

AAPI CREATIVE PLACEMAKING LEARNING CIRCLE

STATEMENT ON OUR VISION, VALUES AND PRACTICE

The AAPI Creative Placemaking Learning Circle is an initiative of the National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development, developed in partnership with our members and funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, NeighborWorks America and the Kresge Foundation.

We are organizations committed to the equitable development and preservation of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities across the country. We believe that our neighborhoods hold social, spiritual, cultural, political and economic importance.

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community development organizations like ours have long practiced an asset-based approach of creative placemaking — before ‘creative placemaking’ was even a term. Our approaches have positioned the arts and cultural traditions as a vehicle for cultivating community social cohesion, building awareness of and organizing around changing social policy, driving economic development, and solving place-based challenges.

Over the course of our work, our organizations have experienced significant challenges (eg — commodification of culture, gentrification, displacement) as well as realized tremendous opportunity (eg — revitalizing traditional practices). While the AAPI community development movement is fighting for ‘place’, what we are truly centering in this work are our people, our cultures, our histories, and hope and opportunity for our future generations. We are creating a sense of belonging¹ for our communities that have long been disenfranchised by institutionalized racism and colonization.

Thus, we offer a perspective on creative placemaking and community development that is unique from the white western dominant culture. Our vision, values and practice below seek to articulate why and how we will create inclusive and equitable communities.

OUR VISION

The members of this group seek to build a beloved community² within Asian American and Pacific Islander neighborhoods. A beloved community is one in which:

- 1 We are part of an intersectional movement for equity.** The AAPI community development movement is most successful when we work alongside the struggles of other low-income, indigenous, and people of color. We are only able to truly contribute to an intersectional movement when we acknowledge our own privilege, while also honoring the diverse experiences within our community.
- 2 Our communities exercise self-determination as liberation.** Equity can only be attained when decisions are driven by and for community members themselves. By honoring these individuals as the experts in their own lived experiences, our communities benefit from the intrinsic leadership and knowledge that is essential to sustaining a place of belonging, authentic culture, and alternative economies that address economic injustice.
- 3 Our communities feel they belong.** For AAPIs and other communities of color, the politics of belonging are shaped by this country’s institutionalization of racism and colonization. The AAPI community development movement is most successful when we create spaces that are welcoming, reflect the lived experiences of our people and foster community power.

OUR VALUES

We uphold the following values for engaging with diverse AAPI communities in our creative placemaking work, which are foundation for building a beloved community:

- 1 Artists and Culture bearers are the leaders in our work who bring others along — and not just tools for getting the work done.** We define culture bearers as individuals who carry and transmit cultural values, traits and practices between communities. Much like our definition of arts and culture is expansive, our definition of culture bearer must be equally as inclusive. Elders, youth, artists, spiritual leaders, business owners — these many constituent groups have the assets and knowledge, framed within our AAPI cultural practices and ways of knowing, to contribute and guide us. We see the artist in everyone. By lifting up artists and cultural bearers in our work, we create greater equity in practice, accessing resources and decision-making.
- 2 In order to be equitable and inclusive, our definition of arts and culture must be expansive.** Arts and culture in our community are both tangible and intangible. It is self-defined and fluid in community practice. Arts and culture is learned — passed on by ancestors and also shaped by the public sphere. It can be found in the cultural institutions that exist in our neighborhoods, such as taiko dojos, temples, or museums; in our rituals and celebrations like Lion Dances or Pig Roasts; as well as in the ways in which we greet our neighborhood elders as ‘Kapuna’ or ‘Pau Pau’. It is reflected in our local businesses, expressed by our faith and spiritual institutions, in our housing choices and design.
- 3 Art and culture is an inherent expression of our communities and is vital to our sustainability and growth.** AAPI communities are diverse and ever-changing in response to broader economic, political and systemic forces. Thus, art and culture within our communities changes and adapts alongside our people while also continuing to honor specific and important traditions and institutional memory that sustains us for generations. Arts and culture should not be commodified, appropriated or colonized. It is a means of resistance and a means of bringing us together and imagining new futures. It is a force for recognizing and valuing our people and customs; it can reclaim our lost or ignored histories and promote collective liberation and freedom. Art and culture is a key element in building a movement against the institutional racism and oppression that prevents BIPOC and other communities from accessing the resources they need to truly thrive.
- 4 We have a responsibility to place.** We are committed to connecting place to the cultures, stories and people who have called it home — from indigenous populations that have for centuries guarded sacred lands to waves of settlers and immigrants who now call the place home. These neighborhoods and communities have been a gateways to opportunity and well-being, an economic, social and cultural hub in the face of race, class, poverty and discrimination. The impacts of outside forces, such as red lining, interment, alien exclusion acts, and redlining have been passed down through generations. But our communities have become rich, vibrant spaces of expression and pride. In acknowledgement of our ancestors, and for our future generations, we must honor our reciprocal relationship between people and space.
- 5 We have responsibility to each other.** We value respectful communication, collective care and healing. We believe this responsibility transcends generations, that we must commit ourselves to work that considers the well-being of children, families and futures we may not see (kodomono tamei ni). We build community through a multi-generational lens, and cultivate new and future generations of leaders.
- 6 We honor the diversity of our community and neighborhoods, and work in solidarity alongside other BIPOC communities toward creating equitable places.** We reject one/ single way of being and invite other ways of sharing and transmitting knowledge. Our cultural values and ways of knowing are not universal across all AAPI communities, and thus, our creative placemaking work looks very different depending on if you are an organization working with the Southeast Asian refugee community, or the Native Hawaiian community, or long-standing Japanese American and Chinese American enclaves. Yet we find commonalities in the connection to our roots and the wisdom of our ancestors. The AAPI community is diverse and complex — and similarly, AAPIs are more likely to live in racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods that are also home to other BIPOC.

OUR PRACTICE

- 1 We are joyful in our work.**
- 2 Our approach is cohesive, connected, and comprehensive.** Community development requires a whole-person approach. We acknowledge that in order to create vibrant, healthy communities, we must have interconnected and comprehensive strategies and approaches that break across silos (of sectors, class, culture, etc.) and bring together partners in collaboration. We honor the different ways of knowing.
- 3 We are here as a safe space to experiment, play, fail, learn, grow and reflect.** We are consciously creating a space together, and we all have the responsibility to sustain this space with each other and within our communities. We are open to failure and making mistakes. And we recognize that given the diversity of our communities, our strategies may look different in different places and contexts.
- 4 Our communities will exercise self-determination and community control.** Decisions should be driven by and for community members themselves. Therefore, we as practitioners must be responsive, this work needs to be able to shift and respond to the needs, threats, opportunities and vision of the community.

¹ Roberto Bedoya, Creative Placemaking and the Politics of Belonging and Dis-belonging

² MLK, Jr. “Beloved Community” — <https://thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy/>

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