



**TELLING  
THE  
WHOLE  
STORY**

Voices of Ethnic Volunteers  
in America

Nora L. Silver

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*Telling the Whole Story: Voices of Ethnic Volunteers in America*

by Nora L. Silver

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The Volunteerism Project, directed by Nora Silver,  
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**TO MY FATHER, LOUIS N. STEIN, 1921-2011**

whose stories let me know what is right and what matters,  
who taught me to listen and to love,  
and who made all the difference.





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# FOREWORD



We and our families have arrived in this country by way of different paths—some to escape war, some to find work, some to seek a better life for our children. We come with advanced degrees in education and medicine, and we come with third grade educations and farming skills. Some of us were original inhabitants of this land, others came five and six generations ago, and some of us are brand new immigrants.

We begin to contribute to our new land quickly, quietly and without recognition.

The purpose of this report is to shine a light on the contributions of our many communities, to recognize that this country rests on the voluntary spirit and action of all of us. We aim to help our established institutions—nonprofit organizations, foundations, public sector programs—better understand our motivations and our preferences. The intended result is that this understanding allows these institutions—ultimately *our* institutions—to better engage all of us in their work, to meet their missions, and to serve all our residents and communities. We aim to celebrate our contributions to date and lay fertile ground for our contributions tomorrow.

We are most proud of this report because it is the product of an often unheard chorus, and we have had the great opportunity to step forward and amplify its voice.

So, listen carefully. You are about to hear the voices of the future, as well as of the historical past and vibrant present. You are about to hear our stories, told in our own voices, and presented by people from our communities.

We are just beginning to “tell the whole story.” We invite you to continue telling the story in conversation with your colleagues, family, and friends.

Sandra R. Hernández, M.D.  
*The San Francisco Foundation*

Harumitsu Inouye  
*Shinnyo-En Foundation*





# INTRODUCTION



*Only the word volunteerism is new to us—the act of being a volunteer is in no way new. We’ve always done it, that village you hear about. We’ve always taken care of each other and given time and whatever we had to help others. The whole neighborhood raised everybody.*

It is the legacy and strength of this country that we help one another. We are lucky to live in a place where people freely and actively help others and improve communities. Each year, millions of Americans volunteer on community projects and in organizations, and millions of others informally help a neighbor, transport a friend to the doctor, or baby sit another family’s children.

The vitality of our communities depends upon our contributing and passing on this ethic to our children. To help all of us—volunteers and organizations alike—to engage *all our people* in the work of building a humane and just society, this book raises up the voices of those doing that important work.

When people volunteer, they bring their cultural backgrounds, having come from many countries and cultures, histories and traditions. People volunteer in order to create a better world for their children and in order to pass along their culture. People’s culture influences how they engage with one another and the world. And we know too little about how people’s culture—their ethnicity, gender, generation, place of origin, class background, and family upbringing—color their community work.

Because our organizations rely on the time and talent of volunteers, these organizations must adapt to the increasingly diverse volunteers of tomorrow. Our organizations must understand, appreciate, and integrate cultural factors so that they can fully engage, support, and recognize the growing number and diversity of people and their many contributions. Organizations must adapt in order to serve

the clients whose lives they seek to improve and to remain relevant and effective in the communities they seek to serve.

Reports from seven ethnic focus groups are the heart and soul of this book. Each focus group brought its own findings and themes to the surface. These themes are reflected in their titles and are presented in each of the focus group reports:

- ***A Chorus of Voices***, African American focus group facilitated by Vicki Clark in Memphis, Tennessee
- ***Self-Determination: Messages for Our Native Youth***, two American Indian focus groups conducted by Kouslaa Kessler-Mata in Oakland and San Francisco, California
- ***Uno Recibe lo que Uno Da: You Get What You Give***, Central American focus group conducted in Spanish, facilitated by Coco Mendoza and translated by Gary Wheelock in San Francisco, California
- ***Extending the Family***, Chinese American focus group conducted by Mae Chao in San Francisco, California
- ***Giving Generously***, Japanese American focus group conducted by Mami Ishikawa in Berkeley, California
- ***Three Continents, Four States, Ten Cities***, Korean American focus group facilitated by Debbie Ng in Oakland, California
- ***La Gran Familia***, Mexican American focus group facilitated by Ramon del Castillo, with simultaneous translation by Patsy Roybal in Denver, Colorado

We heard four common themes that threaded through the different focus groups. These findings are developed in the Global Findings section of the book and are presented along with implications for practice for those in the volunteer field.

The first theme is ***Continuity***, or deep roots and new shoots. This theme highlights the importance of a community's deep traditions of giving. Central to these traditions is a model of first learning to help from the family, a lesson that is

often expressed through a strong commitment to helping young people and to raising the next generation.

The second theme is **Connectedness**, or spiritual and personal development and interpersonal relationships. Here, people spoke of empathy and compassion and of the connection and reciprocity that is central to helping others. They spoke of their spiritual and religious traditions as prime motivators for helping others. Young adults in particular described their community work as a bridge to discovering who they are and to developing their identities in the world. And all spoke of the centrality of relationships in their community work, reminding us always of the personal connection.

The third theme is **Consequence**, or significant impact. This theme emerged as we heard about the importance of seeing specific results and impact. We heard a distinct preference for helping those with the greatest need and for working toward social change. Participants also frequently stated their preference for working with small organizations because it allowed them to see the impact clearly.

The fourth theme is **Culture**, or the unique history of each group. Encompassed by “culture” is the reminder that for each group there are defining cultural and historical events and themes that must be understood if one is to work effectively with its members. In “culture” we include the recognition that real diversity exists within each group. The theme also includes common experience across groups of the discrimination and exclusion they experienced when they tried to offer their time and talent to help conventional organizations.

Our most sincere hope is that you take the opportunity to sit back, breathe deeply, and enjoy reading the reports. The reports are rich and descriptive with the voices and stories of individuals who too often go unheard. It is a delight to hear them. Their stories and experiences can begin a dialogue among all of us about the interests, motivations, benefits, and concerns of the millions of people from communities who even as you read this, are out helping others in need, working on community projects, and freely giving of their time and talent to our voluntary organizations. They are helping make a better life for us all.



# THE RESEARCH PROJECT



*Telling the Whole Story: Voices of Ethnic Volunteers in America* launched in 2000 as a research project conducted by, for, and about volunteers. In the end, eight facilitators, two translators, sixty-eight focus group participants, and twenty-five other volunteers made the project work. Facilitators, who were generally members of the ethnic group they conducted, led focus groups, transcribed sessions, and drafted preliminary reports identifying key themes that emerged from their groups. As author, I edited and re-worked the reports. Finally, I wrote the interlacing sections and compiled the full document.

Volunteers designed, hosted, facilitated, and participated in the seven focus groups conducted across the United States. Staff members of The Volunteerism Project designed and field-tested the questions, and conducted the first two focus groups. Debbie Ng was project coordinator, Kouslaa Kessler-Mata was project intern, and I served as project director.

The goal was to bring to light the civic participation of diverse cultural and ethnic groups in the United States and to help community organizations better engage their time and talents.

We sought to provide a place for people from diverse backgrounds to share their stories and to help us understand how and why people from diverse groups engage in helping others and improving communities. We hoped that in gathering these stories and insights we could fashion a resource that would help community-based organizations learn about, appreciate, and seek the inclusion of people from diverse ethnic communities.

We chose qualitative research, and focus groups in particular, because this method is particularly good at surfacing themes, deepening understanding, and identifying areas for further exploration. We believed that this method would allow the voices of the people themselves to be heard.

We did not name the subject “volunteering,” but instead simply asked people when and if they had ever helped another person, contributed to a community



project, or worked with a community group—for no pay. We sought to delve deeper into the motivations for why people helped others, and what benefits they derived from doing so. We asked which factors helped or hindered them in working with different organizations.

It was our privilege to receive the wisdom of our many ethnic volunteers. We learned much about how to build a more inclusive environment. Participants shared a wealth of experience, insight, personal stories, and historically significant events. They made poignant recommendations for those outside their respective ethnic groups. The aim of this report is to share that experience with you.

# THE FIELD OF VOLUNTEERISM

## TELLING THE WHOLE STORY



Volunteering as an activity is much-lauded but insufficiently understood. Each day millions of people teach children, feed the hungry, assist seniors, and advocate for social change. One-quarter to one-half of the U.S. adult population volunteers. Yet as a management field, volunteerism lay largely undeveloped until roughly fifty years ago, when management practices were identified and research was begun.

Then, twenty-two years ago, Peter Drucker in “What Business Can Learn From Nonprofits” (*Harvard Business Review*, July-August 1989) proposed that “this move from nonprofit volunteer to unpaid professional may be the most important development in American society today.” Drucker understood that volunteers provided a powerful resource to the nonprofit sector. He noted the management skills required to attract, inspire, and develop volunteers. Drucker emphasized the retention of talent (“knowledge workers”) as the critical challenge to U.S. companies and he chose as the model the way nonprofit organizations had learned to manage their volunteers.

In recent years, the field of volunteerism became a professional industry. Starting in 2002, the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics began regularly documenting voluntary activity. The Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies measures volunteer activity in thirty-six countries throughout the world. The emergence of the Corporation for National and Community Service with its programs—Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America—highlight the development of the field. The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009 created new entities within the federal government, including the Nonprofit Capacity Building Program, the Social Innovation Fund, and the Volunteer Generation Fund. The White House Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation has focused its efforts on bringing rigor and discipline to civic engagement. Curricula on social movements, nonprofit organizations, and

community engagement have exploded in undergraduate and graduate programs in colleges and universities throughout the U.S.

Individuals inside and outside the volunteer industry are beginning to recognize the power of voluntary action. The voluntary response to September 11, 2001 captured the spirit of the country. An outpouring of voluntary action followed in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. President Obama's use of organized groups of volunteers in the 2008 presidential election elevated our understanding of the power of volunteer movements, especially when coupled with technology. The Tea Party movement spread rapidly, uniting otherwise isolated people into a common cause. Spontaneous groups of volunteers are generating revolutions and toppling long-standing and seemingly impenetrable governments around the globe.

Two recent publications have done an excellent job of focusing nonprofits on the power of mobilizing people. *Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits* by Leslie Crutchfield and Heather McLeod Grant, 2007, has a powerful chapter called "Convert individual supporters into evangelists for the cause" that points to the higher value of "volunteers" as "evangelists" for the organization and the cause. *The Charismatic Organization: Eight Ways to Grow a Nonprofit that Builds Buzz, Delights Donors and Energizes Employees* by Shirley Sagawa and Deborah Jospin, 2009, has a chapter on "Active Outreach" that shows how the active engagement of people beyond the walls of an organization creates success.

Tools for industry practitioners are evolving. Books, handbooks, webinars, specialized reports, and provocative thought pieces help raise skills and knowledge. Conferences and workshops provide management training. Access to information about the management of volunteers has improved and the quantity of information has grown exponentially: a recent online search for volunteer resources yielded no fewer than 130 million results!

Materials in the field of community involvement have adapted to reflect the volunteering trends and habits of a modern society. As individuals try to spend their time more efficiently, they increasingly volunteer as part of their work group, family, or school. As a result, programs and materials for group volunteering at companies,



places of worship, and schools increase. Additional resources help managers tailor programs for specific populations such as seniors, youth, and individuals with special needs. These manuals are extremely helpful in diversifying volunteer programs and helping them be more inclusive of people of various ages, people who have varying amounts of time, and people with different abilities.

Still, despite the waves of demographic change taking place throughout the country, no similar set of robust resources on community engagement in ethnic communities exists. Some ethnic publications look at philanthropy and, to a more limited extent, volunteering within their specific populations. Few resources consider voluntary activity across ethnic groups. And the few that do, look at large populations such as Asian American or Hispanic.

There is a small, related body of work in the field of philanthropy, but in this case, reports that address diversity tend to highlight giving and minimize volunteering. As philanthropy becomes increasingly more interested in involving ethnic communities in philanthropic causes, it will begin to appreciate the link between giving financial resources and giving time. According to the 2002 publication, *Opening Doors, Pathways to Diverse Donors*, by Diana S. Newman, et al., volunteering leads to philanthropy: "Many Latinos identify their volunteerism as a critical turning point in their philanthropic development since it provides opportunities to meet and get to know [mainstream] corporate, political, and community leaders [and to] learn from [these individuals] about styles of leadership and giving."

Having a true picture of the full spectrum of community involvement may be the first step towards understanding how people participate and support organizations and causes in which they believe.

At the same time, nonprofit organizations continue to struggle with cultural inclusiveness for a number of reasons. Nonprofits are often under-resourced. Organizations, large and small, often overlook the potential of engaging volunteers, not viewing them as integral to their work. Volunteer programs may be focused on general recruiting and not on specific types of volunteers, and



may be stretched so thin that broadening their outreach seems daunting. Current employees and volunteers may not reflect the ethnic makeup of the constituents served and find themselves without the networks necessary to engage prospective ethnic volunteers.

Thousands of consultants and educators—many employed in management support organizations, volunteer centers, research institutions, universities, think tanks, and membership and trade associations—can assist organizations to become more inclusive of volunteers from diverse communities. These experts can infuse the voluntary sector with knowledge and skills. Studies and publications focused on diverse volunteers can lead to the development of more specific and effective training materials. Educators can provide sessions on diversity in volunteers at large organizations, affinity-group meetings, conferences, and special events. This group of educators and consultants can play a critical role in teaching and consulting with executives, volunteer managers, and boards of directors in nonprofit and philanthropic organizations. Together, they can cast a wide net and uphold high standards for involving volunteers from diverse communities.

This publication is a new contribution to this emerging body of work. *Telling the Whole Story* captures the experience of volunteers from different ethnic communities in their own words and shares with us what these volunteers want us to know is important to meaningfully engage them.



# AFRICAN AMERICANS

## A CHORUS OF VOICES



*Each one of us at a given point in time will have an opportunity to make a difference in somebody else's life. The more we do positive things to make a difference, the more others watch, and they will pick up the habit. For every action, there is an equal reaction.*

...

*I would want the groups we work with to understand that African Americans are a proud people—most of them—and that the world really only hears about the 5 percent or so of us who aren't worth a damn.*

...

*We have no intentions of forgetting our ancestry. And because we remember it does not mean that we are holding onto prejudices and hatreds. It's just a fact.*



# AFRICAN AMERICANS

## A CHORUS OF VOICES



*Dedicated to Melvin Floyd, 1928 - 2004<sup>(1)</sup>*

If I can help somebody as I pass along  
If I can cheer somebody with a word or song  
If I can show somebody that he's traveling wrong  
Then my living shall not be in vain.

If I can do my duty as a Christian ought  
If I can bring salvation to a world once wrought  
If I can spread the message as the Master taught  
Then my living shall not be in vain.

– Androza A. Bazel, *A Chorus of African American Voices on Service*

### INTRODUCTION

With a rich history of community culture and endurance even during the years of slavery and with a legacy of activism in the fight for civil rights, 38 million African Americans in the United States today comprise 12.5 percent of the United States population. Today a majority of blacks (58 percent) live in the South, 17 percent live in the Northeast and 17 percent in the Midwest, and 8 percent make their homes in the West. (United States Census 2009)

A chorus of African American voices understood the concept of volunteering as something that they've always done. "The word volunteerism is relatively new, but the act of being a volunteer is in no way new to us. The whole neighborhood raised everybody." Spirituality is a source of sustenance and there is a strong desire to share love and goodwill among humanity. A proud people, African Americans have concrete advice for non-African Americans whose intentions may be good, but who have misconceptions about the African American community.



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Persistent poverty remains a concern, with a 24 percent poverty rate among those who reported black as their only race (United States Census 2008). Additional themes that arose in the focus group included fostering the next generation of African American youth (particularly males), the importance of education, helping those less fortunate, and providing role models both within and outside the African American community.

Youth under eighteen years of age are a significant segment of the African American community, making up 30 percent of all blacks (compared with 21 percent of non-Hispanic whites). Educationally, African Americans have made considerable strides over the last fifty years, with a record 80 percent high school graduation rate and an 18 percent college graduation rate (among blacks twenty-five and over). This compares with 1950s rates of 3.7 percent for high school graduation and 2 percent for college graduation. Still, the rate of prison confinement is alarming, and on any given day one out of every eight black men in their late twenties is incarcerated.<sup>(2)</sup> The correlation between the high school drop-out rate and incarceration is also significant; the Center for Labor Studies at Northeastern University found that “nearly 23 percent of all young black men ages 16 to 24 who have dropped out of high school are in jail, prison, or a juvenile justice institution in America.”<sup>(3)</sup> These facts are of critical concern within the African American community.

For African Americans, reinvesting in the community, providing adult role models, and working together are keys to strengthening the success of the community and securing their future as a people. In fact, the highest rates of volunteering in the San Francisco Bay Area were in the African American community, with nearly 50 percent of men and women volunteering for an average of more than four hours per week (*Volunteering in the San Francisco Bay Area*, 1999). Focus group participants advised organizations seeking a role in the African American community to bring a sense of respect for “who they are and where they’re at” and to work in concert with existing efforts.

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# AFRICAN AMERICANS

## A CHORUS OF VOICES

### FOCUS GROUP

Participants in the African American focus group had a wide-ranging conversation about the place of volunteering, or helping others, in their lives. Each voice added to the chorus.

### OLD HAT FOR US

Only the word volunteerism is new to the African American community—the act of being a volunteer is in no way new to us. We've always done it, that village you hear about. We've always taken care of each other and given time and whatever we had to help others. The whole neighborhood raised everybody.

We took care of every sick person. The neighborhood dressed every child for Easter—that was our volunteerism. We just didn't know that word. Organizations that want to work with us should know that we've always done it and even though they've packaged it differently, it's not new to us. The actions are old hat for us.

### HELP A LIFE GROW STRONGER

What I learned was that to help a life grow stronger and wiser I could help in a different way. Now when I see people on the street, instead of giving them a dollar, I give them the address to the Union Mission.

I would work with the American Diabetes Association, not just because of the impact on my family and me personally, but the impact on my ethnic community. I think we fail to acknowledge that we have an issue with our diets, and that what starts out as something that can be easily managed is killing our community.

I can't think of an organization I'd choose to work with, but I would want to do something involving young adult education. I am working as a researcher now and I am finding out that the drop-out rate is climbing, and it's higher for males and even higher for minority males. So something is missing.

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## A CHORUS OF VOICES

When you talk about addressing the drop-out rate among male students, what I've thought about is starting an academic enrichment program, working with high school students for colleges.

I am involved in my neighborhood association. There were some burglaries in the neighborhood on the side of the street that backs up to the park, and we're trying to get people together to talk about this, trying to get a big town hall meeting to see if we can get some fences put up on the back property to secure the yards.

I help people through the red tape.

### **BEING BLESSED**

You know this song—"If I can help somebody along the way"? Whatever I do must further enhance my spirituality. Then I feel that whatever God blessed me with I didn't receive in vain. I'm giving it back through helping someone else.

It's like I'm supposed to teach what God has taught me to someone else. It's a different kind of volunteering. Handing off—that's what it feels like to me. That's why I'm volunteering for the church.

I would like to start an organization purely based on love, pretty much starting with our race but it could spread, in fact it's from scripture somewhere in 1 John. We should all love one another. If everyone would love one another, completely from the heart like we're supposed to, then there wouldn't be anything that anyone would want or need.

### **TO ACT OUT GOD'S WILL FOR MY LIFE**

We are a very spiritual race, we are spiritual beings. People who work with us should really embrace who we really are and where we came from and what we're really about.



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### **BEING PROUD**

I would want the groups we work with to understand that African Americans are a proud people—most of them—and that the world really only hears about the 5 percent or so of us who aren't worth a damn. I want the world to know that I am so proud. Don't close the door on me, let me feel like I can do what I am capable of doing.

Do not humiliate people for their needs. We are complete. My validity here on earth is not subordinate to any other human being. My validity should not be gauged on my level of need and/or my color.

Working for the National Civil Rights Museum makes me feel good. I meet people from all over the world. By being there I can show people from all over the world that "we're" not like what they might think we are. A lot of people from other countries and around the world think we are lazy, shiftless, shuffling, and I want them to know that we are just as intelligent and can talk just as intelligently as other people on many subjects. We can talk about anything as well as anybody else can. As they go away, a lot of people say "I'm glad I met you and talked with you. Thank you for sharing this information." They shake my hand and it just makes me feel good.

I want to work with organizations that believe in the culture—to understand that we are a people who have a sense of hopefulness and they need to have a sense of hopefulness about our culture too, about who we are. We are people who can and will achieve our full potential.

I think the assumption when non-black groups try to engage people who are black is that we're not competent. They need to respect us for who we are and where we're at.

I want these groups to really get to know me. They think they have an idea of what I'm supposed to do or say, because I'm black. I want them to realize that we want to be and need to be listened to. I've seen groups come

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and go and try to do “for” us—then grant monies run out. I want them to do at least two things:

1) Don't come in thinking that we want you to do things for us—that we can't be involved in how things are done, that we can't give time and volunteer in our own communities to help and change things.

2) Do come in expecting us to want to be shown how to do things for ourselves. Come in prepared to listen. Let us tell you how best we can work together and how you can really get to know us as people. Don't deal with us because of something you've read or heard about.

### **RESPONSIBILITY AND ROLE MODELING**

I would work with an interfaith group, because during hard times I needed them, and they were there for me. I was a caretaker of my mother who was old and sick at the time, and they really helped us. It's one of my favorite organizations. I made United Way contributions for about twenty years and never thought I'd see it from the other side. But this particular organization really helped us and that's why I would want to work with them.

Each one of us at a given point in time will have an opportunity to make a difference in somebody else's life. So we have to be careful. What goes around comes around. People watch people. The more we do positive things to make a difference, the more others watch, and they will pick up the habit. For every action, there is an equal reaction.

Most people need just a little push, you know, and then they can and will do something for the community. So I help others in a way that I hope makes me a catalyst and maybe shows someone else how to help others and give a little time to something important.

Knowing that I'm making a difference is what keeps me and most people I know involved. There's not enough love going around. I stay and keep at it because what I do gives me a genuine feeling of showing love.

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I'm trying to do something to help these little boys. Most of their fathers aren't around or involved, only the mothers. When the mothers and grandmothers can't bring them to practice, I go to pick them up.

When only one black person works in an organization, especially in an elevated position or with higher levels of knowledge, it is their responsibility to transmit that knowledge down the line.

### **NEVER FORGET**

We have no intentions of forgetting our ancestry. And because we remember, it does not mean that we are holding onto prejudices and hatreds. It's just a fact. Sometimes whites are more comfortable if you just act like it never happened.

We can remember the facts. We were slaves. There was prejudice. There is prejudice. Prejudice has not evaporated. It is not gone. But we can still work positively in concert and harmony with people to help. But don't expect us to forget and don't approach us as if the past didn't happen.

### **THE CHILDREN**

I love children, and I see so many minds going to waste. We don't have enough adult leadership. It seems like there's not enough of the right kind of guidance for our young people.

I'm talking about addressing the drop-out rate among young male students. Academic enrichment programs could guide them through high school and hopefully into college.

Young people know that others need help and that kids can help, black kids can help. I want an organization I work with to know that we work together, that we have a responsibility to do the best we can, and that we can work as a team.



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That's why I am volunteering for the church—so that I can teach what God has taught me and passed onto me for others. I can tell you and you pass it on and then I can sit down.

### **NOT TREATED AS AN OUTSIDER**

I was very young and in an organization with people who were probably the age I am now. And I felt uncomfortable in the group. I was young and single and felt uncomfortable so I left the group.

Unless you can quickly establish yourself as part of the group—you get tired of being treated like an outsider. You can sometimes feel like you're not appreciated.

Groups can be very cliquish. My friend and I joined a local chapter of a well-known national black organization, and lots of the members had been in it for a long time. They never called us for assignments that we had signed up for.

At meetings they spoke in a lot of inside/short-hand language that we didn't understand or relate to. We paid our dues and everything. They would sit there saying they needed more new members, but it didn't appear they were really ready or willing to accept outsiders and newcomers. Then they would send tickets in the mail and expect us to sell them for fundraisers on behalf of the group. I just sent mine back and respectfully resigned from the group. I truly believed in the cause, but never was welcomed into the group.

*Facilitated by Vicki Clark  
Memphis, Tennessee*

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### **WHAT WE HEARD IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FOCUS GROUP**

#### *Guidance for voluntary organizations*

Participants spoke about "helping others," "loving others," "community service," and "giving back," rather than "volunteering." Spirituality is integral to this activity—the spirituality of the individuals and the spiritual aspects of the cause

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or organization. People's motivations and the nature of the work are sometimes described in religious terms.

Group members spoke eloquently about different ways to fully engage African Americans in community work. In recruiting volunteers, for instance, it is important to talk about the ways in which the work of African Americans make a difference to the cause, organization, or project. If volunteers see their own interests, concerns, and skills reflected in a volunteer opportunity, it encourages them to be more holistically involved and fully engaged. African Americans involved with a cause or an organization want to share the life experience and expertise that they have to offer. African American males are especially valued as mentors and role models. African American youth are often interested in helping an organization, especially if offered opportunities to work together in a group.

Participants in the focus group want to be recognized for the skills and experience they have, and at the same time, they don't want to be approached as if they have only one contribution to make. They are often eager to be engaged in additional tasks and to work with various aspects of an organization. African Americans must begin to play leadership roles in the causes that engage them.

Seeing clear and meaningful outcomes of the work matters. Both current and former volunteers need to be kept up to date on the progress of the work—on the cause, the movement toward mission, and the outcomes of projects.

African Americans, like all people, want the respect of being introduced and welcomed by name. "Insider" language alienates newcomers. Acronyms are off-putting and must be explained. Beyond this, participants expressed a strong desire to work with organizations that recognize and respect the pride and hopefulness of African Americans in their culture and for their future.

Organizations that want to involve African Americans to work on specific issues that affect the African American community should institute a regular practice of engaging in an open exchange and dialogue about the African

# AFRICAN AMERICANS

## A CHORUS OF VOICES

American experience. We all need to be more conversant with the history of slavery and the civil rights movement in the United States as well as with issues of race in education, health, housing, and criminal justice today. Participants strongly encouraged other community groups to work with African American organizations to promote economic opportunity, health, equity in education, affordable housing, and criminal justice.



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*We learn as Indians all the time that things can be taken away, just like that....We're just a step away from that chicken coop our relations had to live in because they couldn't own a house, even if they had the money.*

...

*If you've gotten an education or you've gotten a skill, I think you have an obligation—a moral obligation—to try and rectify what's been done to our people.*

...

*Participating and being involved in tribal customs and culture and being involved in the community—that's citizenship. Membership is just your name on an enrollment card; it doesn't mean anything.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Hope for American Indian youth is a golden thread running through giving and volunteering in the American Indian community. The American Indian community is committed to and concerned about the development of opportunity for youth, viewing Indian youth as the future, with extraordinary opportunities that earlier generations never possessed. In 2005, there were 2.8 million American Indians and Alaska Natives, representing one percent of the United States population. Of that number, there were nearly 840,000 youth under eighteen, or fully 30 percent of the American Indian/Alaska Native population.

Elders caution that young people must proceed with care and never forget the injustices of the past, a reminder that privileges enjoyed today can be taken away tomorrow. They view the violence and poverty within reservations and other American Indian communities today as the result of the violence committed against American Indians historically.

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### FOCUS GROUP

The voice speaking in the following story is that of a fictitious elderly Indian woman talking to a Native teenager about her experiences helping others. The voices and wisdom of the actual American Indian focus group participants are woven throughout the narrative.

### A LIFELONG ACTIVITY

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#### JUST EXPECTED TO HELP

I used to go help this old lady that lived by herself and I'd clean her house, and get her wood for her. That was kind of a big deal because all of the kids were scared of her because they thought that she was like an old witch.

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But I'd go down there and look through her house about twice a week. I'd just go by the door and then go in there and sweep really fast and do everything I could really, really fast. After a while, I got to know her and she was just really nice. So I don't know where you kids get these ideas sometimes. Especially old people, ya know, gettin' these ideas that old people are kinda scary sometimes. I think I must have been about five years younger than you—I was just eleven, twelve or eleven.

### **YOU DON'T SAY NO**

Helping elderly people has always been something that was kinda taught to me from before I was your age. My friends and I, we'd have to follow the old folks around and whatever they needed done, we'd do for them. Back then helping others out wasn't really something we talked about. When somebody needed help, you were just expected to help. You just did things when they needed to be done, you didn't ask and you didn't say no. Throughout my life, I've always liked hanging out with old people because of that—I like to listen to their stories.

I can remember when my sisters and I were in our twenties and we moved into the city. We had to find a place for ourselves in new surroundings. My sisters got involved in a lot of church events like taking the homeless kids out on Halloween to go trick-or-treating and tutoring kids after school. I really liked helping out handicapped youth—I even got high school credits for it.

It felt pretty good to do that stuff because, ya know, at that time, I was a teenager and just really lost. It kind of, like, gave me something to say. It made me proud of myself because I didn't think that I had really done that much to be proud of up to then. It also helped me figure out what I wanted to do in life. As we continued to go to school, my siblings and I, we all just separated out—different cities, different careers.



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### **CHOICES**

#### **BRINGING OUR SKILLS BACK TO THE COMMUNITY**

I went on and got a law degree, some years ago now, but when I first got out I just went out there and started seeing what all I could do for Native folks. Like a lot of other people, I offered what I was good at—my legal skills—for free. There were so few of us out there with degrees working in the Indian community that I ended up sitting on, like, five different Indian organizations' boards of directors. We really benefited from getting involved and developed strong networks of Native people across the country that were interested in the same issues.

#### **SEEING DIRECT IMPACT AND PROGRESSIVE CHANGE**

Things were pretty crazy back then and I can remember feeling overwhelmed at times. Some people I worked with on the boards got burnt out and stopped doing community work. It just took up too much of their time, and most of them were already working hard at their jobs. What really kept me going was seeing progressive change in whatever it was that I was doing.

#### **STARTING TO SAY NO**

I don't care to participate where I don't see change happening. That's why a lot of us ended up having to become more selective about who we were giving our time to. Some started to say "no" to organizations that wanted our help.

Most Indians I've ever known that work for non-Native groups usually end up bringing their skills back to the community at some point. Really it just seems like they go and work for non-Indians or go into colleges to gain knowledge and experience and bring it back to better Native communities. And there are so many Native organizations that need help, that's always where my focus is.

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I'm sure there are some folks who don't do that, though. I meet them every once and again, but for the most part, we've been in the habit of concerning ourselves with our community's needs. On a smaller scale, I think you have more of an impact. My own community is what I was raised to be concerned with.

### **WHO'S WHO AND WHAT'S WHAT**

When I was your age, I tried to volunteer to read to people at this blind center near my house. I had thought it would be neat because, ya know, if I was blind, I would want someone to read to me. At that time I thought if I didn't do it, who would? And I didn't want the folks there thinking that nobody cared about them. But the people at the center I talked to, they just kind of pushed me off to the side, I don't know what it was, but they didn't take me seriously. Maybe I didn't look professional enough or something. They were just really cold about it and it turned me away from looking to help out organizations where I didn't know anyone—where I didn't have friends working.

### **EDUCATING OTHERS ABOUT WHO WE ARE AND WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO US**

A few years ago I started helping out some non-Indian organizations because friends were doing it and said they were doing worthwhile things. One organization wanted folks to go around and do cultural sensitivity training regarding Natives. It's actually really important work and a lot of Indians out there would get involved in something like that—educating other people about who we are and what we're all about, what's important to us.

### **PARTICIPATING: ONE PERSON, COLLECTIVE SPIRIT**

Ya know, like a lot of folks, I've also spent some time volunteering for events—usually those one-day types—where I can help out and contribute to a larger cause. I really like organizing Natives to participate in larger events like the AIDS Walk and the Million Mom March. I get energy from participating with all those people and you can really feel a kind of collective spirit—having

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a common goal in mind. For a really large issue, you are only one person and don't really make much difference. But when everybody comes together and works on a collective goal then it really can have an impact. And it's important to show a Native presence on issues that impact us a lot, like violence or gun control or AIDS.

### **HELPING ORGANIZATIONS SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES**

I started giving money to Habitat for Humanity when I found out that they were helping build homes on some of the poorest reservations. That was important to me. They were helping us out, but not trying to take over. There's a delicate balance between working with Indians to accomplish something and trying to do something for us. In order for me to become actively involved in non-Indian organizations, they need to be increasing their services to our communities.

We need our youth to continue investing time and energy back into the community. We've all seen what can happen when non-Indians come in and try to "fix" or deal with our issues, they just mess things up and don't understand what's really going on. We need people to stick around and almost, like, stand guard so those folks can't come in and take over.

I have different expectations for larger, non-Indian organizations, different expectations in terms of how I want to be treated as a volunteer, in terms of what my expectations are for the outcome of the volunteer effort. The smaller the organization or group, the less I expect back from them. And if any organization—Native or non-Native—doesn't make good use of me when I'm giving my time, then there's no purpose for me to be there. Unless it is something that I really am personally connected to, there are plenty of other people who can volunteer for the big organizations. There's not that many who volunteer with the Native organizations.

And if an organization just wants you to diversify their volunteers, then don't work with them, ya know. If an organization wants me to participate because they want to understand various cultural aspects of an Indian



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community so they can work with and better serve that community, then I'll eagerly participate. We can help educate others by being a liaison or providing insight to make sure they don't screw up a community when they want to help. It's important that non-Native organizations do their homework and understand, ya know, what the cultural dynamics are. They should really look at tribal communities as nations, as independent communities, and not as a lump sum of stereotypes.

### **POLARIZING POLITICS**

Something you may run into working in our own communities is organizations where the politics get too thick, ya know. When I was a law student, I can remember that the Native organization on campus had a lot of infighting—both within the students and with the Indian faculty. When sides start to be taken and groups get split up, you'll see that folks won't return to help out anymore. That's because there is no longer an emphasis on having fun or reaching an end goal. Instead, it becomes about personal gain and power-tripping.

I've heard that some Indian organizations get really messed up behind people wanting to be in control, to line their own pockets or give all the jobs to their family members. When you see that you're being manipulated or that the organization you are working with is being manipulated to benefit just a few, then it's time to pull out. Often people have lost sight of the greater good and are giving in to the dynamics of the dominant society. Sometimes it's just a lack of organization and determination on their part. Regardless, another group that impacts a larger population can better utilize your time.

Each tribe is different and has different needs. Some are facing serious issues involving high rates of youth violence. I know this is a direct result of the violence previous generations had to face, from policy decisions like relocation and boarding schools, to the mission system and attempts at genocide. Although we have distinct cultures, we've also had some common experiences as Indians that help to bond our communities together.

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### **NEW INCENTIVES**

#### **BROADENING SENSE OF COMMUNITY**

It seems like many of you children have a broader sense of community than we did growing up. I mean you grew up around a lot of non-Natives in your schools, your neighborhood, and all that. I think that you're probably more into kind of mixing it up than us adults are—especially the older adults. Not that I'm trying to put us into a box or anything, I just think the orientation is a little bit different. And I know you're doing some good work helping those folks out, volunteering. Your mom tells me that you've been tutoring at school and learning about birds and the environment with the Audubon Society.

And I hear your older brother always talking about wanting to build his resume and get some experience under his belt so he can get a better job. That's good. But these days it's, like, glitz and glamour is what often attracts youth to get involved in helping out—monetary incentive, parties, meeting famous people. Some people are concerned about the youth who get gaming money and never really do anything for anybody. And I know some tribes are working to structure incentive programs so that youth don't receive checks from the casino money without having graduated high school or college.

#### **RECIPROCITY AND LEADERSHIP**

But, ya know, there are people who are underrepresented and underserved, and if you've gotten an education or you've gotten a skill, I think you have an obligation—a moral obligation—to try and rectify what's been done to our people. I feel like it's reciprocity within our own communities. It's also about realizing your self-worth and knowing that you are important to our communities. And I've found, much like you will find, that after I got my education I was just expected to take some kind of leadership role. You should have that on your mind as you're going through school. The people before you that have already finished, they've been asked to be what it is that they have skills in. And so will you.

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### **SHOWING APPRECIATION**

#### **RECOGNIZING THE WORK AND THE PEOPLE DOING IT**

In your work, you may see and experience some of the same things I have. There are great things about helping out and there are things that will push you away from it. The work you're doing should make you feel good about the impact you're having, and sometimes you won't even realize how significant you've been until people recognize you. It's not about getting money or being publicly held up on a pedestal—although that's not to say that public recognition isn't nice, too. It's really about being appreciated for the work you and other people are doing.

#### **SPEAKING TO THE HEART**

I've received thank you cards and personal notes that really speak to my heart. When I was in my thirties and stopped volunteering at a day treatment job site for developmentally disabled people, I can remember that people drew a card and made me a cake. That was really meaningful and really gave me incentive to keep on helping others. One of the people I recruited to participate in the AIDS Walk actually started helping out at a medical center with HIV patients afterwards. She told me that one day a patient talked to her about what was going on in her life—with her children and her family, you know, just about how she felt. The lady then left and came back later just to thank her. She gave her a big hug and told her that she had needed someone to listen to her. My friend said that it was just so touching for her to have that experience and to impact someone else.

Sometimes organizations will put on dinners for their volunteers and that's nice because it isn't all about you—it's about the work that's being done and recognizing the people who are doing it. But I've also seen when people forget about how instrumental their volunteers are. One lady I know put on an event and didn't thank the folks who helped out. The next year, no one returned to help out again.



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### **MEETING INSPIRING PEOPLE**

One thing is for sure, you'll meet inspiring people when you help out. When I was in my twenties, there was this one elderly lady who used to always help out whenever someone in the community needed it. She pushed herself. It made me feel proud to say that I knew her because she was very well respected for her hard work. It's almost like she had standing in the community because of how dedicated she was to helping others. I always used to tell myself that if she could run around and do that all the time, then I could, too.

### **A TIME OF PRIVILEGE**

#### **LEARNING THAT THINGS CAN BE TAKEN AWAY**

Many of us have hope for the future. As a Native person, you've been taught to think of the greater good of a group of people, and you're going to want to see what you're doing affect larger populations. You know, I grew up listening to my grandmother telling me stories about her struggles and my father's struggles. I really didn't struggle so much as I learned from them. And as hard as our lives may have been, they're nowhere near as difficult as the people who have come before us. That is a message that needs to be passed down to you and to your children to come: easy come, easy go.

We learn as Indians all the time that things can be taken away, just like that. It could happen overnight. That's absolutely something that no one should forget, that we're just a step away from that chicken coop our relations had to live in because they couldn't own a house, even if they had the money. I would also like to impress upon you that our future—your future—is not safe. Even though you haven't had to struggle, that doesn't mean that you are not going to.

#### **BUILDING BACK COMPASSION**

As much as we've seen racism, we have not seen it the way our ancestors have seen it. We didn't have to live through the 1800s and early 1900s when people were just butchering Indians, and many of our people had to go

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underground. I mean, we can stand up and say who we are. It is such a point of privilege. People literally died for us to be in the positions that we're in and if we don't give back, then we are all guilty of participating in their suffering.

There are so many opportunities for young folks like you to make a difference, and it's really enjoyable to help out. It fulfills something in you and gives you experience. Your uncle is looking into starting up an organization where Native youth can learn how to use technology, like video recording and sound equipment, to learn how to tell their stories—to give us more mouthpieces out there in the world. And some of his friends might expand the youth program at the Indian center so teenagers can help take care of animals at the local shelter. That way we can help build back some of the compassion that seems to be fading away.

### **PARTICIPATING IN THE GREATER GOOD**

What does it mean to you to be a member of a tribe? What does it mean to be a citizen of a tribe? Some of us have been talking about that and talking about citizenship over membership. Participating and being involved in tribal customs and culture and being involved in the community—that's citizenship. Membership is just your name on an enrollment card; it doesn't mean anything. We need to move in the direction of citizenship and strengthening our communities because otherwise I think we are very slowly moving away from it as Indian people.

Remember, you can't be a complete person unless you are participating in the greater good. The world doesn't revolve around you—you are a part of it and so you have to contribute to making it an even better place, ya know? Or you're going to participate in making it a worse place. So which side do you want to choose? I've shared with you some of my stories. Now go out there and make your own.

*Facilitated by Kouslaa Kessler-Mata  
(Chumash and Yokut)  
Oakland, California*

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### WHAT WE HEARD IN THE AMERICAN INDIAN FOCUS GROUP

#### *Guidance for voluntary organizations*

Focus group participants talked about the importance of bringing their skills back to the Native community, cultivating leadership, and emphasizing the collective good. Many American Indians are involved in a variety of efforts, from large, one-time events such as building homes for Habitat for Humanity and the AIDS Walk, to more focused efforts within the Native community, such as offering free legal skills and creating national networks.

American Indians in the focus group spoke of wanting to be involved in organizations that are appreciative of the American Indian experience and of the issues that are important to specific tribal communities and nations. The general public tends to be misinformed about the diverse experiences of American Indians. Community-based organizations have an opportunity to educate, and people in volunteer leadership positions will attract American Indian volunteers if they take responsibility for educating others both within the organization and more broadly among the constituencies it serves.

Participants expressed their willingness to educate non-Indians about Indian culture and are often eager to act as liaisons between their communities and the places they invest their volunteer time. This offer is an opportunity for organizations to learn about American Indian history and tribal struggles for independence and self-governance and to apply that knowledge in working with the American Indian community. Tribal leaders can be invited to speak about their particular life experience or about how their experience is relevant to an organization's cause.

In addition to bringing American Indian concerns to other fields, focus group participants encourage other groups to join with them in advocating for American Indian rights, customs, and law. They suggest that organizations expand the focus of their own work to include concerns of the American Indian community, such as access to college education or American Indian sovereignty. This involvement would be especially desirable within specific industries, such as health or arts and culture.



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American Indians want to see that their volunteer work makes a significant impact on the community being served, and they want clear goals and expectations for their volunteer commitment. They want to know that their efforts have a positive impact on American Indian communities, particularly on youth and future generations. Having clear expectations is especially helpful in developing young future leaders through their volunteering.

Focus group participants expressed a preference for working in small organizations where there is a sense of accountability to the community and where a volunteer's voice can be heard.

For organizations that want to involve American Indians, good listening skills are critical. Organizations should seek advice on how the work can be improved and should listen to the feedback. American Indian communities do not want to be told what will be done and do not want organizations just going into their communities to "fix a problem."

There is a strong ethic of participating in the greater good, and American Indians are attracted to collective efforts to support a common cause. Many work with several organizations, and it is important to recognize that they may be stretched very thin. Individually thanking volunteers and recognizing individual effort—through notes or cards, for example—are important. Gatherings such as dinners and parties are helpful forms of appreciation for the collective group of volunteers.

# CENTRAL AMERICANS

## YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE



### *UNO RECIBE LO QUE UNO DA*

*In Nicaragua helping other people was either a family affair or a church activity, “o las dos juntas” (or both together). We used to collect food, take it to hospitals, and entertain the people that needed to stay over.*

...

*What I like most about helping other people is seeing the glow in their faces when they realize they’ve been helped without anything expected in return.*

...

*We want people to know that in all we do, we are connecting people—from home, from here, from family to friends, from what is to what we can make it. I want my children to grow up being proud to be Latinos.*

# CENTRAL AMERICANS

## YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE



### INTRODUCTION

Central Americans come from Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. Their cultures are rich and varied. Acknowledging these differences, participants expressed similar themes for why they give and what giving means to them.

Central Americans prioritize the welfare of their families by providing basic needs for their families first. Many Central Americans have experienced hardship upon coming to the United States and have left their home countries fleeing political instability, civil war, poverty and natural disasters. Significant legal and illegal immigration to the United States began in the 1980s when civil wars in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala along with already weak economies created an exodus to the United States. Other periods of increased immigration have followed natural disasters, such as Hurricane Mitch in 1998, two earthquakes in El Salvador in 2001, and Hurricane Stan in 2005.

Focus group participants shared that upon coming to the United States, they and their families struggled to find a job and a place to live. Some participants received the support of other family members and friends in the United States who helped them establish themselves. Weathering the acculturation experience enables Central Americans to reach out to more recent immigrants and also to send money home to family members still in their home countries.

In 2004, there were 2.9 million Central Americans in the United States, representing 7 percent of all Hispanics. Over 70 percent of the Central American foreign born lived in five states according to Census 2000. California was home to 36 percent, Florida to 12 percent, New York to 10 percent, Texas to 9 percent, and New Jersey to 4 percent<sup>(4)</sup> The Central American foreign born compose at least 10 percent of the foreign-born populations of the District of Columbia, Virginia, and Maryland. Many Central Americans continue to speak their native language—over three-



# CENTRAL AMERICANS

## YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE

fourths of Hispanics speak a language other than English at home. Still, among Hispanics, 37 percent of Central Americans speak English “very well” (Census 2004).

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### FOCUS GROUP

Central Americans in the focus group spoke of the importance of reciprocity and a worthwhile exchange, meeting basic needs, spiritual and personal connections, social change, family and church, and cultural pride. The following report retains the individual stories of group members, although the names assigned are fictitious.

### ALVARO

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#### FAMILY FIRST

When I came to the United States I knew that I needed to do a few things fast: find a place to live and a job or two and send money to my family back home. At that time I didn't even think of the need to learn English. That challenge just introduced itself and would not go away.

My brother Alberto—who came here before me—introduced me to a friend who gave me a job. He also paid for a room I was sharing with a guy from Honduras who used to tell stories of how people would automatically think he was Mexican.

Listening to his stories I decided that the first thing I would tell people when introduced was that I was from Nicaragua. It still amazes me how fast people forget where I come from.

#### SEVEN COUNTRIES IN CENTRAL AMERICA

For some reason people remember me as Central American. That makes me doubt that people know there are seven countries in Central America. For me, being called Mexican is still as odd as calling someone

# CENTRAL AMERICANS

## YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE

from Texas a Canadian because he was born in North America and speaks the same language.

### **SEEING A BASIC NEED AND STEPPING IN TO MEET IT**

I met my friend Raul, who arrived eighteen months earlier, here. He helped me and other people in the building where we lived, translating and filling out the job applications we were handing in. Not that he had it made yet, but I think he felt that at least he had a secure job and that he had to help people who needed help.

Family we just know we have to help, but I didn't know Raul until I came here. I wish I could help people I don't know, but I need to make money now.

### **RAUL**

### **LANGUAGE AND OTHER BARRIERS**

I started translating and filling out job applications for other Latinos in the building because the need was there and I didn't know of any organization doing that kind of work. I like to help people who otherwise won't be helped.

Probably most people who have to leave Central America feel like me and my family at some point: needing help for something it was hard to see coming. We can laugh about it now, but we also remember how painful it was.

It is important to me that I can see the results of my work because what I like most about helping other people is seeing the glow in their faces when they realize they've been helped without anything expected in return.

### **YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE**

Helping other people is a beautiful principle to live by, but it is not always easy. Helping other Latinos makes me feel part of the community. Most of those I helped at that time became friends.

# CENTRAL AMERICANS

## YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE

Alvaro says *Uno recibe lo que uno da* (you get what you give). I know that someone will be there if I need help.

I'm lucky that I speak more English than other people, but still, learning a new language has been one of the biggest challenges. Not only the pronunciation of words forever challenge you if you come to this country as an adult, but also the different meanings attached to words are a challenge. Not to talk about the change of attitude in some people when they notice your accent. They seem to think that an accent tells of your intellectual capacity. Muscle control—that is what it is.

In the United States, not speaking the language well or at all or not having someone to translate (like your own kids) decides a lot for many immigrants. Where you go, who you meet, what kind of jobs you can get. That is why I decided to go to the community center to learn more English.

### **RELEARNING TO BE LATINA**

At the community center I met Angelina, a Salvadoran woman who seemed to be on an opposite journey. While I was trying to learn more about this country, the culture and the language, she was glad to have a chance to meet someone from Central America and to speak Spanish. Angelina told me she was taught to disconnect from her culture in order to learn things faster and become more American. She told me how at one moment she hated being Latina. She did not feel embraced by that culture either. Welcome back.

Angelina also told me she works with community organizations that address women and youth issues. She said that she liked to work with groups that address practical issues in the community. She explained how the gang issue was a problem in the community that needed to be addressed because it was keeping Latinos apart from each other.



# CENTRAL AMERICANS

## YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE

### **ANGELINA**

#### **CLOSER TO SMALL ORGANIZATIONS**

I like working in small organizations because it feels that they are closer to me. And I don't mean it only in a geographical sense. I want to see the results of my work and know that it is going to someone who needs it.

It is also important to me that the organization I work with is accountable to the community and allows active participation in the decision making. At least I want to have a voice. I know that some of the big organizations help people in need also, but I would feel unimportant. Not recognized. Left out. Sometimes I think there is corruption in the big organizations.

I started helping in local organizations because of my career counselor at college. She made me realize the different options I had to help the community while I gained experience and met some people.

#### **A WORTHWHILE EXCHANGE**

Talking with Raul I realize my idea of volunteering includes gaining something in return, like experience, knowing other people, or getting class credit. Raul's idea behind helping other people is to not expect something in return. He said that volunteering for class credit may have a different name in Honduras.

I think he didn't contemplate the possibility of seeing this as an exchange that doesn't involve money. I think volunteering could help him to learn the new skills he needs and also to meet other people. Still, at the other end of our different points of view, there are people who need help.

# CENTRAL AMERICANS

## YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE

### **JOSÉ MARIA**

#### **A SPIRITUAL CONNECTION**

Why do I help? My reason for helping is spiritual. It comes from what I learned from my parents, my family, my friends—this is what makes your life meaningful.

#### **CONNECTING PERSONALLY**

I don't work with an organization right now, but I did before. I feel more comfortable working in small organizations because they are closer to where the need is. I like to meet people interested in knowing me as a person, learning about my country, my town, my family.

I have been in the United States forever. My immediate family is all here, but I still have family back in Guatemala. Sometimes we get together to help our family and friends back home. Right now we are helping one of our cousins to go to school.

Universities are less accessible there, so we help him out with money. Here in the States I help a friend who has AIDS. I make sure he gets what he needs—that he gets access to food and health care and knows that someone is there for him.

### **JAVIER**

#### **SOCIAL CHANGE**

I want to work with Latinos only, on issues that affect Latinos, like immigration and inequality. I want to work in organizations that are attempting to change the social system. I believe that you cannot talk about helping people without talking about politics, without changing the system.

I just signed up to help with an organization that addresses the immigration problems of Central Americans. They have been working in the Latino community for a long time. They were there for the huge numbers of

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Central Americans that had to leave their countries because of the political situation. I like the fact that they help individuals and also advocate for change in policies. Besides, what Latino born outside the United States doesn't have an immigration question that needs to be answered?

I also hope that working there will help me make new friends because I just moved here from the East Coast. There I helped out at a community organizing school, in exchange for which I took classes for free.

### **ALEJANDRA**

#### **FAMILY, CHURCH, OR BOTH**

I was born here, but my family is from Nicaragua, so I'm Nicaraguan. My family went back to live there when I was a teenager. In Nicaragua helping other people was either a family affair or a church activity, "*o las dos juntas*" (or both together). We used to collect food, take it to hospitals, and entertain the people that needed to stay over.

#### **AN EXTENSION OF MY JOB**

Here in the United States I keep in touch with the Latino community through my job. I work in education. I volunteer in the community but I see my volunteering as an extension of my job. I help by doing the things that need to be done but are not included in my job.

Sometimes it is hard to tell where my job ends and my volunteering starts. I help Latinos by advocating for family involvement in education, providing information on organizations working in the community, translating whatever is needed.

#### **RAISING PROUD LATINO CHILDREN**

I just know that by involving Latino families, students and the community have better chances to succeed. For Latinos, things work better when we get the family involved. I'm working on an idea to involve my



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family in a project that would allow us to help improve the quality of life of our community.

We would teach other people about our culture, about our relationships. We want people to know that in all we do, we are connecting people—from home, from here, from family to friends, from what is to what we can make it. I want my children to grow up being proud to be Latinos.

*Facilitated by Coco Mendoza  
Translated by Gary Wheelock  
San Francisco, California*

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### WHAT WE HEARD IN THE CENTRAL AMERICAN FOCUS GROUP

#### *Guidance for voluntary organizations*

Participants in this focus group want to know that their voluntary effort clearly benefits the Central American community and they want to see that the work done has a clear impact on the people served. They often distrust large organizations and are particularly wary of corruption. In contrast, small organizations, accountable to a specific community, are attractive.

In addition to being interested in the impact an organization has on their communities, Central Americans want to see what benefits they themselves might gain from volunteering, such as gaining new skills, gathering work experience, meeting new people, or receiving school credit.

Focus group participants want to volunteer for organizations that know about the seven different Central American countries and their histories. As volunteers, they would like to be invited to share information about their own backgrounds with others involved in the work. They want the chance to tell about the unique culture and traditions of Central American countries. For example, a segment of a board meeting can be devoted to the significance of a particular holiday or custom. This type of exchange can be widely available, and everyone in the work can be encouraged to attend holiday celebrations and special cultural events in Central American communities. This will develop cultural knowledge and competency.

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Immigration is a particular challenge for Central Americans. The newcomer experience can be demanding and painful. The first concerns of new immigrants are basic needs—housing, jobs, and money for family back home. Their focus is on their families first, before other voluntary efforts.

Central Americans who have been in the United States for only a short time understand what new immigrants face, and it is common for them to begin helping newer immigrants by translating, helping to fill in forms, and helping to find jobs. Organizations can draw on these specific skills by offering opportunities to translate, work with families, and mentor youngsters. Focus group participants encouraged all community-based organizations to consider working with groups dedicated to advocating for the rights and needs of new immigrants.

Participants in this focus group talked of the importance of opportunities that help make personal connections for themselves and for others, connections among people from the home country, among family and friends, and between newcomers and established residents. They also spoke of the special concerns of Central American communities about education, access to health care, youth violence, and improving quality of life.

## CHINESE AMERICANS EXTENDING THE FAMILY



*I don't think in Chinese, at least in Cantonese, there is a word for volunteering. It is expected that you help with your family. Generations of immigrants helped their relatives come over, helped them get a job, helped them translate and stuff. And that is volunteering, but we just don't call it that.*

...

*I've always wanted to go work at a soup kitchen at Thanksgiving or Christmas. I've yet to do it because I know my mom would not understand it. "Why would you rather spend time with these strangers than with your own family?"*

...

*Chinese people I know are very practical. So parents will say, "Well, since you are not old enough to get a job that pays, why don't you do volunteer work?" And at some point, "Now that you have enough volunteer experience, you can get a job because you have some experience."*



# CHINESE AMERICANS

## EXTENDING THE FAMILY



### INTRODUCTION

The Chinese American community is the largest ethnic group of Asian Americans in the United States, consisting of 22.4 percent of the Asian American population. It constitutes 1.2 percent of the United States as a whole. In 2006, the Chinese American population numbered approximately 3.6 million. Cantonese, historically the language of most Chinese immigrants, is the third most widely spoken non-English language in the United States.

Three metropolitan areas have the largest Chinese American populations: Greater New York at about 666,000 people, San Jose-San Francisco-Oakland at about 562,000 people, and Greater Los Angeles at about 495,000 people. New York City is home to the highest Chinese American population of any city proper (about 446,700), while the city of Monterey Park, California in Los Angeles County has the highest percentage of Chinese Americans of any municipality at 43.7 percent of its population. San Francisco's Chinatown was established in the 1840s, making it the oldest Chinatown in North America and the largest neighborhood of Chinese people outside of Asia.

Chinese Americans, gathered in a youth agency in San Francisco's historic Chinatown district, discussed the origins of volunteering in the Chinese community. In Cantonese, the closest phrase for volunteering is *mou*, and in Mandarin, *yi wu*. It is defined as 1) attend to, strive after, to be engaged in, endeavor, work, strive, make effort; 2) duty, business; and 3) necessary.<sup>(5)</sup>

Without an exact Chinese translation, the word and the act of volunteering is fluid and expansive.<sup>(6)</sup> As in most immigrant and multigenerational cultures, helping begins within the family and is expected. Family members assist each other in meeting day to day needs, such as caring for elders and children, providing written

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and oral translation, and other tasks that help family members better navigate American culture.

Helping family first was critical during immigration to the United States. The Chinese often emigrated in self-help groups from the same village, often with the same surname. Most had to borrow money for their passage and were required to pay the debt here in the United States.<sup>(7)</sup> The first major wave of Chinese immigrants came to the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century. They labored as panhandlers in the California Gold Rush and went on to work in the wool mills, in garment and shoe factories, and ultimately built the Transcontinental Railroad.<sup>(8)</sup> Their endurance laid the groundwork for the Chinese American networks that exist today.

This notion of helping family on an institutional level began in 1849 with the formation of the first Chinese family associations. Each association was named after a particular surname and their function was largely to help support members from their home village by helping recent immigrants secure housing and employment, and acting as a network for other Chinese immigrants to gain a foothold in American society. Today, many family associations still provide resources, such as education scholarships and social gathering places for family members. The ways that Chinese Americans have contributed their time and talent without pay to help others in the larger community continues to reflect the Chinese commitment to the extended family or village—the older generation along with young or future generations. The family continues to expand as participants welcome other members into the larger fabric of their extended families. Participants shared a passion for a variety of causes, such as mentoring youth, aiding seniors in hospices, and, of course, helping their families. In addition, a strong theme that resonated within the group was the idea that, through community service, every person has the opportunity to develop.

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### FOCUS GROUP

Within common themes, nuances guided the community involvement of each focus group participant and the personal benefit that each one gained.

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### **SOME ASSISTED CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

I used to teach music diversity classes. I did it voluntarily. I basically taught about the different Chinese instruments. I did that for a year. It was very rewarding. But if anyone here has done outreach you know what it means to pack up your car with a trunk full of instruments and then truck them into the classroom for an hour or half an hour and then to teach after preparation. The teaching was the fun part.

### **SOME HELPED IMMIGRANTS AND FAMILIES**

For several years, I volunteered with an Asian domestic violence organization. It was in New York City. It was the only multilingual hotline, so we got lots of calls from immigrant women and helped many immigrant families.

### **SOME HELPED SENIORS IN HOSPICES**

I guess the highlight of when I have donated time and not asked for money was several years ago when I worked as a hospice volunteer. That was a year commitment. So you do five hours every week going to the home—a center where people actually stay. You cook breakfast for them, or just spend time with them, do laundry sometimes. It was interesting and one of the most rewarding things for me.

### **SOME JOINED IN EVENTS AND DRIVES AND HELPED TO BUILD RESOURCES AND ORGANIZATIONS**

I was working in the high tech sector and always wanted to get into community service. Because I wasn't actually working in community service, I felt I really wanted to volunteer a lot. So I was on my corporation's Volunteer Advisory Board, I tutored three times a week, and I signed up for every single event we held—either a walk, run, or drive. I was always involved.



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### **OTHERS DID NOT HAVE THE TIME TO VOLUNTEER**

In order to have time to volunteer you have to have the money to have the time. With most people supporting two or three kids, they're so busy just trying to make ends meet, so they just don't have the time.

### **SOME HELPED INFORMALLY WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE FAMILY**

I helped my Mom. She was widowed in 1989. I think most of us help our parents in some ways. Paying the bills, translating the forms for those of us working with immigrant parents. We do a lot of that. It's just something you do. It's part of your family duty.

I decided to go to City College and learn Mandarin. During those classes I met more students who were having all sorts of problems. People who were busboys in restaurants who needed translated immigration forms. One lady was getting a divorce from her husband—didn't know how to fill out the papers, didn't know where the courts were. So I helped them with that in exchange for help with pronunciation with my Mandarin. It was very rewarding. I still know these people. I keep in touch with them.

### **SOME COULD MIX BUSINESS WITH VOLUNTEERING**

I have been fortunate enough that my jobs for quite awhile have afforded me the opportunity. It was actually a requirement when I was doing public relations for a hotel. I worked for almost ten years as a public relations manager for a hotel that borders the Tenderloin. So as part of my job I was required to do outreach on behalf of the hotel. But it got me, on my own time, to do a lot more.

For almost ten years I did a lot of volunteering, mostly for children in the Tenderloin because it is such a huge family area. Now as public affairs manager I am the community relations contact for my company. We worked with San Francisco's Promise. We were a sponsor. Our company pays us. We get a certain number of paid hours to be able to do community service on our own. They are a very forward-looking company.

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### **WANTING TO MENTOR YOUTH CAN ALSO BE AN IMPORTANT MOTIVATION FOR VOLUNTEERING. IN RESPONSE TO A YOUNG MAN SHARING...**

Right now I am actually volunteering here at the Chinatown Beacon Center once a week with the Middle School Boy's Club. Basically it's an after-school program. We do various activities—from going on field trips, to hopefully, but not yet, having deep discussions on whatever they want to talk about.

### **...CAME THIS RESPONSE:**

I have to applaud you for doing that because young men in Chinatown really need mentorship and we don't have enough young men mentors.

### **THE IDEAL VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE**

During the course of the evening's discussion, elements of the ideal volunteer experience emerged from among a diversity of shared experiences. Through their combined descriptions, the following image emerged.

### **FINDING THE RIGHT OPPORTUNITY**

The first challenge is finding the right opportunity. With all the different organizations with different expectations, it can be hard to find the right match with what I want. After work at night, it is often more tempting to just rest than to make the effort of trying to find what to do.

The ideal volunteer organization is one where I like what it is doing; I like the people there, and the expectations and assignment coincide with what I can do and want to do.

The ideal organization respects what it means for me to take time from my busy schedule. It is organized and ready when I arrive. It does not give me something I specifically did not ask for. It keeps within the clear limits and boundaries for which I was recruited.

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It's nice sometimes to just go somewhere and somebody tells you exactly what they need done and they explain how you can be useful. You do that and you're useful.

The ideal organization does not make me an actor in a monster movie where the more I do, the more it asks, until I am put into the uncomfortable, guilt-inducing position of having to say no. Then I become afraid of ever getting involved at all.

### **HOW AM I MAKING A DIFFERENCE?**

I need to know that what I am doing is making a difference. For example, if I raise funds, I want to know how the money was useful. Specifically what was it spent on and what were the results? I used to tutor. I want to know that the student's grade went from a D to a C+. It must be specific and something I can relate to.

I usually prefer helping small organizations because I feel more involved and that I am doing more. With large organizations, I sometimes feel like a little piece in a really big machine. I prefer helping them with specific drives or events—concerted efforts with specific goals, where I feel we are really doing something.

### **DEVELOPMENT, DEVELOPMENT, DEVELOPMENT**

Development is important. If I am going to commit a year or more, I want to gain in knowledge, skills, and experience. Good relationships are not sufficient, since people come and go and I can have relationships outside of volunteering. I want to feel that I am growing and learning new things.

The service beneficiaries need to be developing too. I need to see real change being made. People are changing or situations are changing because of what I have done directly or indirectly. That motivates me to keep going.

Development needs to be not only with the client base, but also with the staff, programs, organization, board, fundraising, and operations. Why



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should I give something so precious as my own time if I'm going to a place where I don't know if I like how they are managing the program or how the board is involved in fundraising?

### **LEADERSHIP**

Leadership of the organization is important. How are funds used? How am I used? Being appreciated by the organization and by individuals makes a difference because results sometimes take time. I care about relationships. If the leader is doing ten times more than I am, how can I not do it? But if they are disorganized, not knowing what they are doing, not seeing concrete changes, not caring about me, then it is easy to say I give up too.

I really need to believe in the people that I am participating with. I can only be there a certain number of hours per week or month. I don't want to volunteer for people who do poor quality or shoddy work. It is the people there all the time and who are in charge that are going to make things happen in a successful way that will make me proud.

### **ORIGINS OF VOLUNTEERING IN THE CHINESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY**

Nowhere was the diversity among this Chinese American group more evident than during the insightful and provocative discussion on the concept of volunteering within the Chinese American community. The group discussed many facets of volunteering, such as "volunteering" as a western concept, the centrality of family, religion and spirituality, multigenerational perspectives, and sincere empathy for one another.

### **IT BEGAN WITH A COMMENT FROM AN OLDER WOMAN**

I am wondering if we are planning to discuss, from an historical standpoint, the concept of volunteering in the Chinese American community. How it came about and how it is different from the Western volunteering. Because I remember when I would tell my mother that I want to do

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something, she would say, "Why do you want to help other people? You should be helping your own family!"

### **THIS WAS ECHOED BY A YOUNG WOMAN**

I've always wanted to go work at a soup kitchen at Thanksgiving or Christmas. I've yet to do it because I know my mom would not understand it. "Why would you rather spend time with these strangers than with your own family?" I don't think she really understands the concept of volunteerism and to do something without pay for someone other than your family or your network of friends.

### **WAIT, HOW ARE WE DEFINING VOLUNTEERING? WHAT ABOUT WHAT WE DO FOR OUR FAMILIES?**

I don't think in Chinese, at least in Cantonese, there is a word for volunteering. It is expected that you help with your family. It is doing work without pay. It is part of everyday life. What you are not recognizing is that you volunteer within your family. Generations of immigrants helped their relatives come over, helped them get a job, helped them translate and stuff. And that is volunteering, but we just don't call it that.

### **THAT'S EXPECTED**

It's kind of expected. Within the family, you do it out of love, out of responsibility. It's expected of you. It's not the same.

To give within your family, you have that obligatory feeling that you have to take care of your parents when they are older and all. Whereas volunteering in your community or schools or wherever, to give of yourself beyond just your family, is purely by choice. You can really, without any pangs of guilt at all, say yes or no.

### **IS IT AN AGE OR CULTURE THING?**

Chinese people I know are very practical. So parents will say, "Well, since you are not old enough to get a job that pays, why don't you do volunteer

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work?” And at some point, “Now that you have enough volunteer experience, you can get a job because you have some experience.”

It’s uncommon for a person from an older generation to say, “I want to spend some time volunteering,” because they have responsibilities, such as taking care of their elderly parents or taking care of somebody sick in the family or taking care of a child. Grandparents volunteer their whole day, Monday through Friday, to do daycare! That is such a common scenario in Chinatown.

### **AMERICANIZATION NOT AGE**

I need to dispute that it is generational. It’s not just age generational. I think it has to do with, culturally, how much the Americanizing process [has affected you]. I am third generation on my mother’s side and second generation on my father’s side. They encouraged me all my life to do volunteer work. They went to church and did volunteer work and had me doing it.

### **IS IT A CHRISTIAN THING?**

A lot of the reason I volunteer is karmic. I was taught that because I was raised in a Christian church here in San Francisco. I learned the sayings that you want to treat others how you want to be treated. I certainly say to myself that if I ended up homeless somebody is going to have a generous spirit and will somehow give me a meal when I need it, too. When I choose my causes to volunteer for, they are not ethnic-based at all. They have to do with the community and the feeling I get from it. In some respect they have to do with church.

### **WHAT ABOUT ECONOMICS?**

I don’t think it is a cultural or ethnic thing. Across cultures historically, you can see [the concept of volunteering] never existed before industrialization. You go to Italy or wherever, there were generations under one household. That was about taking care of the family. You were never really homeless. There was always someone to take care of you. I think



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industrialization has brought out the more nuclear family. And the whole idea—the Western notion of volunteerism, giving to charities like in the '30s, soup kitchens, all that— came about because of not being able to depend on the extended family. So I think it is more of an economic situation.

### **OR CULTURAL IN A DIFFERENT SENSE?**

I think it is cultural in the sense that if you were raised in the culture of giving, either within your family or outside your family, your time or money, then it is cultural in that sense. It passes down from generation to generation. Your parents taught you to volunteer just as you will teach your children to volunteer. It's interesting to think that there are a lot of families without a tradition of volunteering. Christian families have a very strong tradition of volunteering because it is part of the religion.

But now the public school system is requiring that seniors can't graduate from high school until they've done forty or fifty hours of volunteer work. And now middle school students as well have to do volunteer work. The idea is how to tap into those students who are not being educated at home about volunteerism. How, in turn, do you teach them to be eager volunteers while initially being forced to because the school requires them?

### **BASIC COMMON DENOMINATOR**

Actually I did not grow up religious at all, but both of my parents have a very strong sense of giving back to the community. I didn't go to the church or the Buddhist temple, which my ancestors were involved in. But somehow, probably through modeling of behavior, probably also from the family unit, I learned empathy for someone else and also about bringing together a community. I think that is what can be passed on. That is a basic common denominator that you can feel for another person. Also we work with a lot of high school youth. At that age of adolescence, you see them developing a consciousness and ability and seeing that they can make a change and a difference in the world. I think aside from family beliefs or religion,

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commitment to social justice or social change can really be something that is passed on.

### **TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL**

You mentioned about being young and having the school system involved. That is how I think my consciousness began with volunteerism. I started volunteering when I was in middle school and it just kind of steamrolled. Trying to find my own interests. You try to find your own identity too outside of your home. It is interesting in terms of human or child development that you do begin to search for your own sense of self and this is one way to find that.

### **ULTIMATELY, IT CAN COME FROM ALL OVER**

It is a complex subject that is inclusive of a lot of things. I told you about my background being mixed. Where I think I got my service orientation was from a variety [of influences]. It was partly from the Asian perspective where your family is most important. It may be out of obligation or it may be out of love and respect, but you always want to help, you always want to do something for others.

Growing up in Hawaii, you move out beyond the nuclear family. Everyone is your ohana, which means family. So you have aunts and uncles who you are not related to and you treat them as family. So you want to help everyone. I also grew up Catholic. So there was that Christian perspective where my Mom was always volunteering at the school or the church or the American Heart Association or the Lung Association. There was that. And I agree with you in terms of school. Even though I had this service orientation from an early age, I think it was in college when there was a real consciousness because of the awareness of the need of society. You want to become more involved and you want to give back. You want to create a difference. I think it's all of these things. It's complex because we are all complex beings. And it can come from all over.

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### IT TAKES A VILLAGE

We close with three Chinese American volunteer reflections. They celebrate the cultural diversity within the Chinese American community. And, they celebrate the commonality among giving people across all the villages of the world.

I was a teacher and we moved to Los Angeles. We moved by accident into a community that had a lot of immigrants from Taiwan. So in the process of tutoring and teaching, I met a lot of parents who didn't speak English, who needed basic survival skills—how to go to the bank, how to go to the store, how to go to teacher conferences, and other things. Many of them became personal friends. It was very rewarding. I was a beneficiary as well as a benefactor.

This goes way back. I was a volunteer for the Asian American Theater Company when it started so many years ago. I guess the reason I bring it up is it shows you how volunteer energy can really make something happen. You start out with a group of people doing something with friends, and you come up with an institution.

I believe that a young person is raised by the community, raised by the village—not just by the parents, not just by one individual. So when I help contribute to that community group within the community, I'm doing my part, whatever that is. And I feel good that hopefully the young person is getting more or less what I've shown them. So it's a feeling of giving back to the community that makes me happy.

*Facilitated by Mae Chao  
San Francisco, California*

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### WHAT WE HEARD IN THE CHINESE AMERICAN FOCUS GROUP

#### *Guidance for voluntary organizations*

Chinese Americans like having the opportunity to give back—to help their communities and to help newer immigrants.



# CHINESE AMERICANS

## EXTENDING THE FAMILY

Focus group participants want to see explicit evidence of the impact of their volunteer work on the particular community or issue being served. Very often they also want illustrations of the impact that a specific cause or mission has on Asians, Chinese, or Chinatown, such as mentoring Asian youth or protesting anti-Asian violence.

Chinese Americans are attracted to volunteer opportunities in projects that particularly reflect Chinese American values, such as intergenerational exchange between the older and younger generations. Also appealing is volunteer work on causes and projects that offer opportunities to work together with friends and family.

Community-based organizations seeking volunteers should help people find opportunities that match their unique skills, such as filmmaking, playing a sport well, speaking another language or dialect, or managing events. Organizations can also highlight opportunities to develop new skills, such as learning or improving one's Chinese language ability. As they recruit volunteers, they should show the practical link between volunteer experiences and acquiring new skills or building a resume.

Chinese Americans interested in volunteering want to be involved in organizations that do work they care about, that show respect to volunteers by being clear and organized about assignments, and that are well managed and follow through on their commitments. As is true for all volunteers, they also want to be acknowledged and thanked for the time and energy they devote to a cause, organization, or project.

Organizations should ask Chinese Americans who currently volunteer to tell their friends about the cause, organization, or project, and about opportunities to be involved. These same volunteers should be asked to suggest ways the program can be improved, and they should be informed about how their suggestions were used.

# JAPANESE AMERICANS

## GIVING GENEROUSLY



*I enjoy helping out the professional and cultural organizations I'm involved with, probably because it's a part of my identity.*

...

*More recently the trip to Cambodia gave me different perspectives on life. I guess the biggest example for me is in Cambodia these kids didn't have clothes or shoes or anything and they're really, really happy.*

...

*One thing I always found is that people who put themselves up to be volunteers are capable of being very empathetic. In other words, they place themselves in the other person's shoes and realize how lucky they are, and they are able to reciprocate.*

# JAPANESE AMERICANS

## GIVING GENEROUSLY



### INTRODUCTION

Japanese Americans have historically been among the three largest Asian American communities in the United States, though in recent decades this population has dropped to sixth place at roughly 1.2 million, including those of mixed-race or mixed-ethnicity.<sup>(9)</sup> Of the six largest Asian groups, Japanese were most likely to report a mixed heritage with one or more other races or Asian groups. Of all respondents who reported as Japanese, either alone or in combination, 31 percent reported one or more other races or Asian groups.<sup>(10)</sup> In the 2000 census, the largest Japanese American communities were in California with about 400,000, Hawaii with 300,000, and to a lesser extent in Washington state with 56,000, New York state with 45,000, and Illinois with 28,000. Each year, about 7,000 new Japanese immigrants enter the United States, making up about 4 percent of immigration from Asia.<sup>(11)</sup>

Japanese American culture emphasizes the importance of the group and of peers. Compared with other (non-Asian) Americans, Japanese Americans have less belief in individual action and more belief in the value of the group.<sup>(12)</sup>

Japanese American culture places particular value on education. Across generations, children are instilled with a strong desire to enter higher education. As a result, 52 percent of native born Japanese Americans completed college compared with less than 30 percent for American whites. The majority of Japanese Americans (52 percent) hold managerial, business-finance or professional occupations, compared to 38 percent of white Americans and 47 percent of Asian Americans as a whole.<sup>(13)</sup>

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# JAPANESE AMERICANS

## GIVING GENEROUSLY

### FOCUS GROUP

On a cold, stormy February evening, a group of Japanese Americans gathered to share their experiences in volunteerism. The group consisted of four college students, five young working professionals in their late twenties through mid thirties, and one older gentleman who experienced the Japanese internment camps during World War II.

As the discussion progressed, it became clear that a tightly-knit, strong network of family, friends, and peers is an essential support system that continuously encourages Japanese American individuals to participate in volunteering activities.

One of the core Japanese values is our strong tie to the family. Throughout the discussion this came up as a major factor encouraging our community involvement. Our parents were the role models to pass this down as a family value.

*My parents have always been a role model for me and all their friends were the same way. Everyone in the community was expected to do that.*

*There was a lot of pressure in my family; my brother does a lot of volunteer work and I kind of feel like it's also expected of me. So sometimes I do it to live up to that.*

*Once you start raising families and your peer groups are doing the same thing, you get kids involved, and you'll begin to see a networking. It becomes a norm to do these things. As soon as you start bringing the kids in, the responsibility and their attitudes change and they begin to do the same thing their parents did.*

The community aspect of being involved in volunteering activities is also very large. We tend to participate in activities more often when we know the same efforts are put forth by our family and friends, or when people we know will also be there as participants.

# JAPANESE AMERICANS

## GIVING GENEROUSLY

*A lot of my volunteer projects are with my ten closest friends or my closer coworkers. We do these projects together and they bring a lot of camaraderie. After that trip, our group grew inseparable: every weekend, "let's meet up, let's meet up." So there's definitely that part. It brings your friends and whoever you are doing these projects with closer together, and it just feels good.*

Sometimes we find it difficult to get back on the volunteering "track" when school or work causes us to move away from the local area, taking us away from the support network of family and friends. Participants who went on to find activities on their own after relocation said their new involvements didn't last too long.

*Part of the reason why I stopped volunteering is physical distance. Like, originally I was really involved in my church, a Japanese American church in Alameda, and we would volunteer a lot. My dad would take us there and we'd have a group of friends and a little network. We would do fun things; the volunteering would be fun because it was a community thing. But now, it seems like every time I volunteer, I eventually stop.*

*A lot of the community service I used to do was in Sacramento where I grew up, and I stayed with my volunteer organizations and my responsibilities. Then I got a job in the Bay Area and I moved out here where I didn't really know anybody. I was very involved in work and I'm very far away from Sacramento. I can't really be involved anymore.*

Many participants mentioned that our community involvement begins at a younger age, as something we are encouraged or almost expected to do by our parents, or as a part of earning credentials to apply for college in high school.

*There were times when I didn't really have a choice as to whether I was going to volunteer. First of all in high school you have to volunteer if you want to get into college, and there's also parental pressure. My dad has*

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*always been involved in the community so there was an expectation that I would be involved, too.*

*I probably wouldn't have done that in high school if I wasn't trying to get into college. We were forced to do it, but I definitely felt better after I did it. One of the reasons, I guess, is making somebody else's life better.*

Even though initially there is an external force such as parental pressure that nudges us in the direction, having these experiences in our adolescence leaves us with good feelings afterwards. As we grow older, the “good feelings” we get by making other people happy become a source of gratification and the dominant factor that motivates us. It gives us a clear sense of purpose and a drive to make the community a better place.

*I remember giving away these toys to little kids and seeing these big smiles on their faces when they got the toys, or giving somebody's beat-up jackets away. They're just so happy to get these jackets because it's going to keep them warm for the winter. I guess that's my biggest motivation. At the end of the day you're helping somebody else less fortunate and in need.*

The majority of the participants take part in formal, highly organized volunteering activities such as the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme (a program sponsored by the Japanese government that enables foreign youth to teach foreign languages at schools in Japan), volunteering programs organized through their workplaces, Boy Scouts, university volunteering programs, service fraternities, and student groups. Japanese value the sense of belonging to a group, and we respect the group we identify with.

*I enjoy helping out the professional and cultural organizations I'm involved with, probably because it's a part of my identity.*

Many Japanese Americans work in professional fields such as finance, healthcare, science, and the law, many of which require special and technical knowledge and experience. We value participating in volunteer activities that involve using our knowledge and skills through public education, grant



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writing, and scientific projects that enrich and broaden the community's knowledge base. The service-learning aspect of participating in a volunteering activity is also important to us.

*I actually used to tutor physics at UC Davis. I like teaching. I actually find it very gratifying knowing that someone learned something and that they heard me when I spoke. At the time it made me realize how much I didn't know and how much I had to know before I could actually teach something. So I like teaching.*

*We mentioned previously that one of the reasons people volunteer is to gain new skills. One of the programs I actually would like to get more involved in is Habitat for Humanity. I volunteered with Habitat a couple of times before, so now I can dig fence poles like nobody could, but I would like to be able to do more. I like being able to work with my hands, so Habitat will be a good opportunity to do that and help people at the same time.*

When we engage in volunteering, we look for gratification from things such as the "surprise factor" of being able to expand our views of the world.

*More recently the trip to Cambodia gave me different perspectives on life. I guess the biggest example for me is in Cambodia these kids didn't have clothes or shoes or anything and they're really, really happy. It's like "how can you be so happy when you have nothing?" So it made me think that happiness is more of a mindset. That really put things more in perspective. There's a lot more than monetary or materialistic gain to life and it's more of a mindset about how you live your life.*

*For Suitcase Clinic I used to wash feet. We have a foot washing section, because in the homeless community they don't have the greatest footwear, especially in Berkeley where it's windy, it's rainy, and they come back with all these problems. There was this one guy who told me "Jesus used to wash feet." The fact that he correlated that with me was definitely touching, because he was a person who probably put Christianity and his religion at the top of his life. It was his life goal to become the best person*

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*in his religion, and the fact that he put me practically equivalent to Jesus definitely made such an impact on me. It made me feel warm inside. Each client, each patient, each person, it's different, and I really enjoy that.*

We are exposed to different perspectives in life.

*Rewards come in different ways. [With volunteering] you'll really get to learn and value making a difference in someone else's life. It sounds so cliché but it's really true that when you walk away feeling good, it just outweighs how much money it brings in. It's very gratifying. Satisfaction can come in different forms, it doesn't have to be monetary. In volunteering you are doing free work, but you are getting so much more than what pay could ever offer.*

*Some people retired when they were forty-five or fifty but were they happy? They made a lot of money, but some were happy, others weren't so happy. What was the difference? It's nice to have material wealth, but you never know. This may be your last year on earth so you've got to be able to balance it out with the good stuff, too, the non-material.*

We get inspiration from organizers of these activities and from fellow volunteers.

*I was lucky to find a lot of great people, people I really admired, and that's the reason why I wanted to keep involved. They have busy, busy, busy schedules yet whatever spare time they have they spend doing community service. They take the initiative. The inspiration I get from these people, that's what I want to stay connected to.*

We build camaraderie and friendship.

*The friendships you have when you volunteer, that's just a bonus with it. I think when you get into a volunteer situation where you have fun with people and make new friends, it makes it even more worthwhile.*

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Japanese culture holds humility, modesty, generosity, and empathy in the center of our values, and these virtues are very much alive in the hearts of Japanese Americans.

*It's probably our culture that Japanese people don't like to be, what's the word, "show-offy"? Or they really like to be behind the scenes. They don't like to be recognized that often. There's always a sense of modesty, and the Japanese culture is, like, you're always supposed to sit in the back and be humble about being recognized.*

*One thing I always found is that people who put themselves up to be volunteers are capable of being very empathetic. In other words, they place themselves in the other person's shoes and realize how lucky they are, and they are able to reciprocate.*

*And then there's always the respect towards the elderly and that kind of cultural sensitivity of just being aware or just being more modest.*

*One thing about Japanese culture that I notice is being expected to be generous. Wherever you go where food is served, you can always tell where there are Japanese because they bring a pile of food.*

*Not only that, they won't take the last bite. There's still the one piece of bread left, but you never take the last one, that looks really bad. That's the empathetic attitude. "I wanna make sure there's enough food and I'm not gonna be a pig."*

Another important Japanese American characteristic is that in general we have a strong sense of commitment and responsibility (even reflected in the fact that everyone, except those who fell ill, showed up for the focus group despite the stormy weather). A flip side of this, however, is the strong sense of self-judgment.

*Once you're involved you're kind of in deep. You don't want to quit because you don't want to be a flake. If you've been showing up regularly and all of*



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*a sudden you don't show up, you don't want people to be, "Oh where did he go? He used to help out but now he doesn't do anything."*

*This is probably what everyone experiences, but work is pretty demanding. I bring work home with me quite a bit, so I feel like I'm not as dependable. I don't want to make anyone suffer for my irresponsibility so it's hard for me to be an organizer, however if someone asks me for help I'll show up.*

There was discussion of the injustice that Japanese Americans suffered during World War II. Over time, this historic wound seems to have transformed into high respect, great admiration, and strong ethnic pride on the part of younger generation Japanese Americans towards their seniors who not only survived such a great social wrong, but who came out of it as strong, successful, and well-established as they did in the post-war American society. This perception reveals the core Japanese values of patience, perseverance, and generational respect.

*I wasn't in a camp so I didn't have to live through the whole experience of internment, but for me it's a great source of pride that Japanese Americans did go through something like that and still have the station that they do in this country and the level of success that they've reached.*

*I'm occasionally reminded of it and take pride in it. Recently we had the first Fred Korematsu Day [a day that celebrates Fred Korematsu's role in overturning the legality of Japanese American internment camps].<sup>(14)</sup> That's really awesome. It shows a lot of progress and a lot of awareness on the national level.*

Lastly, as in many cultures, food is an important defining factor for Japanese American culture as well. Food is a very defining characteristic of most Asian cultures. Appearing to be stingy is frowned on. Generosity is held as highly virtuous.

*Facilitated by Mami Ishikawa  
Berkeley, California*

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### WHAT WE HEARD IN THE JAPANESE AMERICAN FOCUS GROUP

#### *Guidance for voluntary organizations*

Working successfully with the Japanese American community means being oriented toward engaging a network of people. It is helpful to invite family and friends and to encourage outreach to the broader Japanese American community. Socializing and bond-building are a valued aspect of engagement. Building networks and having fun are important. Part of the social benefit of community involvement is meeting new people and forming meaningful relationships.

Many group participants integrate their community involvement with their work life, finding both group involvement and affiliation with their professional identity important. Though many first volunteered as a result of parental pressure, many had gratifying experiences that led them to continue, particularly through organized groups at work, school, social, or civic organizations.

Community involvement is personal. People express admiration for and inspiration from those who volunteer and for the personal empathy they develop. Group participants value when the engagement broadens their horizons and introduces them to new worlds and experiences. They recognize that rewards beyond the financial provide personal satisfaction.

Generosity and humility are strong cultural values. Japanese Americans do not like to engage in showy behavior. Generosity, however, is highly valued. Providing food at an event is essential. Offering generous portions of food is a sign of virtue.

Being well organized is important and it is necessary to provide details in advance of an engagement. Japanese Americans have a strong sense of commitment and are highly unlikely to not show up once they commit to participate, but they prefer to plan things with advance notice.

It is important to be aware of the different generations of Japanese Americans (*Issei*, born in Japan, first generation in the U.S.; *Nisei*, children of *Issei*, first American-born generation; *Sansei*, grandchildren of *Issei*). Each has had a markedly different experience of being in the U.S. Specifically, 110,000 early

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Japanese Americans were confined to internment camps during World War II. This experience had a powerful effect not only on that generation, but also on the younger generations that take pride in the subsequent success of Japanese Americans educationally, professionally, and economically. Providing opportunities that benefit *Issei* are particularly important and it can be helpful to offer multi-generational opportunities.



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*I wouldn't necessarily think of it as volunteer work. It was just, I had to do it. And I think at specific times in my life, it was just a part of me.*

...

*I learned the importance of working together with people. I might have a good heart and a cause, but the whole point is doing it together.*

...

*There has to be an atmosphere where people feel comfortable... comfortable with having language barriers or having cultural differences. I think a lot of people don't volunteer in general because they don't feel comfortable spending their free time. It's just making people feel comfortable.*

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### INTRODUCTION

The Korean diaspora to the United States has become more diverse since the early twentieth century when the first small group of Koreans immigrated to Hawaii to labor in the sugar cane and pineapple plantations. The second wave of Korean immigrants were mainly students motivated by educational opportunity in the first decade or so following the Korean War. The third and largest wave of Korean immigration began in 1965 with the liberalization of the United States quota system and comprised families and those who were college-educated.<sup>(15)</sup>

Given the relatively recent immigration of larger numbers of Koreans in the United States, the participants' five major motivations for volunteering were aligned with their place in history. Of the 1.2 million Korean Americans included in the Census 2004, first generation Korean Americans are still the majority of Koreans in the United States, and the importance of welcoming elders into community organizations was an important theme that participants spoke about.<sup>(16)</sup>

The majority of the Korean American participants view volunteering and community service as intertwined with and motivated by social and political activism. Oftentimes college provided the opportunity for participants to discover their convictions, which continued as a thread throughout their volunteering experiences. Thus, volunteering for issues in which one believes is inextricably linked to forming identity.

Another theme was the important role of the Christian church as a starting point and beacon for Korean immigrants. Korean Americans are one of the largest Christian populations in the world. In 1995 it was estimated that there was one Korean church for every 450 Korean Americans, compared to an overall statistic of one church for every 730 United States citizens.<sup>(17)</sup> Korean churches help people maintain a link to the homeland.

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Of Korean homeland issues, the tragedy of the North Korean famine is a cause for which Korean Americans maintain a vigil. It is estimated that one to three million people have died since the famine began in the mid 1990s.<sup>(18)</sup> As one focus group participant suggested, “We’re pretty sure that every [Korean] church in the San Francisco Bay Area has donated money for North Korean famine relief.”

Lastly, participants shared the sentiment that being able to help others is a humbling act, and they are honored to have the opportunity to participate.

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### FOCUS GROUP

#### **DIVERSE BEGINNINGS**

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They come from three continents, four states, ten cities, and span four generations of immigrant to American-born. A group of Korean Americans came together one evening to talk about contributing their time and talent to the community. Their paths have intertwined and they have come together for this hour and a half, in good company, over great Vietnamese food, in Oakland, California.

*I was born in Saudi Arabia.*

*I was born in California.*

*I was born in Korea.*

*I was born in Texas.*

*I was born in Hawaii.*

*I was born in Seoul, Korea.*

*I was born in Queens, New York.*

*I was born in Korea.*

*I came here when I was six years old in 1981 with my parents and my sister.*

*I’m fourth generation. So my great grandparents were the ones who settled in 1902. Actually, they were on the first boat of Koreans to Hawaii.*

*I came here when I was thirteen, so I am technically 1.5 (generation).<sup>(19)</sup>*



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*I came over here when I was a year old. I was adopted.*

*My dad moved here in 1961 and my mom moved here in 1975. And now I'm here.*

In the very ways that people introduce themselves, there is an understanding of their ties to prior generations as well as to their own. It is clear that there is a spectrum of what it means to be Korean American.

*Korean American means a lot of different things. We're so diverse that you can't really generalize because you'd lose the universal. Even in this room, it's so multifaceted that it's really hard to pinpoint specifics.*

*I identify myself as Korean American, but I don't necessarily associate myself with all things Korean or Korean American. And when I go into an organization to volunteer my time, I don't really expect them to see me as just a Korean American woman, but as a woman, as an immigrant woman, as an Asian American woman, as a Korean American woman, as a woman of color, as a person of color. I would expect them to take all these things into consideration.*

### TIES TO PRIOR GENERATIONS

People also acknowledged that stereotypes exist between different generations.

*The Korean older generation has a lot of stereotypes about Americanized Koreans as well. And they think—"well, you're Korean but you don't really know about all the Korean events and I don't feel compatible with you." That's a stereotype that Koreans have.*

### GETTING INVOLVED

#### TRADITIONAL WAYS OF HELPING

There are traditional ways of helping others and getting involved. One participant described her community work tutoring youth of color and joked:

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*Tutoring, it's just the nerdy Korean thing to do. You utilize your academic abilities that your parents tell you to do...*

And added another,

*...or, like, shove down your throat!*

### STARTING YOUNG

Many participants began volunteering when they were very young, in local, community-based settings such as the churches in which they grew up.

*Before today, I never thought of working at Sunday school as volunteer work because my father's a minister so...all of growing up I was doing Sunday school work until probably my senior year of high school.*

Other participants sought out ways to get involved in more formal opportunities, through school or in one-on-one mentoring programs.

*It all started in sixth grade. Growing up in middle school and high school, I was part of community service groups and actually was president of community service groups. And I was really into volunteering and just helping out with different causes.*

### HELPING PEOPLE FEEL COMFORTABLE

*For people like my parents, who have limited English skills, that's definitely a factor. You know, to do something that will take up time that they are always lacking and then have to deal with not being able to communicate. A large part of the population that doesn't speak English, if you want to attract them, you have to make them feel comfortable in the orientation, in volunteering.*

*There has to be an atmosphere where people feel comfortable... comfortable with having language barriers or having cultural differences. I think a lot of people don't volunteer in general because they don't feel comfortable spending their free time. It's just making people feel comfortable.*

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*There has to be a balance of being welcoming but not too overwhelming. And definitely not being stereotypical.*

Reflecting on how much they had gained from their volunteer experiences, people expressed concern about barriers other Koreans face in trying to get involved.

*I think it's really hard when I think about my friend(s) who are more Korean than I am or adults or any Koreans that have been here for a shorter time than I, because if they're not part of a church, or if they're not part of any organization [it is harder for them to know how to get involved].*

*Food and the social aspect is huge. And then the fact that people have to feel like their interests and their abilities really match up with what they're doing. So you have to make them feel like they can do the job that you're asking them to do or that you're going to train them to do that. Because if they feel uncomfortable, they're not going to do it.*

*Since college, it was easy to slack off. I didn't have organizations knocking at my door and asking me to be part of a group. I didn't have a community right on hand where I felt welcome to just come in and join and be a part. So, I think part of this is not really knowing where to step in and how I could be of service.*

*The older Korean generation, we need to give them confidence. I mean just having Korean people in organizations makes them feel comfortable because they're Korean themselves—makes an organization more appealing to volunteer with.*

### **DIVERSITY AND IDENTITY**

#### **INFORMING IDENTITY**

Volunteerism is viewed as a holistic and transformative part of life. People's work informed their identity and, in turn, their identity informed the work that they chose to do. For some, community work has been critical to



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their sense of self and reflects the issues that are most important to them. In talking about early volunteering, people realized how deeply they had been affected by these experiences.

*I find in my volunteer experience that there's a lot about community and, I think, self-discovery in my sexuality politics and my [Asian/Pacific Islander] identity...It's just as much about giving to people and community as it is about discovering the complexity of identity and discovering who I am.*

*I wouldn't necessarily think of it as volunteer work. It was just, I had to do it. And I think at specific times in my life, it was just a part of me.*

Community work continues to define people in the world. One participant, during adolescence, reached out to a local peace organization that shared his unpopular view during the Persian Gulf War.

*I was really against the Gulf War for a lot of different reasons, and also I was draft age so I was really thinking about that. I was living in the suburbs and it was pretty hard because I had a lot of arguments with my family and friends. I really didn't have a lot of people with the same political ideas so I looked it up and found this place in Walnut Creek that focuses on peace and humanitarian issues.*

## IT KEEPS ME HUMBLE AND IT'S AN HONOR

### HUMBLING

A consciousness exists that giving time is a responsibility and a way of keeping the perspective of one's world view. This consciousness enables one to acknowledge limitations and personal boundaries.

*I feel like it's motivation but it's also responsibility. . . you have these high ideals, like how I can change the world, but actually, it's very humbling.*

*I always thought that helping out the migrant workers would be really cool, but I'm not from the community...you'd feel like you were just going to go into the community, trying to take up their cause. I feel limited, personally.*

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### HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE

Another important theme in giving time is the impact one can have on the next generation. Most participants talked about the importance of giving back, of creating a sense of continuity and making sacrifices.

*I go to a Korean Catholic Church in Oakland, and probably since I graduated high school, every summer I'd do summer camp and be a counselor for kids. I guess that's what I had to do, but I didn't realize it when I was younger. The cool college students who are just recently graduated, they were my role models, so I have that weight of responsibility.*

*I have been really involved with this group called the Korean Youth Cultural Center. We are a Korean cultural arts organization, and we do mainly a form of musical drumming and singing and dancing. It's called poong mrrl.<sup>(20)</sup> We're a Korean community arts organization and we try to go out to the broader community and larger events. The impact that KYCC has had has really changed my life...changed my philosophy and the way I treat others. And it's just been a really positive impact. It's kind of a pain sometimes, just because it takes so much time, but when you take into consideration the rewards that you get back, it's really amazing and it's an honor to consider myself part of this organization.*

Many of the Korean American participants offered the voice of a new young generation. The majority of the group was motivated to volunteer for reasons beyond themselves. Ninety to one hundred percent volunteer because they want to give back to society or to the community, to help people in need, to learn new skills and gain experience, to make a difference, and to socialize, meet people, and have fun. The least common motivation (endorsed by only 30 percent of participants) was to fulfill a school or work requirement.

Even with other motivations for volunteering, the rewards people received were far greater than anticipated.

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*I used to participate in volunteer work for a Korean community center, just for a few hours a day. But my motivation, honest motivation, to do that wasn't really to contribute to the Korean community, but it was for later, to have something on my resume. After the project was finished, I learned the importance of working together with people. I might have a good heart and a good cause, but the whole point is doing it together... It was more the realization that we need each other to make a difference to help others.*

### **THE KOREAN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY IS NOT QUIET**

#### **ENGAGING DIFFERENT GENERATIONS**

In the Korean community, you find the voice of many generations. People speak of cultural barriers and opportunities for getting involved. They address the need to feel a sense of belonging and a sense of comfort that makes the work personal, relevant, and inclusive.

*I don't think that the Korean immigrant community is quiet. I think it's a matter of having access to education and making it personal. You know, if it's personal to you, if you're driven to it, you'll volunteer. If it's personal to you, you feel comfortable in the environment because you know that these people are there for that one thing.*

*I think about what you said about older Korean people, like our parents' generation: if the organization came to them, that would eliminate a lot of hassles. At our church, there was a group that came. They wanted to ask for blood donation, or bone marrow donation for a child, a Korean American child, who needed a bone marrow transplant. And so, the parents of the child came and did a presentation at our church. They set up all the equipment in our rectory hall and then they had hundreds of people giving blood and samples. So, just looking back on that situation, if an organization goes to where there are a lot of Korean Americans, a lot of Koreans congregated together, that would really motivate them. Plus everything was in Korean. It was a formal presentation. And they let people*



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*stick a needle in them. It was for somebody who's in their community. And this is not just this one particular child but a lot of Korean and Korean Americans are affected. So, I think that having the organization go to our church was a big plus.*

### **MAKING A PERSONAL CONNECTION**

*We were just talking about how hard it is to engage people that you don't know, to get them to join a cause that you believe in. So, I think first and foremost, you need a personal connection.... You can't get a commitment without a personal connection. And you need to be able to convey what you want from them and what you want them to contribute in a really, really positive and persuasive way. They might be sympathetic, but they're not going to volunteer their time unless they feel like they have a personal stake in it themselves. And you have to find what the personal stake is for them, whether it's you or another connection.*

At the heart of creating this sense of comfort and ease is engaging Korean Americans in ways that are culturally and linguistically accessible for all ages and generations.

### **THE KOREAN DIASPORA (THE 1.5 GENERATION)<sup>(19)</sup>**

Like many immigrant communities, Korean Americans have experienced exclusion and discrimination. Through these experiences, Korean Americans have found strength by maintaining ties to Korea and reaching out to Korean groups here as well.

### **ACTIVE KOREAN CHURCH COMMUNITY**

*Korean churches, historically in the United States, are very socially and politically active. They have been the centers.*

### **HISTORY AND POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT**

*There's a lot of hesitation around getting people politically involved because a lot of times in the history of Asian American immigrant cultures, there's*

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*been alienation, exclusion, and some people, not everybody, being worried about getting in trouble for that kind of thing. It would just take sensitivity, at least with immigrant populations, about that fact.*

*I was working on the thirtieth anniversary for the ethnic studies strike at [San Francisco] State. I just came to a self-realization about history, how rich Asian American history is. We do a lot of social activism and we are so into the “now.” We need to look back at what they had done.*

### APPEAL OF INTERNATIONAL CAUSES

*International causes that draw Korean people together affect the Korean Diaspora. We’re pretty sure that every [Korean] church in the San Francisco Bay Area has donated money for North Korean famine relief.*

### I HAVE NO CHOICE

#### WORK WITH MEANING

*My motivation for church and camp counseling is the energy of the kids that drives me to do it year after year, seven years, every year. But what they get out of it and what I got out if it is a role model for five days, [and that] is priceless.*

*A lot of the stuff that I have done has been with what I consider more marginalized groups, who often get ignored in the larger movement.*

*My main motivation is having a connection with another person who I may or may not have a lot in common with, but just building a relationship with that person is personally fulfilling.*

#### IMPACT

The motivation for community work is layered with depth and conviction. It emanates from the center of who one is and from a deep desire to know that one’s work has meaning that has an impact on others—individuals, groups, the community, and society.

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*I don't consider it volunteering either. I do it because I have no choice since I believe in social justice. I don't really volunteer in the traditional sense of volunteering, and I don't do it out of the goodness of my heart. I can't just stay home and have leisure time like I should.*

*You have an impact on the movement you're involved with, the impact that you have on yourself, or the impact that you see in the community you work with or the specific project that you are working on.*

*Facilitated by Debbie Ng  
Oakland, California*

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### WHAT WE HEARD IN THE KOREAN AMERICAN FOCUS GROUP

#### *Guidance for voluntary organizations*

Engaging Korean Americans takes a balanced approach. How an organization looks on the inside and from the outside makes a difference in the willingness to get involved, to stay involved, and to get others involved. From staff diversity, to overall volunteer management, to the size and feel of an organization, organizations that want to engage Korean Americans must reach out and meet people where they are. Being welcoming and helping people feel comfortable is very important.

Focus group participants encourage organizations seeking to engage Korean Americans as volunteers to understand the diversity that exists within the multi-faceted Korean American community. They can also research contemporary issues that are important to the Korean American community and, wherever possible, find and focus on topics of particular interest in the Korean community, such as Korean famine relief. These concerns can then be integrated into volunteer trainings.

Korean Americans can be invited to make presentations to others working on a cause or in an organization. Such presentations can be a good way to provide information and training about Korean history and current affairs, or Korean American culture. Visiting places where Korean Americans congregate, such as Korean churches, is a good way to increase understanding.



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Volunteer opportunities emphasizing values that Korean Americans hold strongly are attractive. Examples that arose in focus group discussion included the contribution that the work makes to social justice and political change, both today and in future generations.

Volunteer work that has a positive impact on future generations is especially appealing to Korean Americans. In tandem with this, developing a multigenerational approach to the outreach for volunteers is also suggested. Korean Americans of all ages should be invited to become involved, particularly older Koreans.

As they involve Korean American volunteers, organizations should acknowledge and engage as many aspects of the individuals involved as possible and develop opportunities for the volunteers that relate to their personal interests. A person's skill level should be carefully matched with the particular position or task he or she is asked to undertake.

Organizations that want to engage Korean Americans must meet people where they are, making them feel welcome and comfortable. The opportunity to make one-on-one personal connections with others, including socializing around food, is important, as is being thanked verbally.

# MEXICAN AMERICANS

## LA GRAN FAMILIA



*My motivation was when I found myself in a domestic violence situation and there was no one to help me because of the Spanish barrier. There was no one to help me then and that is what motivated me to help other people who were in that situation or in any other.*

...

*One thing I want to put in here is all the hours and time we spend volunteering with our families. This is volunteerism...we save the government millions of dollars because of the care we provide for free.*

...

*Living in East Los Angeles, I was surrounded by intelligent, creative, artistic people. It was a rich environment. When I went outside of that community to college is when I found out I was poor and culturally disadvantaged.*

# MEXICAN AMERICANS

## LA GRAN FAMILIA



### INTRODUCTION

Mexican Americans share a communal approach to civic participation. *La familia* [family] is a key value. For Mexican Americans, family units with extended family members are common, with 31 percent of Mexican American family households having five or more people, as compared to 11 percent of non-Hispanic white households (United States Census 2002). Mexican Americans are also more likely than other Hispanic groups to live in larger households: only 16.8 percent of Puerto Ricans and 10.6 percent of Cuban Americans live in families of five or more.<sup>(21)</sup> Census figures report that the average U.S. household was just 2.6 in 2007.

Mexican American communities, with high rates of recent immigrants, provide services to one another—such as translation or care for elderly family members—that in more acculturated groups are likely to be provided by people outside the family.

The contributions of Mexican Americans are part of a long history of mutual aid and community involvement. *Mutualistas*, or mutual aid societies, were historical entities created by Mexican immigrants to the United States in the late nineteenth century. *Mutualistas* “pooled the limited resources of many to provide a small measure of security in a difficult environment...promoting social and cultural activities like plays, lectures, discussions and celebration of Mexican and American holidays.”<sup>(22)</sup> They were important especially as they gave new immigrants an opportunity to keep a connection to Mexican culture while bringing them together to meet their most basic needs in a new country. These early immigrants to the United States prepared the way for a larger group of now fourth and fifth generation Mexican Americans.

With a population of close to 27 million people, Mexican Americans are more likely than other immigrant groups to be foreign-born, with 10.5 million foreign-born people from Mexico living in the United States. With close proximity to Mexico,



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many Mexican Americans are able to retain their traditions and language. In the United States, one in ten people speak Spanish, and 34.5 million people over five years of age speak Spanish at home (United States Census 2007).

Within the Mexican American (or Chicano) community, volunteering and putting others before the individual is the norm. Participants express great satisfaction from giving to others, and these feelings are often driven by the spiritual values associated with volunteering their time in *la gran familia* [the great family]. Other strong motivators include helping people in need, making a difference, learning new skills, and gaining experience.

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### FOCUS GROUP

#### LA FAMILIA – LEARNING THE VALUE OF GIVING

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As participants shared their experiences, it was apparent that the value of giving is learned at an early age, as family members, both nuclear and extended, interact in daily living. As children watch their parents interact in community life, the behaviors are internalized and emulated in future life experiences. The community, in a web of inter-connections, is viewed as an extension of the family. The expectation to give back to community and to family members accompanies this value. As one participant, who has been in this country for some time stated,

*I volunteered as a child in Mexico...I worked with a homeless group in soup kitchens for Anglos who didn't have...they were poor. In Cincinnati, I worked for the African American community as a volunteer for social services who had needs such as clothing, housing, things like that. And after that in San Antonio, I was a volunteer working in a church with young people.*

This early experience of community involvement was evidenced by another participant who shared that she learned the value of volunteering as a child by accompanying her mother to the Leukemia Society. Adults and elders teach their young the notion of true generosity—that is, giving and

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not expecting something in return. What seems to be taught is that when something is given through true generosity, it comes back to the giver during some other time in his or her life:

*I didn't realize that the connection for me is that everything I volunteered has actually come back to my personal life.*

*When I was thirteen-years-old I started as a volunteer in the schools with a teacher because I really enjoyed being with the children.*

*As for me, what keeps me volunteering is growing up here and, when I was younger, seeing my parents doing it all the time.*

### **GIVING BACK TO YOUR COMMUNITY**

Immigrants unfamiliar with “the system” (American social and economic systems) gravitate toward familiar surroundings, and they volunteer their time with their own group or in their own community. This strengthens a sense of community even though many immigrants come from different parts of Mexico, with a variety of sub-cultural values, behaviors, and customs. During migration times, it is not unusual for newly-arrived immigrants to seek out *barrios* or *colonias* [Mexican American neighborhoods] in order to form connections. Involvement in community creates a sense of group identity and cultural sustenance.

Participants shared their experiences of watching their parents struggle to survive in this society. Group participants, mainly immigrants, recognize that their fellow compatriots have a variety of needs, coupled with an inability to negotiate “the system.” They are eager to share what they learn as they become acculturated in American society. Long-term residents are aware of the many needs that newly arrived immigrants have and express a desire to share these experiences in order to help others minimize the pain and stress of acculturation.

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Volunteerism in the Mexican American community often involves working with others in order to achieve empowerment, equality and justice. One participant stated that she worked with immigrants, in particular with the *Matricular Consular*, a group in Denver designed to provide immigrants with legitimate identification cards, which has caused anxiety and tension in the community.

The importance of culture resonated among the members of the group as they discussed the role that culture plays in the community. On any given occasion, culture is used to teach others as well as reinforce identity. One volunteer belongs to *Flores Indigenas*, a dance troupe that uses dance and culture as a means of educating the community and retaining cultural identity. This woman is now a trainer and works with other women in the community sharing her talent, wisdom, and experience.

One participant felt that she can assist the many Spanish-speaking residents in her community by volunteering her time with two Spanish language radio stations in Denver. These stations provide Spanish-speaking residents an opportunity to understand community dynamics, provide cultural communication, hear *las noticias* [the news] from Mexico, and listen to familiar music.

Another participant, born in California, shared, "I remember carrying water to the strikers when there were boycotts and Cesar Chavez was getting things organized." Cesar Chavez, a national Chicano leader who founded the United Farm Workers in California and whose birthday recently became a state holiday in Colorado, has become a hero to many in the Denver area. This participant was originally from California and spent time in the fields picking crops. As she stated, "My Mom was teaching English as a Second Language.... We grew up with the expectation that, it's just sort of what you do." The behaviors, altruistic in nature and intended to help those who needed help, often blurred with political activism. As she further stated, "sometimes volunteerism was confused with activism."



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### **YOUTH, EDUCATION, AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT**

Much time has been volunteered for youth organizations. Participants expressed the importance of working with youth in the community who are suffering from acculturation and culture shock, resorting to alcohol and drugs to medicate the internal pain caused by the lack of cultural self-esteem, social re-adjustment, alienation, and cultural stress. As one participant stated, “I did a lot of prevention with kids on drugs and alcohol and stuff like that. I helped get them out of that mode of thinking they were bad.”

Participants stressed the importance of educating the next generation of youth. Investing in youth is significant, as Mexicans under eighteen represent 37 percent of all Latinos, and 10 percent (more than 4.2 million) of all Hispanics are children under the age of five (United States Census 2002). People are also cognizant of the high “push out” rates in the public school system. Participants volunteer a lot of their time in schools and nonprofit organizations that provide educational services in order to address this paramount issue.

Empowerment was a word that emerged in several interactions in the group. Many felt that the Mexican American community is often viewed by outsiders as a powerless entity—at the whim of those in decision-making positions. As one participant stated,

*I offered myself as a volunteer in two elementary schools to give classes without charging anything. But I never received a response from the school...Then I explained to them that I was doing this for the purpose of getting parents to become more involved in their children's education. I still didn't receive any response from the school.*

One participant shared that she has spent fifteen years volunteering for the Statewide Parent Coalition, a nonprofit organization that provides empowerment services for parents as they learn the skills to negotiate school systems. This organization also assists parents in learning how to work with

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organizations that provide services to the community. Another participant said, "I volunteered in Head Start for years because my Mom was a Head Start teacher so I was also the babysitter." Yet another participant described, "I worked with parents, motivating women to get their GEDs and some of them even went to the university."

Mexican Americans countered the stereotype that Latinos do not value education. Participants were active in the schools their children attended. One parent stated that she had been on the Collaborative Decision Making (CDM) team at one of the local elementary schools, which her child attended.

*I continued to volunteer [after volunteering with Head Start] at Cheltenham School for the next three years until my son was in second grade. I was a volunteer in Samuels Elementary School and was a CDM parent representative. After my son completed his schooling there, I returned again to Cheltenham and continued to be a volunteer in my daughter's classroom. I am a volunteer in the 40 Assets [behavioral and attitudinal indicators of success developed by the Search Institute ] where we do presentations in schools.*

One of the men in the group shared that he had tutored in the local school in math, reading and writing classes. His passion was sports, and he was dedicated to offering his skills and talents to youth who are interested in sports. Other volunteer hours were spent in organizing parent conferences and other school-related events.

### **VOLUNTEERISM IN THE CHURCH**

There is a long history of interaction with the church in the Mexican and Mexican American communities. In Mexico, community residents continue to have an affinity to the Catholic Church. In the United States, the church continues to be a focal point for spiritual, cultural, religious, and social activities, both for newly arrived immigrants and more acculturated Mexican Americans. It is viewed as a place where spiritual and social needs can be met.

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Many participants stated that they had volunteered much of their time in churches, working with newly arrived immigrants. They shared some of the tough lessons they had to learn about their new culture when they were new immigrants and were willing to share cultural customs with the newly arrived immigrants. Through a combination of religiosity and culture, Mexicans gravitate to the church as a continued expression of their faith and culture. *Quinceañeras*, or the announcement of a young woman to the community in a formalized ritual, is at least one example of the continuance of Mexican traditions. As one participant stated, "And now I am volunteering for a church, teaching classes to children and for *quinceañeras*."

### **OVERCOMING BARRIERS**

There are many barriers that prevent Latinos from volunteering their time. Barriers can be grouped in terms of language, economics, culture, and, in some cases, attitudes.

Communication is essential as community residents engage in volunteer activities in nonprofits. Immigrants stated that on many occasions, the inability of nonprofit organizations to communicate with them in Spanish was a strong barrier to volunteering their time. When the participants in the group were willing to volunteer their time, some organizations lacked the capacity to communicate with them.

Newly arrived immigrants usually come to the United States looking for a better life and employment opportunities. Migration generally stems from economic issues that persist in Mexico, and many Mexicans who migrate to this country have limited resources. With limited resources, newly-arrived immigrants spend what economic means they have on the necessities of life. They may not have the economic means to purchase "proper attire" when they decide to volunteer their time. Sometimes, for instance, immigrants come with only the shirts on their backs. One participant stated that she felt that because she could not dress well enough, she was not asked to volunteer.



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The lack of credentials, namely college degrees or formalized education, was mentioned as a barrier. It was perceived by immigrants that organizations felt that they had nothing to offer. One participant made an analogy to voting and stated, "You're not valued. Your voice is not going to be heard anyway. Who cares? You know what I mean? Why vote?" Another participant stated it was assumed that she had "no recognized skills."

Participants expressed a sense of frustration in attempting to change systems that were perceived to be impenetrable. The lack of cultural competency and attitudinal barriers in some organizations kept these participants from remaining as volunteers. As one participant who offered her volunteer services to an organization stated,

*I think that the only reason I've stopped helping in certain places is because they prohibit me from translating. They tell me, "If those people come to this country, they have to speak English." And I believe that's been the reason why I stopped volunteering at two or three places. If that is your philosophy, stay with it. I'm leaving.*

Mexican Americans want respect and dignity from the organizations to which they offer their services. They stated that organizations that did not have some semblance of cultural competency did not "want to see change." Members of the Mexican American community do not want false generosity or "tokenism" from anyone. Other reasons for not volunteering that were cited included, "no time, hardships, and burn out."

### **CHANGE – A MORE HUMANE SOCIETY**

Stories of suffering indignities and wanting to create a more humane society for the next generation were motivating forces for volunteering time. As one immigrant stated, "We come from a country where we don't have anything and we come to work so that our children won't suffer what we have suffered in Mexico." Generations of residents learn how to negotiate

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new social and economic systems and how to pass their learning and lessons on to newer immigrants.

*When I agreed to volunteer at Focus Points, one of my reasons was because Focus Points focuses on Latino people who don't have [immigration] papers, who struggle, who arrive without knowing anything. They just simply want to become informed. And the reason I went there to help those people is because when I first came I learned it feels just awful, because you don't know where you're standing, you don't know what you're facing. The first time I went to that school, I felt really good. I was beginning to know myself and I believe that they helped me with my personal growth. And I want to help these people who arrive and need help to know where they are standing so those Latino people will grow and learn.*

Mexican Americans consistently expressed, as a reason for volunteering their time and skills, a desire to be part of the change that would improve the lives of others and would also meet the needs of the Latino community to be understood culturally and linguistically. Selflessness and love were repeatedly mentioned as driving forces for community involvement—along with spiritual values, opportunities for effecting positive change, creating awareness, gaining experience, and helping a neighbor in need.

*My motivation was when I found myself in a domestic violence situation and there was no one to help me because of the Spanish barrier. I only spoke Spanish at that time. There was no one to help me then and that is what motivated me to help other people who were in that situation or in any other, when we need medical attention, a place to live, a place to go for food, a place to go for protection against something. That is what has motivated me to help, to be a volunteer.*

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### LA CULTURA CURA – CULTURE CURES

Culture is a healing force in the community, assisting individuals and groups as they engage in social change activities. There was an immense amount of cultural pride that was shared in the focus group.

*Living in East Los Angeles, I was surrounded by intelligent, creative, artistic people. It was a rich environment. When I went outside of that community to college is when I found out I was poor and culturally disadvantaged.*

Participants highlighted cultural aspects that are important to consider in working with the Latino population. The responses ranged from developing respect and trust in the group to requesting that volunteer organizations develop a sense of cultural competency when dealing with Latinos, including “honoring our traditions and customs...as well as treating us like adults, not children.”

Participants shared their desire to tell volunteer organizations about the diversity and pride of the Mexican people. At the same time, they spoke of encountering stereotypes—an “attitude that [each person] represent[s] everyone”—that Latinos are a homogeneous group. Mexican Americans want to be respected for their traditions and empowered in the work that they provide. One participant referring to his Mexican ancestry stated,

*I have always met people who say, “Oh, you came to a free country and in this country there is freedom.” Well, in Mexico, there is also freedom. They treat us as if we came from a country where there is no communication, no culture.”*

As another participant echoed, “Mexicans do not come from a shameless society, we have culture.” Mexican American volunteers enter organizations with *dignidad* [dignity], *orgullo* [pride], and a willingness to give of themselves and with a desire for that to be reciprocated: “Give respect to what we give. Treat us like you want to be treated.”

*Facilitated by Ramon del Castillo  
with simultaneous translation  
by Patsy Reybal  
Denver, Colorado*



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### WHAT WE HEARD IN THE MEXICAN AMERICAN FOCUS GROUP

#### *Guidance for voluntary organizations*

For Mexican Americans, the personal, the familial, and the community rewards of volunteering are central. Organizations should create opportunities for families to get involved together and should emphasize volunteer positions that strengthen the community and deepen cultural pride by helping other Mexican Americans with day-to-day needs. These can include work such as providing translation or helping navigate “the system.”

Respect for Mexican American traditions and customs is critical. Organizations seeking volunteers should consider partnering with Mexican American organizations to advocate for issues of concern in the Mexican American community, such as immigration, access to health care, and education. Concerns for these issues and a knowledge of customs should be embedded in organizational trainings and procedures.

Many different approaches to outreach are needed to welcome all Mexican Americans, from those who are newly-arrived to those with deep roots in the United States. Organizations should consider implementing specific practices to increase their accessibility to Mexican American volunteers. These might include providing Spanish language outreach materials; hiring bilingual English/Spanish-speaking staff; offering information sessions in Spanish, off site when possible such as at a local church; and including individuals from the Mexican American community on the board or on an advisory committee.

In developing volunteer criteria, organizations should make doubly sure that all their qualifications are necessary and fair. Then, in placing volunteers, organizations must be flexible and give consideration to the time and skills people have to offer. It is also very important, once the volunteer is on board, to reduce power differences and avoid misunderstandings. Organizations can do this in several ways, including inviting feedback on organizational issues and creating a time and place for open dialogue and feedback.

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Mexican Americans who are currently involved with a cause, organization, or project should be asked for suggestions on how their experience can be deepened. And recognition for individual contributions should be enthusiastically expressed.





# GLOBAL FINDINGS



The purpose of this research was to highlight the experience and learnings from each of the individual focus groups. Nevertheless, in focus group after focus group common themes emerged that called out to be heard. The Global Findings section emphasizes universal messages gleaned from across the seven communities. These findings are organized into four over-arching themes:

- **Continuity**, or deep roots and new shoots, the family and young people
- **Connectedness**, or spiritual and personal development and interpersonal relationships
- **Consequence**, or significant impact
- **Culture**, or the unique history of each group

## CONTINUITY

### DEEP ROOTS AND NEW SHOOTS: THE FAMILY AND YOUNG PEOPLE

#### TRADITIONS OF GIVING

Rich, deep traditions of giving grow in ethnic communities. Giving to others is a value that is handed from generation to generation. An underlying ethic and inclination to help others is woven into interactions with family and community life.

*That village you hear about... We've always taken care of each other and given time and whatever we had to help others. The whole neighborhood raised everybody. The actions are old hat to us.* (AFRICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*Helping elderly people has always been something that was taught. We'd have to follow the old folks around and whatever they needed done, we'd do for them. Helping others out wasn't really something we talked about; when somebody needed help, you were just expected to help.* (AMERICAN INDIAN GROUP)

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*I don't think that in Chinese, at least in Cantonese, there is a word for volunteering. It is expected that you help with your family. It is part of everyday life.* (CHINESE AMERICAN GROUP)

Many participants reported that they did not use the term “volunteering” with regard to community service. Rather, “helping” was a word that was commonly used by participants, along with the reminder that it was often simply assumed, and therefore not talked about.

Deeper community expectations and behavior are tapped when people are asked about “helping out” or the specifics of what someone has done, rather than the more formal notion of “volunteering” or even “community service.”

Quantitative studies of volunteerism ask whether the subject has recently “done volunteer work” or “volunteered,” rather than whether they have “helped” individuals or the community for no pay. The way members of ethnic communities describe this work for themselves probably affects their responses to studies about volunteering.

## THE FAMILY

Volunteering is often experienced first in the family. Helping behavior is modeled by the elders and learned by the young. The young emulate their elders’ actions, often learning to care first for the family and the extended family, and then for the community.

*Family, we just know we have to help. In Nicaragua, helping other people was either a family affair, a church activity, or the two together.* (CENTRAL AMERICAN GROUP)

*One thing I want to put in here is all the hours and time we spend volunteering with our families—this is volunteerism; we save the government millions of dollars because of the care we provide for free.* (MEXICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*It is cultural. It passes down from generation to generation. Your parents taught you to volunteer just as you will teach your children to volunteer.* (CHINESE AMERICAN GROUP)

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*My dad has always been involved in the community so there was an expectation that I would be involved, too.”* (JAPANESE AMERICAN GROUP)

*I helped my Mom. She was widowed in 1989. I think most of us help our parents in some ways—paying the bills, translating for those of us working with immigrant parents. We do a lot of that. It’s just something you do. It’s part of your family duty.* (CHINESE AMERICAN GROUP)

Participants talked about the extensive help they have provided to family members, newcomers to the country, and extended family members. Extended family is viewed broadly, including people close to but not related “by blood” to the family.

There was talk about “helping strangers.” It may be that “volunteering” is seen primarily as an activity outside the community, particularly by first-generation immigrants, and learned through assimilation and school activities by younger people in subsequent generations. Early immigrants may well help within their communities but see “volunteering” as an activity associated with younger generations who have the luxury of helping others because their basic needs have been met.

*To give of yourself beyond just your family...to give within your family, you have that obligatory feeling that you have to take care of your parents when they are older and all. Whereas with volunteering in the community or schools or wherever is purely by choice. You can, really, without any pangs of guilt at all, say yes or no.* (CHINESE AMERICAN GROUP)

*I’ve always wanted to go work at a soup kitchen at Thanksgiving or Christmas. I’ve yet to do it because I know my mom would not understand it—“why would you rather spend time with these strangers than with your own family?” I don’t think she understands the concept of volunteerism and doing something without pay for someone other than your family or your network of friends.* (CHINESE AMERICAN GROUP)



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*In Nicaragua helping other people was either a family affair or a church activity, “o las dos juntas” (or both together). We used to collect food, take it to hospitals, and entertain the people that needed to stay over.* (CENTRAL AMERICAN GROUP)

*The community, in a web of inter-connections, is viewed as an extension of the family. The expectation to give back to community and to family members accompanies this value.* (MEXICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

## YOUNG PEOPLE

Helping young people was the most commonly cited type of work. This included grandparents who “volunteer their whole day, Monday through Friday, to do daycare,” volunteers for organizations that help abused children, and people working regularly in their children’s schools, libraries, and religious groups.

People in almost every group expressed strong commitments to helping the young, to raising the next generation. They spoke of saving the children from the suffering of earlier generations, and their hope of bringing up children proud of their ethnic heritage.

*I love children, and I see so many minds going to waste. We don’t have enough adult leadership. It seems like there’s not enough of the right kind of guidance for our young people.* (AFRICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*I believe that a young person is raised by the community, raised by the village—not just by the parents, not just by one individual.* (CHINESE AMERICAN GROUP)

*We come from a country where we don’t have anything, and we come to work so that our children don’t suffer what we have suffered in Mexico.* (MEXICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*I want my children to grow up to be proud to be Latinos.* (CENTRAL AMERICAN GROUP)

*Every summer I’d do summer camp and be a counselor for kids. I guess that’s what I had to do but didn’t realize it when I was younger. The cool college students who are just recently graduated, they were my role models, so I have that weight of responsibility.* (KOREAN AMERICAN GROUP)

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There were volunteers who expressed a desire to work with particular youth groups, for example young boys, citing their critical need for role models.

*I am trying to do something to help these little boys. Most of their fathers aren't around or involved, only the mothers. When the mothers and grandmothers can't bring them to practice, I go to pick them up.* (AFRICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*I want to applaud you for [leading a boy's group] because young men in Chinatown really need mentorship and we don't have enough young men mentors.* (CHINESE AMERICAN GROUP)

*Some people are concerned about the young who get gaming money and never really do anything for anybody. And I know some tribes are working to structure incentive programs so that young people don't receive checks from the casino money without having graduated high school or college.* (AMERICAN INDIAN GROUP)

*I'm talking about addressing the drop-out rate among young male students—academic enrichment programs could guide them through high school and hopefully into college.* (AFRICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

## SUGGESTIONS FOR VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS

For organizations that rely on volunteers, many lessons can be drawn from the value of continuity. Deep traditions of giving exist in all cultures. From the outset it is advisable to assume that people hold an underlying ethic to help others. This inclination is tapped when organizations point out community needs that match the specific experience and strengths of prospective volunteers, rather than trying to attract volunteers through a generalized call to service.

It is important to recognize how often family is the natural context in which helping others is understood. Organizations might consider involving the family, not just the individual, in volunteer activity or can at least be aware that working with an individual also means working indirectly with the whole family.

In ethnic communities, there are strong and poignant concerns about young people of today. People from many cultures are concerned about passing on their

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values and customs to the next generation. Two groups specifically mentioned the great value of providing adult male mentors of the same culture for young boys. An organization would do well to emphasize the aspects of its program that addresses youth and the needs of the next generation.

## CONNECTEDNESS

### SPIRITUAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

#### EMPATHY AND COMPASSION

People seek connection and reciprocity through their work with others. They help others as a means of learning empathy and expressing compassion for others and thus as a way of developing themselves. For some, the connection with another is seen as an exchange, and for others it is expressed as an expectation they have of themselves to be more compassionate.

*There are so many opportunities for the young to make a difference, and it's really enjoyable to help out. It fulfills something in you and gives you experience. That way we can help build back some of the compassion that seems to be fading away.* (AMERICAN INDIAN GROUP)

*I would work with the interfaith group because during hard times I needed them, and they were there for me.* (AFRICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*I learned the importance of working together with people. I might have a good heart and a good cause but the whole point is doing it together. It was more the realization that we need each other to make a difference to help others.* (KOREAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*Uno recibe lo que uno da (you get what you give). I know someone will be there if I need help.* (CENTRAL AMERICAN GROUP)

*One thing I always found is people who put themselves up to be volunteers are capable of being very empathetic. In other words, placing themselves in the other*



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*person's shoes and realizing how lucky they are and being able to reciprocate.*

(JAPANESE AMERICAN GROUP)

*I feel like it's motivation but it's also responsibility... you have these high ideals, like how I can change the world, but actually, it's very humbling.*

(KOREAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*A lot of the reason I volunteer is karmic. I certainly say to myself that if I ended up homeless, somebody is going to have a generous spirit and will somehow give me a meal when I need it too.*

(CHINESE AMERICAN GROUP)

*As Native people, we've been taught to think of the greater good of a group of people, and we're going to want to see what we're doing affect larger populations.*

(AMERICAN INDIAN GROUP)

## SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS CONNECTIONS

For many, religious and spiritual traditions provide a prime motivation for helping others in the community. Organized religions, spirituality, collective spirit, and love all provided incentives for volunteering.

*Whatever I do must further enhance my spirituality. Then I feel that whatever God blessed me with I didn't receive in vain. I'm giving it back through helping someone else.*

(AFRICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*It's like I'm supposed to teach what God has taught me to someone else. It's a different kind of volunteering. Handing off—that's what it feels like to me. That's why I'm volunteering for the church.*

(AFRICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*To act out God's will for my life.*

(AFRICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*Why do I help? My reason for helping is spiritual. It comes from what I learned from my parents, my family, my friends—this is what makes your life meaningful.*

(CENTRAL AMERICAN GROUP)

*For Suitcase Clinic I used to wash feet. We have a foot washing section, because in the homeless community they don't have the greatest footwear, especially in Berkeley where it's windy, it's rainy, and they come back with all these problems.*

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*There was this one guy who told me "Jesus used to wash feet." The fact that he correlated that with me was definitely touching.* (JAPANESE AMERICAN GROUP)

In many ethnic communities, religious congregations have played a significant role historically in organizing and offering help. People in the African American, Mexican American, Korean American, and Chinese American groups cite congregations as the places where they provide their service. These are also the places where they were first helped as newly-arrived immigrants and in times of crisis. Many people are active volunteers in their congregations and through their congregations in other community projects.

*Korean churches, historically in the United States, are very socially and politically active.* (KOREAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*We're pretty sure that every [Korean] church in the San Francisco Bay Area has donated money for North Korean famine relief..* (KOREAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*Many participants, particularly recent immigrants, volunteer much of their time in churches, usually serving other newly arrived immigrants.* (MEXICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

A few groups had roots in more than one religion. The Chinese American group, for instance, recognized deep roots of service in both Buddhism and Christianity.

## FORMING IDENTITY

Younger adults explain that community work helps them to discover and develop individual and cultural identities in the world.

*It felt pretty good to do that stuff because, at that time, I was just really lost—I was a teenager and just really lost. It, kind of like, gave me something to say. It made me proud of myself because I didn't think that I had done much to be proud of up to then. It also helped me figure out what I wanted to do in life.* (AFRICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*I find in my volunteer experience that there's a lot about community and, I think, self-discovery in my sexuality politics and [Asian/Pacific Islander] identity... It's*

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*just as much about giving to people and community as it is about discovering the complexity of identity and who I am.* (KOREAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*I enjoy helping out the professional organization and the cultural organizations I'm involved with, probably because it's a part of my identity.*

(JAPANESE AMERICAN GROUP)

*I was really against the Gulf War for a lot of reasons, and also I was draft age so I was really thinking about that. I was living in the suburbs and it was really pretty hard because I had a lot of arguments with my family and friends. I really didn't have a lot of people with the same political ideas so I looked up and found this place in Walnut Creek that focuses on peace and humanitarian issues.* (KOREAN

AMERICAN GROUP)

## **IT'S PERSONAL: RELATIONSHIPS ARE CENTRAL**

Community involvement is often a highly interpersonal experience. People in the three Asian American groups emphasized the centrality of relationships to their experience of working on projects and in organizations. They suggested incorporating socializing and bond-building into events and working through networks of family and friends.

*I think first and foremost, you need a personal connection. You can't get a commitment without a personal connection. Most important is helping people feel comfortable.* (KOREAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*Being appreciated by the organization and by individuals makes a difference because results sometimes take time. I care about relationships. If the leader is doing ten times more than I am, how can I not do it?* (CHINESE AMERICAN GROUP)

*A lot of these volunteer projects that I'm involved with, it is my ten closest friends or my closer coworkers. We do these projects together and they bring a lot of camaraderie.* (JAPANESE AMERICAN GROUP)



# GLOBAL FINDINGS

*The friendships you have when you volunteer, that's just a bonus with it. I think when you get into a volunteer situation where you have fun with people and make new friends, it makes it even more worthwhile.* (JAPANESE AMERICAN GROUP)

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS**

Organizations seeking volunteers from ethnic communities should not be afraid to use words like empathy and compassion. People admire others for their generosity in helping other people and are inspired to develop their own spirit of generosity. Organizations can emphasize the reward of developing oneself while helping others, such as building a stronger sense of humility through connections with others.

Organizations should recognize the connections between religious and spiritual teachings and community service, and help people translate “beliefs into action.” Organizations can create and maintain relationships with key congregations in the ethnic communities they serve and from which they seek to recruit volunteers.

Volunteering can provide young adults a window to the world and a chance to discover and test their newly forming identity. Organizations can offer young people a menu of jobs to try, a chance to reflect on what they're learning, and an opportunity to go beyond their local work and customs. Volunteer opportunities can be promoted to young adults as an adventure and a chance to venture into unknown territory. Special group opportunities for young people and a chance to volunteer together can be attractive.

Organizations should commit to building strong and durable personal relationships with people associated with the organization since often personal relationships hold people to the organization when results of the work take time to see. Social gatherings allow volunteers, staff, and constituents to connect, such as through events that honor the work of community leaders and volunteers from an ethnic community.

# GLOBAL FINDINGS

## CONSEQUENCE

### SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

#### WORKING FOR IMPACT AND HELPING THOSE MOST IN NEED

Participants in this study found it important to see the specific results and impact from their work and from the organization. They want to know how their efforts have made a difference, how they have contributed to social change.

*I actually used to tutor physics at UC Davis. I like teaching...I actually find it very gratifying to know that there's someone who learned something.* (JAPANESE AMERICAN GROUP)

*I need to know that what I am doing is making a difference. For example, if I raise funds, I want to know how the money was useful, specifically what it was spent on and what the results were. I used to tutor. I want to know that the student's grade went from a D to a C+. It must be specific and something I can relate to.* (CHINESE AMERICAN GROUP)

*I want to see the results of my work and know that it is going to someone who needs it.* (CENTRAL AMERICAN GROUP)

A quantitative study (*Volunteering in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1999*) demonstrated that ethnic groups are motivated to help those most in need: 41 percent of African Americans, 45 percent of Asian Americans, and 45 percent of Latinos reported that their primary goal in volunteering was the opportunity to help those in most need. This compares with 34 percent of the volunteer population at large.

The emphasis on helping those most in need was particularly strong in groups with many recent immigrants, notably the Central American and Mexican American groups, though it was certainly expressed in the Chinese American group and others as well.

*I like to help people who otherwise won't be helped.* (CENTRAL AMERICAN GROUP)

*...carrying water to the strikers when there were boycotts and Cesar Chavez was getting things organized. . .* (MEXICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

# GLOBAL FINDINGS

*It was the only multilingual hotline, so we got lots of calls from immigrant women and we helped many immigrant families.* (CHINESE AMERICAN GROUP)

People often described their dedication to meeting the basic needs of others by relating their own experiences of struggle, indicating that people may seek to save others from the pain that they experienced.

*Probably most people who have to leave Central America felt like me and my family at some point: needing help for something it was hard to see coming. We can laugh about it now, but we also remember how painful it was.* (CENTRAL AMERICAN GROUP)

*Then there was no one to help me and that is what motivated me to help other people who were in that situation or in any other...when we need medical attention, when we need a place to live, a place to go for food, a place to go for protection against something.... That is what has motivated me to help, to be a volunteer.* (MEXICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*...the reason I went there to help those people is because when I first came [to this country] I learned it feels just awful, because you don't know where you're standing, you don't know what you're facing.* (MEXICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

## WORKING WITH SMALL ORGANIZATIONS

Seventy percent of registered nonprofit organizations in the United States were founded less than thirty years ago (Bornstein, *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas*, 2004 ), and two-thirds of 501 (c)(3) organizations had budgets under \$25,000 (Arnsberger in O'Neill, *Nonprofit Nation: A New Look at the Third America*, 2002). This study has good news for these relatively young and small organizations seeking community support.

People in at least half of the focus groups (American Indian, Central American, and Chinese American) expressed a preference for working with small organizations. They believe that small organizations serve their communities better, and that in small organizations they can better see the impact of their effort and the difference they had made.



# GLOBAL FINDINGS

*I just think that there are plenty of other people who can volunteer for the big organizations, and there's not that many who volunteer with Native organizations.* (NATIVE AMERICAN GROUP)

*I liked working in small organizations because it feels that they are closer to me. And I don't mean it only in a geographical sense. I want to see the results of my work and know that it is going to someone who needs it.* (CENTRAL AMERICAN GROUP)

*It is also important to me that the organization I work with is accountable to the community and allows active participation in the decision making. At least I want to have a voice. I know that some of the big organizations help people in need also, but I would feel unimportant, not recognized, left out.* (CENTRAL AMERICAN GROUP)

*Volunteer energy can really make something happen. You start out with a group of people doing something with friends, and you come up with an institution.* (CHINESE AMERICAN GROUP)

## WORKING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

People in nearly all groups emphasized the value of working for social change. They spoke of “social justice,” “empowerment,” “politics,” and “systematic change.” They pointed out that social change motivated them to serve and kept them inspired to continue. They described feeling responsible for being part of the change they wished to see happen in their communities and in the world.

*People literally died for us to be in the positions that we're in and if we don't give back, then we are all guilty of participating in their suffering.* (AMERICAN INDIAN GROUP)

*I don't consider it volunteering, I do it because I have no choice since I believe in social justice.* (KOREAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*A lot of the stuff that I have done has been with more marginalized groups, who often get ignored in the larger movement.* (KOREAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*What really kept me going was seeing progressive change in whatever it was that I was doing.* (AFRICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

# GLOBAL FINDINGS

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS**

Organizations should not be afraid to express the stark needs of the people they seek to serve; ethnic volunteers very often seek to serve those in most need, and they want to see a direct impact from their work. These volunteers express a strong desire to work with small, local organizations, precisely because they can see that impact. This suggests significant opportunity for small groups that address basic needs of food, housing, work, health, and education. Large organizations might consider emphasizing their work with local ethnic communities; partnering with small, community-based groups; and promoting smaller programs or offices of the organization.

Individuals in ethnic communities are particularly motivated to improve life and create opportunities for others. This opens special opportunities for organizations with explicit social justice and advocacy purposes and also suggests the possibility that other organizations might usefully broaden their definition of volunteerism and civic engagement to include social justice and community activism.

## **CULTURE**

### *UNIQUE HISTORY*

## **DIVERSITY WITHIN GROUPS**

Ethnic groups are not homogeneous. Wide differences exist among people who identify as part of the same cultural group. Many groups discussed the diversity within their ethnic communities. People spoke of regional differences and of coming from different tribal nations, from different countries of origin, and from large countries with many provinces and languages. People in the Korean American group came from “three continents, four states, ten cities.” In the Central American group they came from seven countries in Central America. People in the Chinese American group noted their generational differences; those in the African American group noted whether they migrated to or from the South. The Mexican American group was conducted with simultaneous translation (English/Spanish) to

# GLOBAL FINDINGS

accommodate both participants born in the United States and recent immigrants, and the subgroups also exhibited differences in their helping behavior.

*We didn't have to live through the 1800s and early 1900s when people were just butchering Indians and many of our people had to go underground. I mean, we can stand up and say who we are. That is such a point of privilege.* (AMERICAN INDIAN GROUP)

*I met Angelina, a Salvadoran woman who seemed to be on an opposite journey. While I was trying to learn more about this country, the culture and the language, she was glad to have a chance to meet someone from Central America and to speak Spanish. Angelina told me that she was taught to disconnect from her culture. She did not feel embraced by either culture.* (CENTRAL AMERICAN GROUP)

*You [speaking to a younger generation] grew up around a lot of non-Natives in your schools, your neighborhood, and all that. I think that you're probably more into, kind of, mixing it up than we adults are—especially the older adults.* (AMERICAN INDIAN GROUP)

## EXCLUSION

People from almost all ethnic groups related experiences of exclusion, oversight, rejection, and discrimination as they tried to offer their time and talent to help community-based organizations. They described negative reactions to their youth, their accent, their language, their dress, and their skills. Potential volunteers, and volunteers who left for these reasons, cited the organizations' lack of cultural competency, limited language capability, and lack of understanding of generational issues and immigrant needs as barriers to their involvement.

*At meetings they spoke in a lot of insider/short-hand language that we didn't understand or relate to. We paid our dues and everything. They would sit there saying they needed more new members, but it didn't appear they were really ready and willing to accept outsiders and newcomers.* (AFRICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*When I was [young], I tried to volunteer to read to people at this blind center near my house. I had thought it would be neat, because, if I was blind, I would want*



## GLOBAL FINDINGS

*someone to read to me and at that time I thought if I didn't do it, who would? And I didn't want the folks there thinking that nobody cared about them. But the people I talked to at the center, they just kind of pushed me off to the side, I don't know what it was, but they didn't take me seriously. Maybe I didn't look professional or something. They were just really cold about it and I got turned away from looking to help out organizations where I didn't know anyone.*

(AMERICAN INDIAN GROUP)

*And then there's the change of attitude in some people when they notice your accent. They seem to think that an accent tells of your intellectual capacity.*

*Muscle control—that is what it is.* (CENTRAL AMERICAN GROUP)

*Since college, it was easy to slack off. I didn't have organizations knocking at my door and asking me to be part of a group. I didn't have a community right on hand where I felt welcome to just come in and join and be a part. So, part of this is not really knowing where to step in and how I could be of service.*

(KOREAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*I think that the only reason I've stopped helping in certain places is because they prohibit me from translating. They tell me "if those people come to this country, they have to speak English" And I believe that's been the reason why I stopped volunteering at two or three places. If that is your philosophy, stay with it. I'm leaving.*

(MEXICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*I offered myself as a volunteer in two elementary schools to give classes without charging anything. But I never received a response from the school. I went three times and talked to them and took my materials and I explained how everything was, why I was doing this. I explained that I was doing it for the purpose of getting parents to become more involved in their children's education, but I still didn't receive any response from the school. It was as if they didn't care.*

(MEXICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

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## COMMUNITY VOICE

Two groups emphasized the importance of the community itself leading the way in voluntary action. The African American and American Indian communities made an important distinction between helping out and taking over when others enter an ethnic community not their own.

*Don't come in thinking that we want you to do things for us—that we can't be involved in how things are done, that we can't give time and volunteer in our own communities to help and change things.* (AFRICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*Do come in expecting us to want to be shown how to do things for ourselves. Come in prepared to listen. Let us tell you how best we can work together and how you can really get to know us as people.* (AFRICAN AMERICAN GROUP)

*We've all seen what can happen when non-Indians come in and try to "fix" or deal with our issues, they just mess things up and don't understand what's really going on. We need people to stick around and almost, like, stand guard so those folks can't come in and take over.* (AMERICAN INDIAN GROUP)

Other focus group participants added the reminder that it is critical for members of their communities to be heard as they participate in community work and to be able to tell their stories more broadly.

*Native youth can learn how to use technology, like video recording and sound equipment, to learn how to tell their stories—to give us more mouthpieces out there in the world.* (AMERICAN INDIAN GROUP)

*It is important to me that the organization I work with is accountable to the community and allows active participation in the decision making. At least I want to have a voice.* (CENTRAL AMERICAN GROUP)

## UNIQUE CULTURAL HISTORIES

Each group cited defining cultural or historical events and themes, the significance of which people outside the group often do not appreciate. In order to

## GLOBAL FINDINGS

work effectively with group members, one must become more familiar with these events and themes.

**African American group.** We learned of the importance of slavery and its reverberation in current consciousness:

*We have no intentions of forgetting our ancestry. And because we remember, it does not mean that we are holding onto prejudices and hatreds. It's just a fact. Sometimes whites are more comfortable if you just act like it never happened.*

*We can remember the facts. We were slaves. There was prejudice. There is prejudice. Prejudice has not evaporated. It is not gone. But we can still work positively in concert and harmony with people to help. But don't expect us and don't approach us as if the past didn't happen.*

**American Indian group.** We heard of the slaughter of tribes and the extreme deprivation that earlier generations were forced to endure, and we were reminded that suffering may not be over.

*We learn as Indians all the time that things can be taken away, just like that. It could happen overnight. That's absolutely something that no one should forget, that we're just a step away from that chicken coop our relations had to live in because they couldn't own a house, even if they had the money. Even if you haven't had to struggle, that doesn't mean that you are not going to in the future.*

**Central American group.** We learned that many people had to "leave their countries because of the political situation," and they identify with their country of origin: "I was born here but my family is from Nicaragua, so I'm Nicaraguan." One Central American participant shared, "[I want people to know] me as a person, learning about my country, my town, my family." They don't want to be confused with people from other countries with different histories and cultures.

*For me, being called Mexican is still as odd as calling someone from Texas a Canadian because he was born in North America and speaks the same language.*



# GLOBAL FINDINGS

**Chinese American group.** We are reminded that volunteering begins with and extends out from the family. The roots of volunteering in the Chinese American community come from religious, generational, age, and economic influences.

*It is expected that you help with your family. It is doing work without pay. It is part of everyday life.*

*Grandparents volunteer their whole day, Monday through Friday, to do daycare! That is such a common scenario in Chinatown.*

*Generations of immigrants helped their relatives come over, helped them get a job, helped them translate and stuff. And that is volunteering, but we just don't call it that.*

**Japanese American group.** We found out that the experience of internship camps during World War II touches not only the older generation that experienced it directly but also the younger generation that takes pride in what Japanese Americans who were stripped of everything have accomplished since then.

*I wasn't in a camp so I didn't have to live through the whole experience of internment, but for me it's a great source of pride that Japanese Americans did go through something like that and still have the station in this country and the level of success they've reached.*

**Korean American group.** We heard people in the Korean American group remind us of their diverse beginnings: born in Korea, Saudi Arabia, California, Texas, Hawaii, and New York. We learned of the differences in generations, and the 1.5 generation of those born in other countries who immigrated to the United States and retained a connection to both. This variety of history and experience is anchored in generational ties to Korea and Korean culture. Given the "diaspora" experience, people reminded us of the primary importance of having access and being welcomed, "because if they feel uncomfortable, they're not going to do it."

*[If Koreans are already involved], organizations don't have to go out of their way to make Korean people feel comfortable because they're Korean themselves.*

# GLOBAL FINDINGS

*I identify myself as Korean American, but I don't necessarily associate myself with all things Korean or Korean American. And when I go into an organization to volunteer my time, I don't really expect them to see me as just a Korean American, but as a woman, as an immigrant woman, as an Asian American woman, as a Korean American woman, as a woman of color, as a person of color. I would expect them to take all these things into account.*

**Mexican American group.** We learned that the challenges of immigration to the United States are woven into the story of the Mexican American experience. Though many Mexican American families have been in the U.S. for generations, the influx of newcomers and the identification with immigrant issues and challenges is a compelling feature of this ethnic group.

*I have always met people who say, "Oh, you came to a free country, in this country there is freedom." Well, in Mexico, there is also freedom. They treat us as if we came from a country where there is no communication, no culture.*

## SUGGESTIONS FOR VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS

Learning another's culture requires time and sensitivity. Organizations that want to involve individuals from ethnic communities should educate themselves about the differences in tribes, places of origin, generational differences, and language distinctions within the groups they want to engage. To be effective, organizations must do their homework and become conversant with key historical events and themes in the life of a cultural community. Attending cultural events in ethnic communities is an excellent way of reaching out, of educating oneself, and of having fun.

Yet all people from one culture are not the same, and it is important to stay attuned to differences among generations, country of origin, and other differences within an ethnic community. Older Japanese Americans experienced the loss of homes, jobs, and more in internment camps, while younger Japanese Americans have experienced subsequent educational and economic recovery and success.

## GLOBAL FINDINGS

In most of the groups, people reported individual and historical experiences of exclusion, prejudice, and discrimination based on their cultural background. It is important that others acknowledge and understand these experiences. They are real and persistent. It helps everyone to acknowledge that such discrimination occurs so that people feel that their experience is noted and that everyone works together to prevent recurrences. One useful way to begin to understand the experience of someone who has been discriminated against is to recall the feeling of being rejected oneself and to use that experience to understand others.

Some people mentioned that they would value sharing their cultural backgrounds with community organizations. This is a powerful and generous gift that organizations should accept. Organizations can learn from the experience of “pioneer” (first of their group) volunteers to identify barriers to inclusion and mechanisms that helped the early volunteers to become and stay involved. Organizations can ask for these volunteers’ help in paving the way to make the organization welcoming to other new ethnic volunteers.



# CONCLUSION



The wisdom and perspectives of many people make up *Telling the Whole Story: Voices of Ethnic Volunteers*. The study set out to hear and learn from these voices, to provide a platform for people's experiences and perspectives, and to share the lessons learned from Americans in ethnic communities who help others.

What we have learned is that people from these communities have a deep connection to helping others. They often give it names other than volunteering—helping others, for instance, or giving back. Their behavior extends back to their families of origin and cultural groups and ahead to helping young people and future generations. People see in community engagement a path to personal and spiritual development. They rely on a web of personal relationships to get involved in helping others and they benefit from new relationships and new experiences as a result of their engagement. They value meeting inspiring people and respect those who help others. They get involved in order to create significant impact and are willing to lend their time and skills where the promise of impact exists. They are particularly motivated to help those in greatest need. Because they want to see the impact, they often prefer volunteering in small, local organizations.

These volunteers bring a wealth of knowledge, wisdom, and skills that they are willing to share. They also carry the histories and experiences of their ethnic groups, some rich and some difficult, including differences within their groups, memories of painful exclusion, and current and historical incidents that must be understood for full inclusion.

One of the most striking findings from this work was how regularly people from all backgrounds shared that they had *never* been asked about their voluntary activity. What is striking about this is the difference between how meaningful their volunteer activity was to them and how unknown their involvement was beyond themselves.

# CONCLUSION

Have we not been asking? Have we not been listening? Have we not been paying attention to what we hear?

The hope for this study is to bring attention to this activity and these people and to begin a dialogue about the importance and relevance of this work—for the ethnic individuals involved, for the communities from which they come, and for the organizations that seek volunteers to meet their mission, serve their clients, and improve society.

The growing diversity of our population and the burgeoning needs of our society compel us to listen and learn. As long as organizations rely on volunteers to provide, deepen, and expand their work, they will need to include the growing “majority minority” as an increasing portion of their volunteer pools.

All of us stand to gain from greater understanding of others, a growing circle of colleagues and friends, and an enriched life experience.

Let us welcome you to the world that our focus group participants are seeking to make better for all of us. Won't you join us?

# NOTES



- 1 Melvin Floyd came late to organized volunteering and gave his all with pride for Memphis and African Americans at the National Civil Rights Museum.
- 2 *Schools and Prisons: Fifty Years after Brown v. Board of Education*, The Sentencing Project. [http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/rd\\_brownvboard.pdf](http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/rd_brownvboard.pdf)
- 3 "Pathways to Prison," *The Atlanta Post*, September 13, 2010. <http://atlantapost.com/2010/09/13/pathways-to-prison-and-poverty/>
- 4 <http://www.migrationinformation.org/usfocus/display.cfm?ID=385#5>
- 5 Wikipedia, accessed May 24, 2011. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese\\_American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_American)
- 6 *Dictionary of Chinese Characters*. <http://chineselanguage.org>
- 7 "The History of Chinese Immigration," *Brown Quarterly* (par. 2), V.3, No.4 (Spring 2000). <http://brownvboard.org/brwnqurt/03-4/03-4c.htm>
- 8 *A Brief History of Chinese Immigration to America*, in American Heritage Project (par. 3), American Law Foundation (2000). <http://www.aifl.org/>
- 9 Wikipedia, accessed May 24, 2011. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese\\_American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_American)
- 10 The Asian Population: 2000 Census 2000 Brief. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/c2kbr01-16.pdf>
- 11 Wikipedia, accessed May 24, 2011. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese\\_American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_American)
- 12 Schwartz, Audrey James, *Traditional Values and Contemporary Achievement of Japanese American Pupils*, Center for the Study of Evaluation, UCLA Graduate School of Education, 1970. <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED046061.pdf>
- 13 Min, Pyong Gap, *Asian Americans: Contemporary Trends and Issues*, 2006, second edition.
- 14 President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, requiring all Japanese Americans be placed in internment camps. When the orders were



# NOTES

issued, Korematsu instead became a fugitive. The legality of the internment order was upheld by the United States Supreme Court in *Korematsu v. United States*, but Korematsu's conviction was overturned decades later after the disclosure of new evidence, challenging the necessity of the Japanese internment, which had been withheld from the courts by the U.S. government during the war. To commemorate his journey as a civil rights activist, the "Fred Korematsu Day of Civil Liberties and the Constitution" was observed for the first time on January 30, 2011, by the state of California. It was the first such commemoration for an Asian American in the U.S., Wikipedia, Fred Korematsu.

- 15 Marcus Noland, "The Korean Diaspora in the World Economy," *Institute of International Economics Special Report*, No. 15, Jan. 2003: 61.
- 16 "Korean Americans: Middle Class Citizens After 30 Years" (par. 9), available from Global Korean Network. <http://korean.hani.co.kr:80/eng/>
- 17 "Korean Churches in North America—The Lampposts of Korean American Society" (par. 2), available from Global Korean Network. <http://korean.hani.co.kr:80/eng/>
- 18 Carl Gershman, "North Korea's Human Catastrophe," *Washington Post*, 17 April 2003: A23.
- 19 The term "1.5 generation" refers to people who are born in other countries and immigrate to the U.S. Those who consider themselves 1.5 generation feel closely connected to their native countries as well as the country to which they have immigrated.
- 20 *Poong mrrl* is a traditional Korean form of dancing with drums.
- 21 Stoyanova, Ana and Seulhee Yoo, "Hispanic Working Women's Business Jacket Purchase and Consumption," Texas Tech University. <http://www.kon.org/urc/v4/stoyanova.html>
- 22 Meir, Matt S. and Feliciano Ribera, (1972, 1993 revised), *Mexican Americans, American Mexicans: From Conquistadors to Chicanos*, Harper Collins.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Sixty-eight people of all ages, generations, backgrounds, and languages shared their stories and perspectives on how and why they help others for no pay. Their experiences and reflections form the backbone of this work. We promised to keep their identities confidential, but not our thanks and gratitude.

Eight people organized and facilitated the focus groups and drafted the reports you will read. They are the heroes of this work, committing their time on top of already busy lives to help us hear the voices of others—Vicki Clark, Kouslaa Kessler-Mata, Coco Mendoza, Gary Wheelock, Mae Chao, Mami Ishikawa, Debbie Ng, and Ramon del Castillo. In good spirits and sometimes in the face of rain storms and tricky travel arrangements, these eight people came through for us all. Particular acknowledgment goes to Debbie Ng, project coordinator of The Volunteerism Project, whose help was invaluable in creating this work.

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Two deserve kudos for bringing the work to fruition: Melanie Beene, president of Community Initiatives stepped up to ensure access to the final resources needed to complete this book, and identified our editor, Anne Focke, who understood our purpose and helped us meet it.

# APPENDIX



## THE VOLUNTEERISM PROJECT

The Volunteerism Project (TVP) was a collaboration of foundations working together to strengthen, diversify, and increase volunteerism and community service every day and in times of disaster from 1989-2003.

A first of its kind collaborative network, TVP was funded and guided by a Governance Group that consisted of the presidents of the San Francisco Foundation, Shinnyo-en Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, United Way of the Bay Area, Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund, East Bay Community Foundation, Marin Community Foundation, and Bank of America Foundation.

As a result of their guidance and support, TVP invested \$2.3 million in building the first regional group of volunteer centers, increased volunteerism in the San Francisco Bay Area four-fold, produced a marketing campaign for volunteer centers throughout the country, oversaw training and technical assistance to 800 AmeriCorps programs and fifty state commissions, developed an innovative community-based disaster response program for more than 150 communities nationwide, and created new research and products that changed the way people look at volunteering and community service. *Telling the Whole Story: Voices of Ethnic Volunteers* was the final contribution of TVP.