI community.

These elite individuals are breaking the meek Asian model minority stereotype by excelling in the rough and tumble, rule-bending, and bare-knuckle world of American politics. NAAPPPA is a non-partisan non-profit national organization dedicated to promote and develop Asian American and Pacific Islander career advancement and excellence in political consulting, public affairs, and legislative advocacy through networking, innovative training, and professional development. **Congratulations Class of 2024!**



Maheen Ahmed | Deputy Director of Community Awareness, Response, and Engagement (CARE), California State Attorney General Rob Bonta. CARE is an office she crafted and established in 2021 in order to engage with historically marginalized and underrepresented communities across California to increase transparency and address barriers to accessing justice. Maheen joined the California Department of Justice after serving as then-Assemblymember Rob Bonta's Legislative Director, where she shaped and oversaw progressive budget and policy priorities. Maheen became the first Muslim legislative director in the history of the California state legislature in 2019, and had joined the California State Legislature in 2016 as a Jesse M. Unruh Fellow. Maheen strives to devote her life to working towards social equity through systemic changes and amplifying and empowering marginalized peoples. She has received her Bachelor's degree from the University of California, Davis in Community and Regional Development, and received her Master's degree in Public Administration from the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy.



Celia Bote | Managing Director, Targeted Victory. Celia is a senior member of Targeted Victory's Client Strategy team where her focus is to help drive our digital persuasion and digital advertising efforts. In a world where every vote counts, more so than ever, Celia helps push the limits for the company's ever-growing roster of Republican races and ensures that their digital persuasion efforts echo each campaign's holistic voter contact strategy. Joining Targeted Victory in January of 2020, Celia dove head first into several of our most competitive house races at the time. In 2022, she led our gubernatorial and non-federal team and spearheaded our largest digital political and persuasion efforts, managing and executing some of the largest digital persuasion programs on the right. Prior to joining Targeted Victory she served as the Press Secretary to 2019 Gubernatorial Candidate, Eddie Rispone. She graduated College of Charleston with a double major in Political Science and International Studies.



Alexander Chang | Director, Targeted Victory. Alexander Chang serves as a Director on Optimization and oversees all technical development for the team. He currently leads R&D for the team's artificial intelligence and machine learning projects. Before joining Targeted Victory in 2021, Alex worked in data transformation for the Foundation for Economic Education and communication at the Leadership Institute. He holds a BA in Political Science from the University of Washington and a Master's in Business and Analytics from the University of Massachusetts.



Lance Chih | President - California Associate Staff. Lance started his political career in high school as an advocate for LGBT rights, often testifying in the California State Capitol on bills furthering the rights for LGBT youth. After earning his degree in Government from CSU Sacramento, Lance began his career in the legislature with internships before being hired in the office of Senator Marty Block. He currently is at the Governmental Relations Department for the California Teachers Association (CTA), where he has worked in many roles since October 2016. In his most recent role, he tracks all the legislation reviewed by CTA Legislative Advocates and supports the State Legislation Committee for CTA State Council of Education. CAS is a CTA staff union dedicated to helping protect, promote, and improve the conditions for CTA members throughout California and support CTA's mission of ensuring human dignity and civil rights of all are protected through a more just, equitable, and democratic society. As the President of the California Associate Staff (CAS), Lance uses his skills build relationships with the current leaders of CTA to help foster and grow respect for CAS and ensures the rights and success of their members.



Tommy Choi | Deputy Executive Director, Illinois Republican Party. Tommy, an Illinois native and son of Korean immigrant parents, brings dynamic experience in public affairs, global engagement, governmental relations, political campaigns, business development, and nonprofit management. Tommy is the Deputy Executive Director and previously held the role of Interim Executive Director of the Illinois Republican Party. Beforehand, he led governmental affairs and advocacy at the Chinese American Service League and established the Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at the Chinese Mutual Aid Association, the sole AAPI-Hed Illinois SBDC. Tommy served as Public Affairs Manager for Illinois State Comptrollers Judy Baar Topinka and Leslie Geissler Munger, and Public Engagement Manager for Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner. He was also an intern and later served as a community outreach advisor for former U.S. Congressman Robert Dold and U.S. Senator Mark Kirk. Throughout his career, Tommy has been recognized by various community organizations, such as being named the 2017 Korean American of the Year by the Korean American Association of Chicago. He holds a bachelor's degree in International Studies and Political Science from the University of Miami.

“The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.”

-Mark Twain



Cynthia Chou | Public Policy Manager, Uber. Cynthia is a public policy manager at Uber Technologies, where she skillfully combines technology, public affairs, and community organizing to shape policies that support economic empowerment and the sharing economy. Previously, Cynthia enhanced her expertise on the public policy team at Postmates and Airbnb, deepening her understanding of policy impacts in technology-centric businesses. She began her career with an internship at the California State Senate, followed by leading AAPI field organizing for labor and political candidates, affirming her commitment to her community. As a first-generation Asian American with family origins in Hong Kong and Taiwan, Cynthia earned a bachelor's degree in International Security and Conflict Resolution from San Diego State University. Currently based in San Francisco, Cynthia actively participates in her community, volunteering for political campaigns and supporting candidates who share her vision for democratic values. With over ten years, she remains a dedicated advocate for innovative technology solutions that help people, communities, and cities through public engagement.



Rob Chua | Principal Consultant and Founder, Avenues Consulting. Rob is a seasoned public affairs professional with a diverse background in community engagement, campaign management, and government relations. Beginning his career in public affairs, he focused on voter registration and outreach within Pilipino communities across the Bay Area. Transitioning to campaign work, he's served as a Field Director, Organizer, Finance Consultant, and Campaign Advisor for municipal and state races. Rob later ventured into government, serving as an aide to Assemblymember Phil Ting in District 19, where he focused on education and health policy, labor relations, and advocacy for the Asian Pacific Islander community. After his tenure at the State Legislature, Rob worked with Imprenta Communications Group, leading statewide campaigns for marginalized communities and managing communications for Dr. Tony Iton's Building Healthy Communities initiative. Currently, Rob heads Avenues Consulting, a mission-driven public affairs firm, offering government relations, advocacy, and communications services to clients in the public and private sectors. He has also consulted for prominent community-based organizations, managed Census efforts for the API community, and led outreach campaigns for voter engagement. Rob is a member of several advisory boards and holds a degree in Cultural Anthropology from the UC Santa Cruz.



Matthew Estipona | Director of Government Affairs, Associated Builders and Contractors Northern California. ABC NorCal is a national nonprofit construction trade association representing almost 500 member companies from Tulare County to the Oregon border. Matthew advocates for fair and open competition while building bridges with like-minded organizations to promote safety in the construction industry and policies that ensure the next generation of workers in the trades have access to good paying jobs. Prior to working with ABC NorCal, Matthew managed a campaign in the Bay Area, served as Communications Director for California State Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell, and worked on state and local campaigns with BCF Public Affairs and Phil Giarrizzo Campaign Consulting. Matthew holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science: Public Service from UC Davis.



Arya Hariharan | Chief Oversight Counsel, Senate Judiciary Committee, Office of Chair Dick Durbin. Prior to joining the Senate, she worked as the Chief Oversight Counsel for the House Judiciary Committee under Chairman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY). She led the House Judiciary Committee's team for both impeachments and trials of then-President Donald J. Trump, as well as its investigations into obstruction of justice, the FBI's actions surrounding the 2016 election, foreign election interference, family separation, competition in digital markets, and FISA abuse. Her areas of legislative expertise include foreign/ domestic surveillance, drones, consumer protection, hate crimes, privacy, and other national security related matters. Arya also specializes in preparing senior officials and sensitive witnesses, such as sexual assault survivors and celebrities, for congressional testimony. Prior to joining the House Judiciary Committee, she was the Legislative Director & Senior Counsel for Rep. Hank Johnson (D-GA). Before working on the Hill, Arya worked as a lobbyist for Earthjustice and the American Association for Justice. She earned her undergraduate degree from American University and law degree from the William & Mary School of Law.



Tasi Hogan | President, TH Strategies. Tasi is a government affairs consultant experienced in influencing public policy, leading federal and state advocacy campaigns and helping pass over a dozen pieces of legislation. Prior to consulting, she led federal and state government affairs on the social impact team at Beautycounter, a certified B Corp, where she oversaw a multi-issue policy portfolio, social impact communications and the brand's giving program. Prior to Beautycounter, she was a lobbyist and public affairs advisor who helped clients across the health, sustainability, tech and transportation sectors with strategy, relationship building, public affairs and political giving. A campaign manager turned government relations professional, Tasi has held leadership positions on over 20 successful political campaigns at the federal, state and local levels. She serves on the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition's Advisory Committee and is a member of the LA Junior League, Women Investing for a Sustainable Economy and Women in Cleantech and Sustainability. Born and raised on Guam, she is a voracious traveler who has been to all seven continents and 50 states.



Akbar Hossain | Secretary of Policy and Planning, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Prior to his appointment to Governor Josh Shapiro's cabinet, Secretary Hossain served as the Executive Director of the Shapiro-Davis Transition and as Policy Director on the Shapiro for Pennsylvania gubernatorial campaign. Previously, he was a white-collar government investigations attorney at Morgan Lewis and served as a law clerk at the US District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. He has been recognized nationally as a Harry S. Truman Scholar, a Paul and Daisy Soros Fellow, and a member of the Aspen Global Leadership Network. His work has been featured on CNN, NPR, Philadelphia Inquirer, and many other media outlets. Secretary Hossain has a bachelor's degree from Franklin & Marshall College and a juris doctor from University of Pennsylvania Law School. Secretary Hossain is one of the youngest members of the Governor's cabinet and the highest-ranking Muslim official in the history of the Commonwealth.



Chai Jindasurat-Yasui | Vice President, Policy, Nonprofit New York. Nonprofit New York is a nonpartisan membership association of 1,100 nonprofits in New York City. Chai's successful legislative campaigns include repealing a retaliatory state law against advocacy nonprofits, enactment of New York's Not-for-Profit Corporation Law Modernization Act, and inclusion of nonprofits in federal economic relief programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program and Employee Retention Tax Credit. He leads the #WHY15 campaign, Campaign to Advance Nonprofits, and efforts to reform New York City's contracting process to address disparities for Asian and other people of color-led nonprofits. Chai's research on the nonprofit racial leadership gap has highlighted the under-representation of Asian nonprofit leaders in New York City. Previously, he worked in the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget and LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations. He is on the board of the NEW Pride Agenda and served as the Political Chair of GAPIMNY - Empowering Queer Asian Pacific Islanders. Mayor Adams recently appointed Chai to the City's inaugural Nonprofit Advisory Council. This spring Chai is graduating from the City University of New York School of Law. He attended NYU's Wagner School of Public Service as a Bohnett fellow and Point Scholar, the national LGBTQ+ scholarship fund.



Ashley Juhn | Communications Director, Congressman Tom Kean, Jr. (NJ-07). Ashley Juhn is a communications and public relations professional with a passion for crafting impactful narratives, strategic planning and fostering meaningful connections. Ashley adeptly navigates the intersection of politics and public perception. Prior to joining Congressman Kean's team, Ashley served as an Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APAICS) Fellow in Congresswoman Young Kim's (CA-40) office. Ashley holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Biola University and is currently pursuing her Master of Public Relations and Corporate Communication at Georgetown University.



Cynthia Kai | Executive Secretary, Chula Vista Mayor John McCann and the Chula Vista City Council. Cynthia previously worked in TV, public relations, and digital marketing. Cynthia also co-hosted a political podcast and aided numerous candidates with their campaigns. Cynthia was also nominated as an "Outstanding Professional" by the Philippine American Business Improvement and Development and has been recognized by the Filipino-American Military Officers Association for her collaboration on Chula Vista's first upcoming Filipino-American Veteran Memorial Park. She has appeared on Voice of America, OAN, ABC10, NBC7, KPBS, KUSI, AM870, Gun Owners Radio, several political podcasts, and has been featured in the San Diego Union Tribune, San Diego Voice and Viewpoint, and Times of San Diego. Cynthia has a Bachelors in Communication from UC San Diego and completed Campaign Leadership College with the Leadership Institute. She also serves as the President of San Diego Young Republicans, as the Press Secretary for California Young Republican Federation, as the Communications Director for California Women's Leadership Association & Political Action Committee, on the Impact Council for Women's Public Leadership Network, and on multiple committees for Lincoln Club Business League. Cynthia was honored for her leadership by Young Republican National.



Lucy Khuu | Consultant, California Asian American and Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus. Lucy Khuu is the consultant for one of the largest AAPI legislative caucuses in the nation. The Asian American and Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus is dedicated to representing and advocating for the interests of the diverse AAPI communities throughout California, and increasing AAPI representation and participation at all levels of government. Prior to joining the Caucus, Lucy was a District Representative for State Assemblymember Evan Low, where she provided direct assistance to constituents and cultivated relationships with community leaders and stakeholders. Lucy earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology at the UC San Diego.



Monika Lee | Chief of Staff, Sacramento City Mayor Pro Tem Karina Talamantes. Monika is an experienced public affairs professional. Her work spans policy, legislative, and budget advocacy to community outreach to narrative change work. She is dedicated to transforming systems and policies to ensure everyone has what they need to thrive. She has experience working on campaigns, ballot initiatives, and policy covering issues such as housing, labor, and health equity. The heart of her work is to serve as a bridge between policymakers and elected officials and the multiracial, multilingual communities they serve and are accountable to. She previously worked at Paschal Roth Public Affairs and the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network. Originally from San Diego, she enjoys reading, hiking, baking, and playing soccer. In her spare time, she is involved locally through Global Shapers Sacramento and Sacramento County Young Democrats.



Susan Li | President-Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Asian Pacific Islander Caucus. Susan Li has been in labor organizing for over 13 years, and most recently serves as SEIU's California Statewide Clinics Campaign Director in addition to representing SEIU API leaders across the US and Canada. Her work has been vital in driving union, policy and political campaigns across various areas, including healthcare, higher education and public sectors. Susan has helped workers to organize and advocate for better working conditions, such as coordinating efforts to secure a \$25 minimum wage for California healthcare workers. Susan has also been a leading force in fighting for language justice and a pipeline for API leaders in the labor movement. Susan's journey in activism began in high school, where she joined youth organizations in Chinatown Los Angeles that focused on community empowerment. She continued her advocacy at UCLA, where she was elected the Executive Vice President and led efforts to register students to vote, fight for the DREAM Act and mobilize against proposed fee hikes. She graduated with degrees in History, Asian American Studies and a minor in Labor Studies. Her leadership skills have continued to shine in her current roles, where she remains inspired by her community and her parents who immigrated here from China.



Heather McGuire | Counsel, Republican National Committee. Heather McGuire is a graduate of the University of Florida and American University Washington College of Law. During law school, Heather clerked for the Federal Election Commission, Republican National Committee, Institute for Free Speech, and Judge Ryan T. Holte of the Court of Federal Claims. Immediately following graduation, Heather began as Associate Counsel to the Republican National Committee and was recently promoted to Counsel. At the RNC, Heather counsels the Committee on campaign finance, election, pay-to-play, joint fundraising, contract, intellectual property, administrative, and nonprofit law. She also manages legal matters and proceedings pertaining to the 2024 Republican National Convention. Heather sits on the Board of Visitors for The Fund for American Studies' Law Fellowship and is a member of the Federalist Society.



Mariko Nakawatase | Assistant District Director, San Diego County Supervisor Joel Anderson. Mariko is a dynamic and results-oriented professional, who has dedicated her career to leadership development, community outreach, and strategic organizational management. Driven by a deep desire to empower others, she pursued her studies with unwavering focus, earning a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Law as well as achieving her MPA, from Arizona State University. Mariko's academic achievements equipped her with invaluable knowledge to navigate complex societal challenges and promote effective and equitable public policies. Recognizing the importance of community engagement, she became actively involved in initiatives that aimed in initiating meaningful dialogue and fostering spaces where everyone's perspectives are heard and valued. Whether it's organizing impactful community events, or volunteering her time and expertise, she consistently seeks opportunities to contribute to the betterment of San Diego. Her unwavering commitment to social causes has earned her recognition as a trusted leader and an agent of change.



Miyu Oda-DesHotels | Legislative Assistant, San Diego County Supervisor Joel Anderson. Miyu Oda-DesHotels is a dynamic force as a legislative assistant for the County of San Diego, a board member of San Diego Young Republicans and Turning Point USA. Renowned for her unwavering commitment to conservative values, she stands as a beacon within the movement. Passionate about reshaping governance and amplifying voter engagement, Miyu is a driving force for positive change. She actively spearheads campaigns aimed at nurturing exemplary leadership within her community. She is a graduate of CSU San Diego and is currently pursuing a Master of Public Administration Emphasis in Government and Public Policy degree. She is also an alumni of the Leadership Institute.



Sophie Ota | Director of Digital Strategy, Office of New York City Comptroller Brad Lander. Sophie Ota is a NYC-based political operative who currently serves as Director of Digital Strategy for New York City Comptroller Brad Lander. Prior to running online communications in City government, Sophie oversaw digital programs on statewide and presidential campaigns and is a leading grassroots fundraising strategist. In 2022, she led a state-of-the-art online fundraising program that raised \$48.6 million in-house for John Fetterman's U.S. Senate campaign. In 2020, she built a first-of-its-kind social media fundraising program for Elizabeth Warren's presidential campaign that raised \$4.95 million.



Anurag Pal | District Director, California State Assemblymember Alex Lee. Anurag is a first-generation immigrant from India where he grew up in a small village in Punjab, India. Anurag received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from CSU San Jose (SJSU). At SJSU, Anurag was a recipient of the 2011 Phyllis Ward Washington D.C. Scholarship through which he was able to intern with former Congressman Mike Honda's Capitol office. Currently, Anurag works as District Director for Assemblymember Alex's Office in his district office. Previously, he has worked as Field Representative and District Director for former Assemblymember Kansen Chu, Business Development Specialist with the U.S. Minority Business Development Agency's SF Office, Campaign Consultant with 270 Strategies in the Caribbean, Field Organizer for President Obama's 2012 re-election in Virginia and Senator Cory Booker's first senatorial election in New Jersey in 2013. Anurag has over a decade of experience in politics, public policy, campaign, and community engagement with knowledge of local, state, and national governments, and international organizations. He is proficient in three languages – Punjabi, Hindi, and English.



Vedant Patel | Principal Deputy Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State. Vedant Patel serves as the Principal Deputy Spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State. He previously served as an Assistant Press Secretary and Spokesperson for President Biden in The White House. Prior to this he served as a spokesperson on the Presidential Inaugural Committee and the Biden-Harris Transition. Patel also held communications positions on the Biden Campaign both in the primary and general election. Previously, Patel worked as Communications Director to Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal and Communications Director to Congressman Mike Honda. Patel is a graduate of the UC Riverside and received a M.B.A. from the University of Florida. He is originally from San Jose, California.



Tu Pham | Field Representative, California State Assemblymember Tri Ta. Tu plays a pivotal role within Assemblyman Ta's dedicated team, spearheading outreach efforts for Little Saigon and the vibrant Vietnamese community, a significant constituency in AD 70. With a robust background in community engagement, Tu's journey began with influential roles in various political campaigns within Little Saigon. Her tenure prior to joining Assemblyman Ta's office has fortified her as a trusted and dependable asset, with an innate understanding of the pulse of the Vietnamese community. She adeptly channels community sentiments, ensuring their voices resonate within legislative corridors. Tu's journey to the United States, originating from Vietnam seven years ago, epitomizes the quintessential immigrant success story. Post-graduation, she swiftly established a thriving small business, and pursued academic excellence, culminating in an MBA from the esteemed University of Redlands. Not content with resting on her laurels, Her dynamic contributions enrich the team's capacity to serve the diverse needs of their constituents, embodying the spirit of effective and inclusive governance.



Koy Saeteurn | Vice President, Sage Strategies. Sage Strategies is a California based strategic affairs firm leading the highest priority public campaigns, strengthening statewide non-profit organizations and supporting Fortune 500 companies. Koy is a passionate and resourceful leader with nearly 10 years of community engagement, communications and political experience working across all sectors. Since 2023, she has led a multidisciplinary team under the Listos California program at the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services which is responsible for reaching Californians with the highest social and health inequities through data driven, culturally rooted education. Prior to her current post, she served in multiple roles, including Chief of Staff to Sacramento Councilmember Eric Guerra. During her time in local government, she held a senior role that brought the Aggie Square, a \$1.1 billion innovation center, to fruition. In addition to her public service, she has served on the boards of Power Inn Alliance and Stockton Boulevard Partnership. She is a graduate of Leadership Sacramento (2019) and the CalAsian Foundation Catalyst Leadership Program (2023). Koy is the daughter of Lu Mien refugees and is the first Lu Mien Chief of staff in the nation.



Leslie Shim | Management Analyst, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. Leslie Shim is a proud Korean, born and raised in Long Beach, California. She resides in Los Angeles and works for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power in the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Leslie currently sits on the Board of Directors for the Korean American Democratic Committee. Also, she formerly served as the President of the Asian Pacific Islander Caucus at the USC Price School of Public Policy and as a California Democratic Party ADEM Delegate for Assembly District 53. Leslie is a graduate of UC Los Angeles (UCLA) with a Bachelor's Degree in International Developmental Studies and the University of Southern California (USC) with Master's Degree in Public Administration.



Navdeep Singh | Principal, Novalux Solutions. Novalux Solutions is a national consulting firm dedicated to helping organizations realize opportunities and grow impact. Navdeep builds community power using a cross-functional approach that combines advocacy, organizing, program strategy, and narrative design. He has over fifteen years of leadership in policy, campaign strategy, and organization building in civil rights and non-profit organizations. He previously served as the Policy Director of the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA) and as the Policy Director of the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF). He was the co-chair of the Civil Rights Committee of the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA). He is co-chair of the NAPABA Civil Rights Committee and serves on the Continuing Legal Education (CLE) Committee. He served on the board of the Asian Pacific American Bar Association of Pennsylvania. He is a co-founder of the Sikh American History Project. He was recognized as one of the Pennsylvania Legal Intelligencer's Lawyers on the Fast Track and NAPABA's Best Under 40. He graduated from the George Washington University Law School and the University of Virginia.

“If you suffer without succeeding, it is so others will succeed after you. If you succeed without suffering, it is because others have suffered before you”

- Unknown



Farrah Su | Senior Communications Manager, Center for Asian Americans United for Self-Empowerment (CAUSE). Farrah is a 1.5 generation Taiwanese American immigrant, Buddhist, community advocate, and artist with a deep love and dedication to the AAPI community. Through her work at CAUSE as Senior Communications Manager, Farrah builds and implements engaging communication strategies as a mobilizing tool to empower AAPI advocates to take civic action in their communities. One key effort Farrah spearheaded was CAUSE's 2021 Redistricting digital campaign that activated over 40 organizations and 150 individuals to demand that the voting rights and political representation of West San Gabriel Valley AAPI communities be protected on the Congressional redistricting level. This included a six-part unscripted video series that Farrah produced, shot, and edited, to promote AAPI engagement in the 2020 Census executive produced by Visual Communications in collaboration with APIELA and EPIC. Beyond nonprofit work, Farrah is a cinematographer who has worked on projects ranging from award-winning short films and bite-sized series to music videos and experimental documentation. Farrah is serving as Producer on a feature documentary about the longest-running Asian American free arts series, Tuesday Night Cafe.



Kristine Esposo Telford | Executive Director of External Affairs, The Edison Electric Institute (EEI). EEI is the association that represents all U.S. investor-owned electric companies. Kristine leads EEI's External Affairs department and is responsible for outreach to state and local policymakers and external stakeholders, as well as EEI's public affairs practice, which assists member companies in achieving legislative and policy success through issue advocacy tools and campaigns. Kristine also co-leads EEI's state practice team and is a past co-chair of EEI's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council. Prior to joining EEI in 2017, she provided public affairs counsel to Fortune 500 clients, specializing in grassroots communications, strategic partnerships, and coalition management around advocacy groups, think tanks, and issue experts. Kristine was named to Public Utility Fortnightly's inaugural "Fortnightly Under Forty" list in 2019 and was a finalist for Women in Government Relations Excellence in Advocacy Award for Excellence in a State Issue Campaign. Originally from Frederick, Maryland, Kristine graduated from The George Washington University with a B.A. in Political Science and completed graduate coursework in International Commerce and Policy at George Mason University.



Tina Tran | Senior District Representative, California State Senator Janet Nguyen. Tina is a longstanding social advocate that has spent most of her legal career serving various Public Defender's offices and the U.S. Air Force as a military attorney (JAG). Ms. Tran is a first-generation Vietnamese-American, raised in a poverty-stricken house rife with domestic violence. She is the youngest of five children, first to attend college, and has been self-sufficient since the age of sixteen. Prior to law school, she served as a Field Representative to State Senator Janet Nguyen, where she helped constituents navigate the barriers of bureaucracy. Most of whom were monolingual-Vietnamese who she regularly helped with translation services. She assisted individuals and families with social service forms and inquiries regarding safety net programs like Medicare, S.N.A.P, and housing, as well as, issues with licensing and naturalization. In order to advance issues of economic justice, she joined the Social Enterprise and Economic Empowerment Clinic at Hastings and advised social enterprises, nonprofits, and small businesses. With an unwavering passion to serve, she found herself eager to give back to the armed forces in honor of the country who gave her family asylum. After her term in the Air Force, Ms. Tran returned to the State Senate to further expand her reach in providing for the underserved communities.



Mai Vang | CEO, Heart & Hustle Strategies, LLC. Mai is the daughter of Hmong refugees from Laos, a proud Sacramento native, and the eldest of 16 children. Mai is the CEO and Co-Founder of Heart & Hustle Strategies, LLC. She brings over 20 years of community organizing experience to help drive strategic grassroots campaigns, candidate development, and non-profit strategic development. Mai has developed and implemented winning campaigns for local school bonds, ballot measures, and progressive candidates. Mai specializes in uplifting authentic narratives from candidates and supporting organizations to elevate the impact of their advocacy efforts. Before being elected to the Sacramento City Council in 2020, Mai co-founded Hmong Innovating Politics (HIP), an organization whose mission is to strengthen the power of disenfranchised communities through innovative civic engagement and strategic grassroots mobilization. In her first term, Mai led one of the most linguistically diverse community-led vaccination clinics during the COVID-19 pandemic; secured 102 acres for civic amenities & affordable housing; championed a city-wide ballot initiative for youth investments; and secured over 20 million dollars for libraries, streets, and parks in South Sacramento. Mai holds Master's Degrees in Public Health and Asian American Studies from UCLA.



Kayla vanWieringen | Senior Vice President, EDGE Communications. Kayla has dedicated her career to supporting Democratic candidates and causes. She has worked on campaigns at the presidential, statewide, legislative, and local levels and has advised hundreds of candidates throughout her career. In her role as Senior Vice President at EDGE Communications, she currently serves as campaign manager to Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava for her reelection campaign. Prior to that, she was Vice President of Political and Programs at Ruth's List Florida, the state's preeminent organization for electing Democratic pro-choice women to office. During her tenure she oversaw the political, program, and training departments and played an integral role in a transformative period of growth for the organization. Kayla also served as the Statewide Youth Outreach Coordinator for Elizabeth Warren's presidential campaign in Florida and prior to that served as a legislative aide in the Florida House of Representatives. She was born and raised in South Florida and graduated from Florida State University with B.A. in Political Science and Philosophy.



Finley Varughese | Programming and Political Manager, Republican National Committee. Finley currently acts as the Programming and Political Manager at the Republican National Committee (RNC), serving the RNC's 168 members. During the 2022 midterm cycle, he worked as a political aide and assisted with RNC operations across the West Coast in key target states and congressional races, helping to secure a Republican majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. During the 2020 election cycle, Finley was a field organizer for the North Carolina Trump Victory team and coordinated canvassing efforts to secure Republican victories across the Old North state. In college, he interned for the 2020 Republican National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina and Jacksonville, Florida. Born and raised in Florida, Finley holds a Bachelor's in Political Science from Southeastern University in Lakeland.



Newton Viengkhou | Field Representative, California State Assemblymember Phillip Chen. Newton serves as a dedicated field representative for the Office of Assemblyman Phillip Chen, where he passionately advocates for the needs of the community. Recently recognized as the Emerging Leader of 2023 by the Brea Chamber of Commerce, Newton is esteemed for his exceptional rapport with constituents and his unwavering commitment to community engagement. Known for his unwavering respect for others, Newton's character is deeply influenced by his upbringing. As the son of immigrant parents from Southeast Asia, he embodies the values of hard work, perseverance, and resilience instilled in him from a young age. Embracing the lessons of his heritage, Newton understands the importance of accepting life's challenges with grace and resilience, exemplifying the spirit of determination in overcoming obstacles. His dedication to serving others and his profound respect for diverse perspectives make him an invaluable asset to both his community and the Office of Assemblyman Phillip Chen.



Dyanna Volek | Government Affairs Manager, San Francisco International Airport. Dyanna brings more than a decade of government relations and public affairs expertise. At SFO, she successfully navigates the legislative process for a \$1.2B operating budget department. Prior to her current role, Dyanna served as a Vice President at Strategies 360, Legislative Aide to San Francisco Supervisor Katy Tang, and Policy Aide in the Office of San Francisco Mayor Edwin M. Lee. In public service, Dyanna was recently elected as a Delegate for California Assembly District 17. She also serves as a Deputy Marriage Commissioner and on the Board of Directors for Planned Parenthood Northern California. A first-generation college student and daughter of Filipino immigrants, Dyanna started in public policy as a law student intern at the East Bay Community Law Center and the USDOJ's Civil Rights Division and as a Judicial Fellow with the California Administrative Office of the Courts. She holds a Bachelor's Degree from UC Davis in Sociology and a Juris Doctorate from the UC Berkeley.



Darlene Vu | Chief Operating Officer, Asian American Women's Political Initiative (AAWPI). As AAWPI's first COO, she has co-led the organization's national expansion and oversees the operations, hiring and finances for AAWPI, the only national-level political leadership organization for Asian American and Pacific Islander women. She began her journey at the MA State House as a legislative aide in both the House of Representatives and State Senate. She managed the groundbreaking campaign of Cinda Danh, the first Asian American woman to run for Lynn City Council, before joining Dewey Square Group. Raised in East Boston public housing by her single, immigrant father, she champions access, opportunity, and inclusive democracies. She serves on the Board of Directors for the University of Massachusetts Amherst's Women into Leadership where she helps advance women's representation in government and public policy. Darlene also serves on the revisioning committee for the University of Massachusetts Boston's Gender, Leadership, and Public Policy graduate certificate program. Darlene was a 2015 AAWPI State House Fellowship alumnae and a member of the 2023 Anna Faith Jones and Frieda Garcia Women of Color Leadership Circle through Boston Women's Fund and. Darlene graduated from UMass Amherst with a B.S. in Public Health.



Danni Wang | Deputy Campaign Manager, Lisa Blunt Rochester for Senate. Danni Wang is the Deputy Campaign Manager for Lisa Blunt Rochester for Senate, a historic race to elect the first Black woman to the U.S. Senate from Delaware. Previously, Danni served as a communications advisor at EMILYs List, advising Democratic, pro-choice women and campaigns up and down the ballot. Danni first started in politics working for Democratic members of the California state legislature, spending time both in Southern California and Sacramento. Originally from Overland Park, Kansas, she graduated with a B.A. in Psychology and minor in Gender Studies. She is a staunch supporter of Los Angeles sports teams, except when it comes to the Kansas City Chiefs!



Clint Weirick | Senior District Representative, California State Senator John Laird. He's born and raised on the Central Coast in San Luis Obispo County serving Senator John Laird there since the Senator's swearing-in. Starting amidst a historic pandemic, he immediately tackled difficult issues and provided assistance for constituents and stakeholders such as unemployment and COVID-19 relief. His extensive long-standing community involvement combined with dedication to outreach and engagement in the county helped their office quickly cultivate relationships with many elected officials, local governments, organizations, unions, and diverse community stakeholders to address unique issues, bring new voices to the table, and accomplish results. He's known for his own extensive network and relationships locally and statewide in addition to understanding a wide portfolio of complex public policy issues. He's graduated numerous programs including the CA API Legislative Caucus Institute's API Legislative Staff Academy and National Conference of State Legislatures' Legislative Staff Certificate Program. Outside his work in the public sector, he's run and supported numerous political campaigns over the years. He has the privilege to serve on his hometown Grover Beach City Council and is a proud member of the League of California Cities Asian Pacific Islander Caucus.



Mon Yuck Yu | Policy Director, Office of the Brooklyn Borough President. Mon Yuck serves as Director of Policy at the Office of the Brooklyn Borough President, where she works on policy including maternal and mental health, safety, and education. Her work has contributed to new legislation, Brooklyn's first comprehensive plan for public health, workforce development and food security initiatives, and the launch of a targeted maternal health outreach campaign combatting Brooklyn's maternal mortality crisis. Mon Yuck also co-founded RaisingHealth Partners, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to addressing healthcare barriers affecting underserved immigrant populations like her parents, who struggled with healthcare access when her father had terminal illness. For 13 years, she spearheaded initiatives bringing free healthcare, mental health, literacy, public safety, and food security programming into her community, and had been instrumental in response efforts during COVID-19. She serves on several boards and advisory councils including: Women's Empowerment Coalition, NYC Health Public Health Corps, and City Limits. Mon Yuck received her B.A. from Dartmouth College and M.P.A. from Columbia University. She has been recognized as a New York Nonprofit Media 40 Under 40 Rising Star and Nonprofit Trailblazer, City & State Asian Power 100, Schneps Media AAPI Power Player, and recipient of the Picker Prize in Public Service.



Boo Yuen | Co-Founder and Executive Vice President, The Adwell Group. Boo is an expert ad maker and strategist. While in school, Boo wrote for his college satire magazine, where he ran two different satirical candidates for student government president, one of whom won the election. Boo then transitioned from comedy to serious campaigns, working for one of the country's leading democratic media firms where he rose to become an award-winning ad-maker and strategist. Boo has written, directed, or produced over 400 TV, radio, digital, and print ads for political campaigns, non-profits, and corporate clients. Boo's work includes helping elect and re-elect Rep. Andy Kim, Rep. Elissa Slotkin, Rep. Jennifer Wexton, and many wins with the DCCC IE and HMP IE. In addition to helping elect candidates to office, Boo has worked with companies and issue advocacy groups to craft successful ad campaigns. This work has included producing the corporate values video that kicked off a national brand campaign for a multinational beverage company and an ad campaign supporting the Los Angeles Clippers move to Inglewood. Boo is a graduate of Georgetown University with a degree in Government.

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

- African Proverb

2024 NAAPPPA LEADERSHIP AWARDS

FORWARD AWARD

Recognizing Leadership in Mentoring and Advancing AAPIs in Politics and Public Affairs Careers



Johnnie Giles

Johnnie Giles is Founder and President of JDGiles LLC, which helps companies in three specific areas: CA political strategies, business consulting and private equity solutions. Prior to forming his own consulting firm Johnnie served as Executive Vice President for a private equity firm specializing in mezzanine funding. He joined the firm to help reorganize the company and ultimately sell its holdings to two strategic partners. Giles had a successful 15-year career at Comcast NBCUniversal. After more than 10 years leading the government and regulatory affairs office for Comcast's California region, he finished his career at Comcast Corporate HQ External Affairs group working on Asian American Pacific Islander and Center Left strategies and program activations. Johnnie has been an Executive Board Member for the California Foundation for the Environment and Economy for more than 10 years and has been active within the Asian Pacific Islander community for nearly three decades. He has served on the executive board of the Center for Asian American Media. He was a founding member and served on the board of Asian Americans for Good Government. He is the founding board chairman for the California Asian Pacific American Chamber of Commerce, Board Chair for APIAVote, Board Advisor for Asian American Victory Fund, and has served on the board and advisory board of Asian Americans Advancing Justice Los Angeles, Asian American Justice Center, OCA National, Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies C4, Asian/Pacific Islander American Chamber of Commerce & Entrepreneurship, and the Japanese American Citizens League President Circle.

TORCH AWARD

Recognizing Leadership in AAPI Media & Journalism



Pamela Wu

Pamela Wu is the Director of News and Media Relations for UC Davis Health, one of the nation's leading academic health systems. Since 2017, she has led a team that produces award-winning health stories. In 2021 and 2023, she received Emmy Awards in the category of Health/Medical Long-Form Content. Previously, she served as Executive Director of Marketing and Communications at UC Davis School of Law. Pamela joined UC Davis in 2009 following a career as a television news anchor and reporter where she was nominated for an Emmy Award and received the Unity Award in Media for political reporting. Pamela hosted a CapRadio health care documentary that won the 2012 Edward R. Murrow Award. She is an active member of the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA), where she has served on both the national and Sacramento chapter boards. She is the founding co-director of AAJA's Media Institute, a program in which top journalists and communicators train thought leaders to become valuable sources to the media. In 2015, she was named AAJA's Member of the Year for excellence in service to the organization and the journalism industry.

DIVERSITY CHAMPIONS

Asian Pacific American Leadership Foundation

APALF was founded in 2004 as a non-partisan, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization to help prepare and equip AAPI leaders for public service and civic involvement. APALF was founded with the mission of engaging the AAPI community in active civic participation by creating, supporting, building and strengthening the local community infrastructure to help prepare and train qualified AAPI leaders for public service. APALF encourages AAPIs to be active and become leaders in their local communities, and beyond, equips AAPI leaders with tools and skills to better serve their constituencies, and connects AAPI leaders from around the country including past and current elected and appointed officials.

apalf.org

Cal Cities API Caucus

Established in 2000, the Asian Pacific Islander (API) Caucus provides API municipal officials and their colleagues with a forum to share ideas and develop leadership experience. It also provides resources for city officials to discuss League priorities and issues, and offer avenues to communicate with the state's API constituency. The Asian Pacific Islander (API) Caucus is a diversity caucus organized within the League of California Cities. Asian Americans are the fastest-growing ethnic population in California. The API Caucus serves as leaders to improve the quality of life, advocate on behalf of the API community, and provide resources to develop the next generation of leaders. Its mission is to strive for greater API representation, equity, belonging, and inclusion in all aspects of the Cal Cities' policies and practices; advocate for the well-being of the diverse API community throughout the state; and support and empower API local elected officials.

cacitiesapicaucus.org

The Asian American Foundation

TAAF is dedicated to building a safer, more inclusive future for AAPIs everywhere. Founded in response to the rise in anti-Asian hate and violence, TAAF is reversing the longstanding under-investment in the AAPI community and addressing the root causes of hate and discrimination. Its mission is to serve the Asian American and Pacific Islander community in their pursuit of belonging and prosperity that is free from discrimination, slander, and violence. Its vision is an America where opportunities to participate in all aspects of society are equally accessible, and individuals and communities are not rendered invisible, nor singled out for false stereotypes, discrimination, or hate on the basis of race.

taaf.org