

The background of the entire page is a vibrant, painterly illustration. In the foreground, several large, pink lotus flowers are in various stages of bloom, with green lily pads floating in the dark blue water. In the middle ground, a city skyline with several tall buildings is visible, set against a backdrop of snow-capped mountains under a sky with soft, orange and blue hues, suggesting a sunset or sunrise.

Colorado Lotus Project

A Statewide Look at the Strengths and Barriers Facing Colorado's Asian American and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Communities

Executive Summary

Funded by the Colorado AAPI Circle

May 2024



Colorado Lotus Project

A First-of-its-Kind Comprehensive Report
on Colorado's AANHPI Communities



The Colorado Lotus Project is a groundbreaking effort to uplift the unique voices and experiences of Asian American and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (AANHPI) people living in the state. This project was conceptualized and spearheaded by AANHPI leaders who were tired of seeing their communities viewed as a monolith. This work brings together rich information and is a powerful resource to learn about Colorado's many AANHPI communities.

Colorado Needs to Better Understand and Support AANHPI Communities

The umbrella term AANHPI encompasses more than 50 distinct ethnic groups. It includes people who speak more than 100 different languages and represents 75 countries across East, Southeast, and South Asia, as well as the Pacific Islands of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

In Colorado, about 260,000 people (alone or in combination with another race or ethnicity, including Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander) trace their roots to these regions of Asia. Over 22,000 (alone or in combination with another race or ethnicity, including Asian) trace their roots to the Pacific Islands. Each has unique histories and cultures.

But in most U.S. data, this diversity is lost. People are lumped together as "Asian

Americans” and “Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders” in one or two categories. As a result of this data practice, key social, economic, and health indicators often show that AANHPI communities are better off than other racial or ethnic groups. In reality, variations in the data are masked, hiding the full extent of the experiences of people included in these categories. For example, research shows that income inequality in the U.S. has been rising most rapidly among Asians. The gap between the highest earners and the lowest earners is also greater among Asians than for any other racial or ethnic group.¹

Meanwhile, misconceptions – the [model minority myth](#), [healthy immigrant effect](#), and [perpetual foreigner stereotypes](#) – continue to exclude and misrepresent the experiences of people who identify as AANHPI.² The model minority myth paints Asian Americans as a high-achieving, wealthy, and obedient group. While many may perceive this as a positive stereotype, it is detrimental to AANHPI communities and hides the existence of AANHPI people who struggle. Further, the myth denies the effects of racial inequality for all people of color in the U.S., creating a wedge between Asians and other people of color.

These are just some of the issues that can drive inequities for AANHPI communities across multiple systems, including philanthropy. In 2021, [Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy \(AAPIP\)](#) found that **for every \$100 awarded by foundations for work in the U.S., only 20 cents are designated for AANHPI communities.**

The community is tired of these dynamics, and people are doing something about it.

The [Colorado Asian American and Pacific Islander \(AAPI\) Circle](#) partnered with the [Colorado Health Institute](#) and an advisory group of 10 AANHPI community leaders to create the Colorado Lotus Project. The project highlights disparities, raises the need for better data, and calls on Colorado leaders to commit to supporting the community and allocating resources equitably.

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Most importantly, this project underscores the indisputable fact that **AANHPI Coloradans are not a monolith.** For every factor studied in this work, important differences and nuances emerged among each AANHPI race and ethnicity. Now it's time to spread this information to all of Colorado.

This executive summary provides a high-level description of Colorado Lotus Project efforts and outlines the data-driven recommendations from the project's analysis. For more information and detail, explore all the resources on the [Lotus website](#), including the full Colorado Lotus Project report.



A Rich Tapestry of Information

The Colorado Lotus Project brings together detailed data in key topic areas and raises community voices. This includes a thorough analysis of data on AANHPI communities and storytelling. This comprehensive approach calls attention to an essential need for better data, while fostering a nuanced understanding of the diverse experiences within communities. This rich information is available through four different community resources.

Detailed, Disaggregated Data

Systemic misrepresentation and erasure of diverse AANHPI communities leads to a lack of comprehensive and nuanced data, and that lack of understanding hinders the equitable allocation of resources. Data clustered into a handful of racial and ethnic labels misses crucial trends. Separating data into subgroups – also known as data disaggregation – is necessary to fully understand the experiences of people represented by the overarching racial or ethnic group. To the extent possible for each data source, the Colorado Lotus Project report displays information for the most detailed AANHPI identities available, including:

Bangladeshi, Bhutanese, Burmese, Cambodian, Chamorro, Chinese, Fijian*, Filipino, Hmong, Indian, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Malaysian, Marshallese*, Mongolian, Native Hawaiian, Nepalese, Okinawan*, Pakistani, Samoan, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Thai, Tongan*, Vietnamese

*Due to small survey sample sizes, there is limited information available about these communities.

Key Topic Areas

The Colorado Lotus Project report brings together information about important areas that affect the lives of AANHPI people. This includes a philanthropic analysis of funding for the AANHPI community that examines how foundations across the county have supported AANHPI people in Colorado over the years.

Additionally, the report focuses on key topic areas, referred to as domains. The full report details key metrics, trends, and insights from AANHPI communities for each domain. It also includes domain-specific recommendations that explain how leaders and communities can turn intent into action.



Colorado Lotus Project Report Key Topic Areas

Funding for the AANHPI Community

- Funding amounts from foundations
- Where funding goes in the state

Demographics

- AANHPI identities of people living in Colorado
- Recent Asian migration trends

Health

- Physical health
- Mental health
- Access to care

Housing

- Housing affordability
- Housing quality
- Housing for immigrants and refugees

Income and Economic Opportunity

- Income
- Employment
- Entrepreneurship

Education

- Experiences in the school system
- Educational attainment

Crime and Justice

- Hate crimes, violence, and experiences with racism
- Experiences with the justice and legal systems
- Outreach and trust

Democracy

- Civic engagement
- Language access
- Representation by state and local leaders

Colorado Lotus Project Resources



Full Colorado Lotus Project Report

Fact Sheets About Key Topic Areas (Domains)

Interactive Community Maps

AANHPI Data Metric Inventory

Access the [Colorado Lotus Project website](#) now to learn more about Colorado's AANHPI communities.

Community Voices

The Colorado Lotus Project was built from the ground up by AANHPI leaders and was guided by community input. From the advisory group to community conversations, to partnering with a local artist to create the look of the Colorado Lotus Project, AANHPI people contributed their voices and expertise to this work.

Advisory Group

10 AANHPI leaders served on an advisory group to guide this work.



Focus Group Discussions

51 community members gave their perspectives on issues and strengths of the community.

Conversations with Experts

12 AANHPI community leaders, from university professors to community organizers, shared their expertise.

Thought Exchange

107 community members participated in an online poll, sharing and rating 60 comments about their strengths and challenges as AANHPI people.

Storytelling

Two AANHPI writers captured five stories about:

- Denver's historic Chinatown
- Engaging Colorado's South Asian community
- The history of the Asian Pacific Development Center
- Health disparities among Pacific Islanders
- The immigrant experience in Colorado



Art

Local AANHPI artist **Nalye Lor** created the report's cover art to represent the growth and resilience of Colorado's AANHPI communities.

A Call to Action for Colorado:

Recommendations to Advance Equity for AANHPI Coloradans

The Colorado Lotus Project's overarching goal is to educate policymakers, service providers, advocates, philanthropic institutions, and community partners about the nuanced strengths and challenges of AANHPI communities in Colorado. Based on the information gathered and opportunities identified in the domains, the Colorado Lotus Project formed these recommendations for leaders.

1. Enhance and Improve Data Disaggregation and Collection

There is a severe lack of data on AANHPI communities. Partners in health care, philanthropy, community organizations, government, and others must capture accurate, timely, and detailed data about people within different AANHPI communities.

2. Promote Meaningful Representation and Create Belonging

AANHPI communities need to feel respected, valued, and acknowledged, both in the workplace and their communities.

3. Authentically Engage and Build Trust with AANHPI Communities

Partners need to see where people live, understand the nuances of their cultures, and build open communication.

4. Address Language and Cultural Barriers

Breaking down language and cultural barriers for AANHPI communities in Colorado is necessary to ensure people can thrive.

5. Target and Enhance Funding to AANHPI Communities Most in Need

AANHPI communities most in need of support should receive more funding. Tracking funding annually is essential, and comparing existing support to communities' actual needs is important for improvement.

Conclusion

Disaggregated data show that AANHPI communities are not a monolith. They are not a model minority. The number of AANHPI people across Colorado is sizeable, and their experiences are diverse. Among different AANHPI groups in the state, there's also a strong sense of solidarity, collaboration, and celebration of culture. As one participant in the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander focus group put it:

"If you rally us together, we're loud and boisterous in our numbers... Once you 'see' someone [who represents you], we're coming. Culturally, we all have that in common – *ohana*, we come together."

The 2024 Colorado Lotus Project report is a first-of-its-kind, in-depth look at these communities in Colorado. But more statewide research is needed. As a state, Colorado leaders need to continue to advocate and advance data collection systems to better understand trends in key metrics for AANHPI people. There must also be better ways to reach out and engage AANHPI people across the state and across identities. This includes AANHPI people who are living in rural areas, are older adults, are LGBTQ+, or are experiencing homelessness, among others.

Like the flower itself, the Colorado Lotus Project represents the potential for growth, transformation, and resilience for Colorado's AANHPI communities, even in the face of barriers.

Endnotes

1. Kochhar R. and Cilluffo A. Income Inequality in the U.S. Is Rising Most Rapidly Among Asians. (2018) Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/07/12/income-inequality-in-the-u-s-is-rising-most-rapidly-among-asians/>
2. Yi S.S., Kwon S.C., Suss R., et al. The Mutually Reinforcing Cycle of Poor Data Quality And Racialized Stereotypes That Shapes Asian American Health. (2022) HealthAffairs. 41 (2) <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2021.01417>