

8 YEARS OF SEEDING CHANGE

National Fellowship Program for Asian American
Organizing and Civic Engagement



seeding/change

A Center for Asian American Movement Building

MISSION

Seeding Change is a center for Asian American movement building. We are cultivating a national ecosystem that supports young people and their continual leadership to promote a just, sustainable, and democratic society.





Introduction

Dear friends,

We started Seeding Change eight years ago with the understanding that we were going to seed an organization that would contribute to a national movement for social change. At the time, we were asking ourselves these questions:

- How do we build the next generation of leadership that understands and sees the importance of organizing?
- How can we support the growth of grassroots organizations and add capacity to them?
- Given how much time and energy it takes to develop leaders, how do we scale up this work?

In your hands is the product of the last eight years of experimentation and our attempts at answering these questions.

Much has changed since we started this organization. The current pace and scale of change is unprecedented. The rise of nationalist, reactionary forces at the same time that US hegemony is being questioned and challenged cannot be lost on us. Not only is US society fractured along the color line, Asian communities are divided along class and immigration status, and the myth sold to us as the “American Dream” continues to put a wedge between us and other communities of color. Indeed, as Asian Americans, we have a stake in these fights.

It is clear that the erosion of our social safety nets, consolidation of wealth, increasing divisiveness and the pushback against civil rights will affect us for the next few decades. We are fighting for more than the reversal of policy changes. Our tasks as radicals, revolutionaries, and progressives lie in rethinking what democracy can actually look like for our communities, what it means to have a society where people have a say in how their needs are met. We must be bold in what we can accomplish collectively.

With all this in mind, we continue to build Seeding Change with an eye towards the long arc. Young people around the country have been getting politicized, yet still under-organized and disconnected from grassroots organizing. We have made a commitment towards strengthening a multi-generational and multiracial movement by investing in young people. This is no easy task. It is our responsibility to nudge, to listen, to ask questions, and to be in relationship with young people. We need to provide the opportunities for them to have the courage to take risks and make mistakes. And quite frankly, in building out this program we were also taking a risk and have made mistakes. We know that we are learning and evolving with future leaders who will also do the same for our future generations.



Friends, family, host site staff, and community members gather to celebrate the first Seeding Change cohort. [A group photo with smiling faces and two Seeding Change logo banners held in the front.]

Seeding Change is a call and response to the injustices our communities have faced and to the moment that we are in. It is a contribution to the broader movement. And it is very much an experiment born out of necessity, love, and vision for a world that we create together.

In reflecting on this experiment together, we have thoroughly enjoyed our work with Seeding Change over the past eight years, as co-founders, former staff of the organization, and participants. There is something about the planting of seeds and nurturing their growth that also transforms the grower. It shows just how interdependent we are as living beings to each other and to the world around us.

In the next few pages, we hope you see what we see:

We plant a seed that will one day grow.

We water seeds already planted,

knowing that they hold future promise.

(excerpts from poem attributed to Archbishop Oscar Romero)

In love and power,

*Alex Tom, Le Tim Ly, Linda Lee (co-founders)
and Monica Chan (current Director)*

December 2021

Our Story & Our Model: Planting Seeds

Why a Fellowship Program?

The National Fellowship Program for Asian American Organizing and Civic Engagement was launched in 2014 to explore and build pathways for young Asian American organizers. It provides a unique opportunity to the next generation of activists and organizers who want to build the power and improve the lives of working-class, immigrant, and refugee communities.

Throughout the 7-10 week summer program, fellows learn organizing skills in Asian communities by working on the ground with grassroots organizations around the country. They also are able to deepen their political analysis through various fellowship activities, reflect on their personal and political selves, and build community with each other.

The program goals are to:

- Sharpen political analysis and understanding of grassroots social justice movements
- Develop skills to organize, particularly with immigrant and refugee communities
- Deepen the commitment of fellows to social justice

While the fellowship program lasts for just the summer, it is the foundations for a community that sustains us for the long haul. Throughout the summer and after graduating fellows are welcomed into a network of host site members and staff, movement elders, alums, and supporters of Seeding Change.

Origins of the Fellowship Program: The Eva Lowe Fellowship

The National Fellowship Program grew from the Chinese Progressive Association - San Francisco's Eva Lowe Fellowship Program. Named after longtime Chinatown community activist Eva Lowe, CPA-SF developed the Eva Lowe Fellowship for Social Justice in 2010 to foster the leadership development of a new generation of Asian American community activists and organizers.

Eva Lowe was a longtime progressive community activist who committed her life to serving the community. She focused much of her energy on social and economic justice, firmly believing in the work to end imperialism and uplift working families. In the late 1930's, Eva co-founded the Chinese Worker Mutual Aid Association, CPA's predecessor organization that organized unemployed workers during the Great Depression.



Seeding Change fellows meeting with Eva Lowe. [A group photo of 8 people smiling into the camera sitting and standing around Eva Lowe.]

Fellowship By the Numbers



193 *Alumni*



29 *organizations*



11 *states*



17 *cities*

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I found it to be a very powerful experience being a part of a community, and it confirms my theory of how difficult it is to have the absence of community. It inspired me to see the value of community more and how important it is for people to have community and for people to go out there and build community for marginalized people like Seeding Change and Asian Americans United. I found a passion for this kind of work because I experienced first-hand how important it is for someone's growth and self-image to have that community, where you feel safe and like you belong.

—Janice Luo, c/o 2017,
Asian Americans United

Janice is now an organizer with Seed the Vote, fighting for electoral wins so we can pave the way for long-term grassroots change.

Our Model

We are fortunate that we don't have to reinvent the wheel on fellowship programs, and we have also made this fellowship our own.¹ Our model includes:

- On-the-ground skills development
- Bringing together a diverse cohort that centers relationship building
- Local and national learning
- Self-reflection, emotional and mental well-being, and constructive feedback
- Bridging the gap after youth programs
- Growing leaders as whole people



Chinese Progressive Association hosted a rally in San Francisco Chinatown's Portsmouth Square to educate the community about the importance of the census. [A crowd is gathered holding signs and some have their arms raised.]

¹ Some of the main components of the Seeding Change National Fellowship program draws from models used at the Center for Third World Organizing and the School of Liberation and Unity, among others.

On-the-Ground Skills Development

Fellows spend the majority of their time working with their host site organization and with the membership base at their host site. Fellows support organizations to achieve their organizational priorities and summer goals. Some of the work fellows have participated in include:

- Conducting community education and organizing through door-knocking and outreach in public housing, transit corridors, and working-class neighborhoods
- Facilitating and leading workshops for youth and immigrant adults
- Working in community clinics on worker and tenant rights in multiple languages
- Conducting voter registration and education
- Supporting communications projects
- Planning events and rallies on community issues
- Collecting community stories to document immigrant experiences
- Recruiting new volunteers and members
- Helping to run youth development programs

Seeding Change fellows from 2018 conducted public outreach to register voters. [Four people are smiling and holding clipboards with “Register to Vote” signs on the back of them.]



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At Seeding Change, I was continually challenged to think about the bigger picture of what we're working for, our histories, migration and the things that impacted our communities and continue to impact how we live now. The fellowship made me energetic and enthusiastic about the work that we were doing; Seeding Change became a space for me to draw energy and resources from. Being in the fellowship with folks who share similar visions and goals, but who have different perspectives really changed the way that I think about and engage with things.

— Mai Vang c/o 2018,
Hmong Innovating Politics

Since the fellowship, Mai has moved from the non-profit to the private sector. Although she no longer works directly at a community organization, she still stays connected!

Bringing together a diverse cohort

AGE

Range from 18-28 over the years

ETHNICITY

Identify as South Asian, Burmese, Hmong, Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, Pilipinx, Chinese Vietnamese, Khmer/Cambodian, Iu Mien, Vietnamese, Filipino/Puerto Rican, Japanese/Korean, Bangladeshi, Laotian, Malaysian

MAJORITY ARE CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS OR REFUGEES

GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Identify as cis-women, cis-men, gender non-conforming, trans femme, non-binary, gender fluid, transgender

Identify as queer, questioning, pansexual, heterosexual, bisexual, gay, biromantic, asexual, lesbian

EDUCATION

Range from high school graduates, college students, and college graduates

CLASS

Range from working class, middle class, upper class

AFFILIATION WITH GRASSROOTS, COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND HOST SITES

Alumni of youth programs (Chinese Progressive Association - San Francisco's Youth MOJO program), members of host sites (DRUM, Khmer Girls in Action, Asian Americans United, Ugnayan, VietLead, Hmong Innovating Politics), and new staff hires

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For our young people, Seeding Change provides a grounding for us as Asians in the United States, and it has grown from the individuals who have participated until now. It's important that they are engaged and grounded in their spaces, whether it's community or campus, and are rooted in the feeling that "we are here" and "we belong" - that there is pride, a love for our people, and understanding they are part of the "greater we." The program is not only a personal transformation, but that we will fight for dignity, human rights, and a better world together. We believe a summer can transform their lives to be progressive people.



—Pam Tau Lee and Ben Lee,
OG mentors and movement leaders

Local & National Learning: Regional Exchanges, Working with Host Sites, National Webinars

In addition to host site placement activities, fellows participate in multiple national and regional activities throughout the summer with the intention and commitment of deepening their political analysis.

Orientation Retreat

The fellows begin with a week-long orientation in the San Francisco Bay Area, where they participate in workshops, hear from experiences of movement organizers, deepen their understanding of organizing, and build community. Each summer, the workshops vary; however, in the past, fellows have learned about capitalism, settler colonialism, imperialism, heteropatriarchy, transmisogyny, approaches to social change, and outreaching skills.

Fellows are also expected to engage in building trust and community through participation in activities that lift up our personal stories and experiences. Guided by the belief that the personal is political, fellows and staff share their “rivers of life” - their personal stories - with everyone with the intention of developing deeper relationships with each other in a collective way as a path towards healing and building community.

In addition, the idea of learning from and teaching each other is emphasized. As every person in the fellowship cohort comes from different experiences and exposure to political theory, community organizing, and social justice work, everyone has something to both learn from and teach one another.

Near the end of the week, we host a public reception to welcome the fellows into the fellowship and introduce the Bay Area community to them. In recent years, we have included a political education speaker/panel component to inspire fellows and send them off on their journey for the summer.



Fellows are engaged in a political education workshop about building power through campaigns. [People are sitting in a room at tables, on chairs, and the floor facing a speaker in the front of the room.]



We adapted our Power and Privilege workshop for Zoom and our fellows got creative with it. [A screenshot image from zoom of 5 individual people each renamed to represent hearing privilege, gender, education privilege, privilege street (resources), and class.]



Linda modeling our River of Life activity, which grounds us in our personal experiences, collective sharing, and storytelling. [Two people are standing and holding onto a large piece of paper with hand-made drawings.]



Orientation features many energizers, appreciation games, and other community building activities. Here, fellows are winding into a human cinnamom roll on the last day of orientation. [A group of people are holding hands and forming a spiral shape.]

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During the fellowship, I learned that outreach is critical. You'll never entirely know what it's like for another person, but we can find common ground. Outreach also helps me understand why I'm doing what I'm doing - what my stake in the issue is. 12 years on from the fellowship, I didn't stray far from movement work. I currently serve as the policy and compliance counsel for Resilient Strategies. In the years since the fellowship, I worked for many years as a worker organizer, helping Chinese immigrant workers to fight for dignity at work. I went on to law school to continue to build on the skills to serve the community. I now help advocate for stronger worker protections in state law and support community organizations to engage in the political process. While my day-to-day work no longer involves direct organizing, the lessons I learned from the fellowship still ground my work as a community lawyer.



—Ken Wang,

ELF c/o 2010, Chinese Progressive Association San Francisco

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In my personal development this summer, I grew a lot through affirmation and valuing my own experience as a Pakistani immigrant. It was helpful to share my experiences and to put words to the dynamics of power and oppression that framed these experiences. Politically, I developed a sharper analysis through the capitalism and imperialism workshops. I also found it really helpful to talk about Asian American movement history.

—Hera Mir, c/o 2015,
Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon

Hera is now the Movement Communications Strategist at the New Jersey Policy Perspective working to build the communications capacity of grassroots organizations serving BIPOC communities in New Jersey.

Dinner Series

Seeding Change hosts a weekly dinner series in the Bay Area (and alternated in New York City and Philadelphia) with the intention for fellows to continue their political education and practice speaking their politics while working with their host organizations. The location of the dinner series rotates weekly and is hosted by the different host organizations located in the area, so fellows are able to see more of the geographic region they are in. Similar to orientation, topics change yearly, but regular topics over the years have included: true movement history, queer and trans liberation, international solidarity, activism, Black and Asian solidarity, and gentrification/displacement.



One of our 2017 dinner series about art and culture in movement building, featuring the work of Emory Douglas. [A group photo of people looking into the camera holding up power fists.]

“I realized how it’s important for art to exist because art is another avenue of validation of the existence of a people.”

“Centering the activism that has mushroomed after Trump’s campaign gave me a glimpse of what changed and didn’t change after such a historical campaign. It was very helpful to hear how Bay Resistance as well as other groups have managed to leverage the current political moment to rope more folks into the Movement, and also be reminded of the fact that organizing is not a reactive exercise. Rather, Trump is a symptom and our work is for the long-haul.”

“I’ve learned how the concept of gentrification is how capitalism manifests on local levels. I’m also thinking more about how to collectivize care, how Robbie described that they are best cared for when the community cares for them.”



Pam Tau Lee and Phil Hutchings share about movement history and their reflections on organizing today at our dinner series in 2019. [A group of people sit in chairs intently listening to two speakers seated in front of a table.]

Regional Exposure Trips and Exchanges

Fellows have participated in 1-2 day exchanges with different organizations separated by region. There have been exposure trips in San Francisco, the Northeast, South, and Los Angeles and Long Beach.

“I better understood how the struggle for liberation is a global one. [Pilipino Worker Center’s] Tita Myrta’s story was so powerful and honestly I couldn’t imagine organizing during her time. Listening to her and being entrusted with that courage was really inspiring and I hope to continue to learn more from movement elders as they have a lot of experiences/knowledge to share to the next generations.”



“The Little Tokyo mural tour in Los Angeles really showed me how ethnic enclaves can build power and engage more intentionally with the city. I am really inspired to get involved in Cambodian Town in Long Beach!” [A group of 5 people are circled around a mural and listening to a speaker share.]

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I was connected to a large network of amazing organizers and movement yelders/elders that I know will carry and guide me in my future organizing work. I feel more confident in my ability to lead a meeting, plan an action, lead political education workshops, base build, and so much more. Working with youth over the summer and meeting so many other Seeding Change fellows grounded me in what's central to organizing: the relationships made and community developed. Looking back at Seeding Change now, I am grateful, despite the difficulties of these virtual times we're in, that I got to meet so many people participating in movement building in many different capacities. Sometimes I find it is easy to get burnt out in this work, but the cohort experience was special because it reminded me that we all have parts to play and we can reach out to and support each other!

**-Walter Lee, 2021,
Chinese Progressive Association
San Francisco**

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There's a lot of pressure to have your job be the thing that you love and want to do for the rest of your life. I met people through the program—even at nonprofits—who shared the visions they were working towards outside of their jobs. These conversations helped me come to the understanding that I could separate my job as something I need for financial security, and that I can organize outside of work.

**—Angelica Cupat, 2020,
Seeding Change**

Angelica works in the tech field and organizes with the Malaya Movement Seattle. She is also dedicating time to being present with her family and wishes for her Lola (Grandma) to live a rich and fulfilling life.

National Webinars

Fellows participate in weekly national calls to stay connected, continue learning, and have a space for reflection with the rest of the fellows in the cohort. Some of the calls have guest speakers, while other times, fellows share reflections on local host sites and activities. Previous topics have included imperialism, disability justice, climate justice, sex worker organizing, and detentions and deportations.



Fellows share on a national webinar call. [A screenshot from Zoom of 25 profiles of individuals smiling and posing into the camera.]



Closing Retreat

At the end of the summer, fellows come back together to share lessons and reflections with each other. We continue building with the fellows to build a safe space for everyone to close out the retreat with a sense of community and commitment to the movement. Fellows also have space to continue meeting in identity-based caucuses started during orientation.

The last component of the fellowship is their graduation, which is a celebratory event to honor and lift up the personal transformations of the fellows. Each fellow is given an opportunity to speak in front of the community to share their reflections about their summer and about themselves.



The 2019 cohort closed out graduation with a group rendition of “Old Town Road.” [Black and white image of people huddled on stage smiling and singing from lyrics on their phones.]



Seeding Change really shifted my mindset to the fact that I can both teach and organize. One of my biggest lessons from organizing in Minnesota as a Seeding Change fellow, is how much you have to center community which is really relevant as a teacher because you have to center your students and create a community within the classroom. I also learned the value of creating deep-rooted relationships. Through Seeding Change, I have been able to connect with people from all walks of life-- in my home community in LA, with the Seeding Change network, and the community I worked with in Minnesota. It all feels interconnected in a really strong way, and it gives me hope to go forward knowing I have people to lean on and ask for support from.

— Johnny Trinh c/o 2018,
Asian American Organizing Project

Johnny currently works with Southeast Asian youth in Oakland and shares, "I can't possibly see myself, as a teacher, without community, ever again."

Self-Reflection, Emotional and Mental Well-being, and Constructive Feedback

We believe that the personal is political and that we are always learning, evolving and growing. Additionally, at different times in our lives we may have different emotional and mental capacities, but that as a movement we can support each other and still create space to build power.

- *Written reflections* - Fellows share reflections throughout the summer with the intention of creating a space to pause and process.
- *Evaluations* - Fellows participate in mid-summer evaluations as well as end of program written evaluations.
- *1-on-1 check-ins* - Fellows participate in a midsummer check-in with Seeding Change staff to share how they are doing - interpersonally, professionally, and fitting in with their organization and local community. They are also asked to reflect on progress towards their personal development plan and overall growth thus far.
- *Fundraising* - Fellows are asked to engage in fundraising to support the fellowship program by reaching out to their communities.
- *Personal Development Plans* - All fellows are asked to set 2-3 goals through Personal Development Plans, which is an opportunity for intentional learning. Supervisors support fellows in achieving or making progress on their plans with the resources available.
- *Peer & Community Mentorship* - Fellows are able to build lasting relationships with peers, alumni, mentors, and community members from those connected to their host site orgs as well as individuals who support the fellowship by being workshop facilitators and speakers.
- *Mental Health & Healing* - As people living with a multitude of identities within oppressive systems, we recognize that trauma is present in our communities and oftentimes, it trickles down into how we show up interpersonally and with ourselves. Because oppression and power can

impact our emotional health, we have been intentional in understanding and bringing in mental health and healing into the program. We have trained alumni resident assistants in crisis and suicide assessment, facilitated a trauma and healing workshop in our organizing workshops during retreats, hosted guest speakers during national calls, and built in mindfulness practices into retreats.

“Being a part of Seeding Change strengthened my compassion in helping me believe that everyone has the capacity to grow, unlearn, and transform. It showed me what it looked like to heal through the work.”

-Jenn Heng, c/o 2017

Bridging the Gap Between Youth Programs to Volunteer/Staff

Since the inaugural launch of the fellowship nationally in 2014, Seeding Change has had the benefit of having grassroots community organizations send members from their base to the program. Desis Rising Up and Moving, Khmer Girls in Action, and the Chinese Progressive Association San Francisco are three organizations who have sent members:

Khmer Girls in Action located in Long Beach, CA has been a host site for the past 4 years and has sent both members and new staff hires. Khmer Girls in Action is a community-based organization whose mission is to build a progressive and sustainable Long Beach community that works for gender, racial and economic justice led by Southeast Asian young women.

“KGA values the leadership of Southeast Asian youth in our community. Our youth leadership programs reflect our vision and mission by investing in marginalized communities through organizing work. Leadership development is a key tool in creating social change and the Seeding Change program has been a huge resource for us to strengthen

our base of members impacted by systems and institutions to take lead and engage in movement building locally, statewide, and nationally. Seeding Change is a bridge for the Asian American communities to share history, experiences, and resources. We have been able to build capacity and extend the fellowship to our alumni network as they transition from membership to our staff team.“

-Sophya Chum, Associate Director

Chinese Progressive Association located in San Francisco Chinatown has sent new staff and former youth members to the fellowship program. CPA educates, organizes, and empowers the low-income and working-class immigrant Chinese community in San Francisco to build collective power with other oppressed communities to demand better living and working conditions and justice for all people.

“In the last few years, we’ve encouraged our youth alumni to not only apply for the Seeding Change Fellowship, but to also challenge themselves in spending their summer with a different host site. We find this a valuable experience because our fellows learn to adapt and build with different communities, organizational models, and they learn the strength of movement building. We also benefit because the fellows come back to cross pollinate with new tools and practices.”

-Tiffany Ng, Lead Organizer

Growing Leaders as Whole People

We believe people are organizers and changemakers even if it's not in your official job title. We do not expect or desire everyone who comes through our program to become a paid organizer at a grassroots organization, especially when there are so many roles to play. In whatever our fellows and alums pursue, we hope they carry with them the stories, methods, and commitments they gain over the fellowship to advance justice that is committed to the most marginalized people.

We know we are most powerful as leaders when we can show up authentically with our whole selves. Our program makes space for sharing our stories, connecting the personal and political, and wrestling with contradictions and personal decisions. We hold space for fellows as they navigate big feelings, insecurities, hardships, and joy. We believe in growing leaders from a framework of acknowledging, honoring, and healing the contexts that we each come from, and that is inseparable from our organizing journeys and movement.



An original Eva Lowe Fellowship cohort poses at their graduation. [A group photo with people smiling, sticking out their tongues, and posing with expressions of silliness and authenticity.]

A National Investment

Big cities on the coast (New York, Boston, Bay Area, Los Angeles) have built strong organizations and generations of leaders. We want to continue to strengthen the relationships with these organizations.

At the same time, we have a commitment to areas of the country that have rising Asian populations, or regions historically overlooked and underrepresented in national movements. These regions include the Midwest, South, and small to medium-sized cities. Seeding Change has placed fellows in organizations based in these areas and will continue to support local organizing and civic engagement work.



Seeding Change fellows from 2019 at the regional expo in the South. [Top photo: Three people sit around a table painting. Bottom photo: A group of people are smiling at the camera and holding their fingers into heart shapes.]



The Community Organizations

Organizations that have participated as host site placements include:

API Equality Los Angeles

Arab Resource and Organizing Center

ASIA Inc

Asian Americans Advancing Justice Chicago

Asian American Organizing Project

Asian Americans United

Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon

Asian Pacific Environmental Network

BPSOS Delaware Valley

CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities

CA Healthy Nail Salons Collaborative

Chinatown Community for Equitable Development

Chinese Progressive Association - Boston

Chinese Progressive Association - SF

DRUM - South Asian Organizing Center

Filipino Advocates for Justice

Filipino Community Center

Hmong Innovating Politics

Khmer Girls in Action

Korean Resource Center

Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance

North Carolina Asian Americans Together

Pilipino Workers Center

Providence Youth Student Movement

Rising Voices

Southeast Asian Coalition

Ugnayan

VAYLA New Orleans

VietLead

Lessons from Partnering with Host Site Organizations

The cornerstone of our program is the hands-on experience fellows gain from working on the ground with grassroots organizations. The staff and members of our host organizations offer tremendous commitment to growing the leadership of the next generation and building the capacity of our movement.

Our host organizations have alignment around organizing values and practices, such as base building and engaging in civic engagement work. Our organizations also believe in Seeding Change's mission to build a leadership pathway and ecosystem. Many of our partner organizations re-apply every year to host fellows. For new host sites, we typically have opportunities to build relationships in other movement spaces and then recruit their organization to the program.

Preparing community organizations

Over the last several years, the fellowship has continued to grow and evolve. Each year, we learn more about how to support fellows and host site organizations. Before the summer begins we have an orientation call for host site staff to give an overview of the fellowship program components. At the end of the summer, we have an evaluation call as well. Seeding Change has created guidelines of expectations for host sites to commit to that serves to support both fellows and host sites to have a meaningful summer. Included in this is a document around supporting LGBTQ fellows.

For some of our fellows, this may be their first time working full time at an organization. And for some of our supervisors, this is their first time mentoring and supervising a fellow in this role. We have a host site supervision training that highlights best practices for supervising and checking in with fellows. We also learn more throughout the summer about individual staff's capacity and skills to supervise; Seeding Change offers

support where we can, such as mediating conversations, encouraging our fellows to express their needs, or sharing tangible things like workplan structures. It is amazing that increasingly more of the supervisors at host sites are themselves former Seeding Change fellows.

Lastly, we offer recommendations for components of a site orientation for organizations to orient their fellow(s) to the history, landscape, understanding of the organizational work as well as logistical information. There are of course many varying experiences of fellows and staff due to region, organizational size, and resources. No host site is the same, and we encourage our fellows not to compare their experiences when there is so much context.



Funding the Program

Seeding Change has been creative and resourceful to make this program into what it is today. We do not receive a major amount of foundational funding. Instead, our funding comes from the following:

- Host sites make contributions to Seeding Change, but they haven't been enough to cover stipends for fellows in their organization.
- Fellows participate in a grassroots fundraiser over the summer. The primary goal is skill-building rather than how much we raise. We lead a grassroots fundraising training that digs into our relationships with money, asking for money, and the broader importance of funding our movements.
- If applicable, our applicants look to their institutions for summer internship funding. We believe these resources in higher education should go to students for organizing training! They are typically offered through academic departments, fellowship offices, or social justice or multicultural offices.

Fellows who do not have access to personal, familial, or institutional support are offered scholarships to offset the summer expenses of food and housing. More than half of the cohort every year falls into this category, and we do not make our selections of fellows based on their ability to access resources.

This model has worked for us as best as we have made it work, and we must continue to change and grow how we resource Seeding Change for the benefit of future cohorts. We are intentional in sharing that this is an unpaid educational opportunity, and that can be a barrier for low-income and working-class applicants. Even though we offer scholarships, it is still harder for us to recruit people and it's never as much as we'd like to be able to offer. We generally attract more applicants from small liberal arts colleges that do have resources for their students. Another layer is that

sometimes host sites offer stipends to their other interns that is a different amount than what we can offer.

This is a program that we believe in. It is the slow, long term work of building leaders who will organize for a vibrant social justice movement. While funding over the 8 years has had its challenges, we are committed to building the political organizing skills and analysis of young Asian Americans.

Alumni Stories

After graduating from the summer fellowship, fellows have continued to apply and develop the skills they learned within their current jobs, leadership positions, organizing collectives, personal circles, and college campuses. Since completing the program, many alumni have contributed their skills within various sectors to continue their commitment to social justice while having an organizer’s mindset and an understanding of grassroots communities’ struggles. Although a few have gone on to be paid organizers, many have also continued their work as staff at community-based organizations, union organizers, teachers, legal rights advocates, social workers, and student organizers. Here are a few stories of the impact of the fellowship from alumni and their journey of landing in various places in the movement:

Neary Narom, c/o 2019 (host site: Providence Youth Student Movement)

Student and Organizer with VietLead

Neary’s Seeding Change summer was during the transition of transferring from community college to Swarthmore College. As many folks know or experienced, attending a predominantly white institution impacts our mental health, especially for working class folx of color. Her reflections uplift the rifts of institutional schooling and the importance of building our political consciousness with community organizations.

“Building your political consciousness is an ongoing process. Going into Seeding Change, I had a lot of wisdom and coming out of it the process was still ongoing. Every day that an organizer blossoms into their full



political consciousness is a spiraling process. You may find yourself questioning your strategy and intellect - but once you push yourself out of that lowpoint you spiral out, you push forward, and bring the movement forward with you in whatever capacity you are working in. Seeding Change was one of the beginning points of my personal spiral of political consciousness and the process remains ongoing.”

Three years ago, Neary described herself as a “bright-eyed blossoming organizer” and coming out of Seeding Change, “I really began to embody what it means to be an organizer and a leader, which is something that a lot of queer and femme folks don’t immediately name even though we are oftentimes the forefront leaders of our movements.”

Neary truly is a leader in our community and our movements. They have dedicated over two years to anti-deportation defense, and together with their team at VietLead achieved a tremendous win of releasing a Cambodian community member detained by ICE during the pandemic. She also reminds us that it is necessary to rest and have balance so we don’t get burnt out, which for Neary means dedicating her focus to finishing her last semester at school!

Jasmine Quintana, c/o 2016 (host site: Filipino Advocates for Justice, San Francisco Bay Area)

Social Work

Coming into Seeding Change with experiences of student organizing and feelings of frustration at what was happening in the world and community, Jasmine intentionally wanted to learn how to organize with compassion instead of anger.



“Seeding Change helped me channel a lot of frustrations for my uncertainty into a more tangible way where I could use this collective understanding learning process to help my organizing skills. It helped me develop my critical thinking so I can advocate for my community and how to practice allyship and understand my stake as a Filipino American in the current political climate.”

In addition to deepening their understanding and political analysis, they had the opportunity to develop tangible organizing skills.

“My prior experience was with youth and higher education. That summer, I worked with domestic workers and tenants facing eviction. Understanding how intergenerational oppression is and being able to organize on a larger scale - writing emails to council members, lobbying in Sacramento - these were all really important skills I never had before.”

At the end of the summer, Jasmine came away with the realization and a further commitment:

“Seeding Change also cemented my belief in the power of youth and our power in knowledge production. I began to see myself as a resource for young people who come from underserved backgrounds like mine, especially those who are economically and socially disadvantaged. It really impacted my choice to be a social justice therapist and healer. I learned that my role as an organizer will not stop if I don’t have the title of an organizer. I will always organize and be there for my community in whatever way I can, in whatever space I’m at. Seeding Change was instrumental in understanding that my role as a future social worker is very important and needed in movement building.

Minh Tran c/o 2019 (host site: VietLead)

Minh came to Seeding Change as the Project Coordinator of VietLead's Farm Program.



"I came to Food Sovereignty work by accident at first, the program needed folks to support running it. What kept me staying in the work was the way we praxis farming like how Ancestors did it. Another part of our work is to focus on intergenerational healing & learning where high school students learn farm lessons from the elders and vice versa. It's powerful to see that the farm can bring everyone together through the language and age gaps."

After his Seeding Change summer, Minh was able to apply different skills he learned to the farm, as well as other programs he is a part of.

"When I first came into Seeding Change, I felt I wasn't able to make impacts around asking for donations. The fundraiser training through Seeding Change allowed me to have more courage to ask for what we needed to run the program, and to not only think of it as asking for donations, but funds to uplift our labor. There were other workshops we explored over the summer too that impacted me, like Disability Justice and harm reduction. I applied those learnings with high schoolers I work with, such as thinking about how to accommodate people and asking check-in questions about how to support one another in the space."

Minh also shared about the community he found through Seeding Change.

"At that time for me, it was hard to find people around my age group to connect with to talk about political education and to share about experiences. One of the best things that happened was connecting with people my age. And learning how they navigated the space taught me how to show up in community too."

Minh is currently working with Vietlead's farm program as a manager and pursuing their study in culinary arts to become a movement Farmer Chef in the nearest future.

Lisa Ng, c/o 2017 (host site: CAAAV)

PhD Candidate in Ethnic Studies

Lisa's summer fellowship led to two major affirmations. The first was the leap to move away from her home in New York.

The connections I made in Seeding Change really primed me to move out of New York for the first time. I only lived in this one place my whole life. In Seeding Change, I learned that organizing work happens everywhere, just in different contexts. I was able to find community in so many different places because the people you meet in the program are your friends for many years. Having shared commitments is why these relationships are so formative and foundational. The emphasis is on growth and mutual respect. We have a shared mission to know how these systems impact us, our communities and we're not alone in our struggles. These relationships continue to buoy me. They're grounding, but they also allow me to feel safe in my decisions knowing that there will be people behind me especially when things get hard.

Lisa's second major affirmation from the program was her movement role as an educator. During the fellowship, she recognized that she preferred to work with a range of people rather than a core group because it favored her strengths of relating to people and being a translator of ideas.

Being in a national space like Seeding Change and building relationships with other people in the cohort allowed me to feel that I could come into my own as an educator and not everyone has to be an organizer in the traditional sense. One of my main roles is to educate about how a white supremacist settler colonial nation affects our material realities.

Seeding Change connected Lisa's academic and organizing passions in environmental justice.



When I was an undergrad I took a lot of environmental justice classes; I didn't hear about any Asian Americans in the movement. I googled it and the Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) came up. Where are all the Asian Americans in the literature of environmental justice? That absence was not about representation, but it signified that people would move on with the assumption that Asians didn't have these experiences. This factually wasn't true from my experience growing up near a power plant. Eddie, one of my cohort mates, was a fellow at APEN. On the last day of our orientation I casually asked them if I should write about APEN and they said "sounds great, I think you should do it." Eddie and Jonathan (our friend and Eva Lowe Fellow alum) took me to Pam's house for a preliminary interview and that grew into my thesis. (Side note: Pam Tau Lee is a movement giant, co-founder of Chinese Progressive Association SF and APEN). From there, this project really became about East Asian Americans founding APEN. This was important because it represented the fact that people didn't think Asian Americans were having these issues. Low income Asians are also being impacted by race and capitalism. That was my first master's thesis.

Victor Yang, c/o ELF 2012 (host site: Chinese Progressive Association - SF)

Union organizing

Victor has served as a political organizer with the 32BJ SEIU, a union for property service workers in Boston, Massachusetts for the past three years. His journey to landing in union organizing was an unexpected one and came about post Eva Lowe Fellowship, grad school, electoral, and youth organizing. He shares:

"I was not initially dead set on labor/union organizing. But I wanted to use my language skills of Mandarin and Spanish and I thought it would be interesting, rigorous, and have more structure.



Being a fellow at CPA was the only time where I was not the only organizer and I wanted to work in a big organization where everyone can be an organizer.”

Meaningful relationship building has been a core value that has kept Victor committed to the work:

“I have close relationships with many of the worker leaders. My job consists of doing lots of things, but long term building with workers is a main one. I have been able to work with the same workers for quite a bit of time, and I think I’m quite close to people.”

Looking back at his experience six years later, Victor credits his experience as an Eva Lowe Fellow as transformative in the trajectory of his life:

“If I was not an ELF, I definitely would not have been an organizer. I didn’t have Asian American role models and it was really inspirational to see the staff at CPA who made me realize I could be one too.”

Not only has the fellowship shaped his life path, but it also has allowed for healing in how he sees himself:

“Organizing has changed me a lot. I think about how even in this job how much more confident and proud I feel in myself, not just in context of organizing but different things in my life - I’ve been able to work through feelings of not feeling good enough, not working hard enough, etc.

The biggest thing I took away was realizing I can and should be proud of my people. Coming from a racialized identity and learning that was really powerful for me. I still have a lot of internalized racism but I’m working through it. Being an ELF helped me begin to combat that. I hate myself less. For me, growing up in Lexington, Kentucky, it has been really hard to be Asian American in this country and not feel normal. There were years of my life where I’ve really internalized a lot of shame and hate and other negative emotions of being Chinese.”

Engaging Alumni & Ongoing Support to Fellows

We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.
We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation
in realizing that. This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well. It may be incomplete,
but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
We may never see the end results, but that is the difference
between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

-A Future Not Our Own poem
attributed to Oscar Romero

With a strong commitment to the movement for social justice, Seeding Change alumni are engaged in this work all over the United States and Canada. We are creating an ecosystem of people who are part of our broader network. In the past years, we have had alumni who are interested in staying connected to Seeding Change. Alums of different class years have supported and contributed to Seeding Change by supporting recruitment and regional activities over the summer, developing curriculum, being host site supervisors, showing up to dinner series with new classes of fellows, supporting new fellows by showing they are a part of their community, and coming out to organizational

events. They also have applied for and participated as resident assistants during orientation week as well as joining the National Asian American Coaching Circle for Organizers.

We are looking forward to building out our alumni network to continue to keep people connected, to share resources with each other, and to continue to make waves across the world.



Alums reunited at a conference hosted by Asian Americans Advancing Justice. [A group of 11 people in two rows smile into the camera holding different black signs with orange text such as “Hmong,” “worker,” and “queer.”]



Seeding Change fellows and alums attended protests hosted by The Rising Majority to oppose Trump’s zero-tolerance immigration policies. [A group of 11 people look into the camera. The front row holds 3 signs that read “Families belong together and free” in English and Chinese, another sign in Chinese, and another sign says “No ban, no wall, no cages, free our futures.”]

Relationship to Other Seeding Change Programs

National Asian American Peer Coaching Circle for Organizers

The National Asian American Peer Coaching Circle for Organizers supports young Asian American organizers to thrive in their work, organize for the long haul, and transform our communities and society towards justice, love, and equity. The Coaching Circle develops the capacity of emerging organizers by increasing their skills to communicate, manage and navigate the emotional stress and pressures that comes with organizing. Through the Coaching Circle, Asian American organizers join a community of peers to:

- Learn more about what is important to themselves and their lives
- Celebrate their strengths and contributions
- Acknowledge challenges of organizing for systemic change and honor what they are learning
- Organize, live, and play with more sustainability and joy

It was first piloted in 2013 in the San Francisco Bay Area (Ohlone land) to provide support to a small group of graduates of the Eva Lowe Fellowship. At this time, the circle participants received coaching from a certified life coach and former organizer. As the participants received support, they also gained more skills in coaching each other. In 2015, the model shifted towards training the organizers to coach each other as peers. Peer coaches learned how to ask coaching questions, how to practice self-compassion, and explore core values. In 2016, the Peer Coaching Circle went national and it has grown to support organizers across the country and Canada.

Since its launch, it has supported over 90 young Asian American organizers. The coaching circles are facilitated by a crew of organizers and volunteer coaches. The program begins with an in-person training and then participants are grouped into specific peer coaching pods relevant to either their identity or work area, where they then engage in monthly conference calls with a commitment of six months. Pods in the past have included West Coast, Queer and Trans, Youth Workers, East Coast Labor, West Coast Labor, and Southeast Asian circles. Each participant both received and provided coaching.

“Coaching circle transformed the way I engage with my work as an organizer. It reminds me that my community and I are resourceFULL to continue building and supporting each other.”

“It was really helpful to talk about issues out loud with other folks who have a third party perspective and aren’t super familiar with your organization - to be able to process out loud thoughts and actions I’m planning to take.”

“



Seeding Change was a transformative space for me to continue thinking about my intersecting identities as a Bangladeshi, Muslim, working-class, undocumented person (and more). It is where I formed some of my closest friendships and got to further develop my political thinking and praxis, both with my cohort mates and at my host site, for which I'm deeply grateful. It continues to be a wonderful network for me in which I feel at home, held and cared for by a wider community.

— Israt Audry c/o 2017,
Desis Rising Up and Moving

Since Seeding Change, Israt received a Masters in Social Work from the University of Washington. Professionally, they are now working as a Clinical Oncology Social Worker.

Closing

The Future: A Movement Ecosystem

When we decided to start Seeding Change eight years ago, we envisioned an Asian American movement-building vehicle, one that was explicitly building up the next generation of Asian American organizers and activists. In Seeding Change, we envision a leadership pathway of young activists and organizers who see us as one of their political homes, where they get to explore questions about what it means to be Asian/Asian American in the United States and be in practice around building a broader movement for social justice.

Through the Seeding Change Fellowship, we hope that people will understand that the broader movement for social justice includes them even if they may not become staff organizers - that they are committed to bringing their experiences, learnings, and skills back to wherever they are going - whether that is back to their organization, their campus, their activist spaces, or new spaces they are a part of forming. Everyone has a role to play in fighting injustice and building the world that we need to survive and thrive. We are excited to see what the future brings as we continue to plant seeds that grow.



seeding/change

A Center for Asian American Movement Building