

CASE STUDY

T.T. & W.F. CHAO SENIOR CENTER

LOCATION: HOUSTON, TX

TOTAL PROJECT COST: \$7.5 MM

PROJECT STATUS: COMPLETED IN 2019

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS:

- 20,000 SF COMMUNITY FACILITY
- STATE-LICENSED ADULT CARE CENTER FOR OLDER ADULTS AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES
- MULTI-PURPOSE AUDITORIUM AND CONFERENCE/OFFICE SUITES
- RECREATION CENTER FOR AT-RISK YOUTH AND DISASTER RESPONSE SHELTER

PROJECT DEVELOPER: CHINESE COMMUNITY CENTER



PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 2019, shortly before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese Community Center (CCC) completed construction of the T.T. & W.F. Chao Senior Center. The Senior Center was the second expansion that the organization had completed since its founding — and represented a significant milestone in their efforts to meet the increasing need for community and service-delivery space for Houston’s growing Asian American community. This facility was part of CCC’s vision for creating a community gathering space for Asian American in Houston, which had never before existed — and the need for this was validated through a rigorous community needs assessment.

In its first few months, the Senior Center sat vacant because of the local shelter-in-place protocols instituted to reduce transmission of the COVID-19 virus. But it became apparent that the Senior Center was in fact an ideal place for staging emergency response and relief efforts that allowed for serving clients safely. Houston’s local health department was able to conduct educational seminars on COVID-19 that helped to reduce stigma and provide important education on the virus — which was critical at the time given growing anti-Asian sentiment. Following the increase in xenophobia-fueled [anti-Asian violence](#), the Senior Center served as both a physical and



metaphorical ‘safe space’ for healing. CCC’s Executive Director, Chi-mei Lin says, “This Senior Center was a way to build power. We have this space — and it’s not just a venue. It represents our community, a place that is ours that helps AAPIs in Houston to unify and come together.” The Senior Center helped to increase visibility of the local Asian American community — and [celebrate the contributions of local Asian Americans](#) that were fighting on the frontlines of the pandemic.

CCC’s development of the T.T. and W.F. Chao Senior Center is a success story that many other Asian American, and Native Hawaiian and Pacific-Islander (AA & NHPI) serving community based organizations hope to replicate. Other National CAPACD members also seek to create a sense of belonging, carve out safe spaces that celebrate their culture, and to amplify and increase visibility of AA & NHPIs in their area.

NEED

Although CCC's project is completed and they do not need to borrow from National CAPACD's CDFI, their project illustrates the importance of investing in the development of AA & NHPI community commercial spaces. These types of facilities contribute significantly to the social and cultural resilience of historically marginalized populations, particularly in times of crisis — as CCC has demonstrated so clearly in this case.

CCC was only able to successfully complete this project because of hard lessons it learned from its first renovation of a new office space and construction of a community gym —

completed in 2007, funded primarily through a capital campaign.

Many organizations across the country, from the South Asian community in Queens, NY, to the Filipino community in Sacramento, CA have been attempting to build such types of spaces for decades. The Our Neighborhoods Capital Fund, National CAPACD's CDFI, could be catalytic for getting these types of projects off the ground with groups who are not typically real estate developers, but seek to create spaces of belonging for AA & NHPI community members.

ABOUT CCC

The mission of [Chinese Community Center](#) (CCC) in Houston, TX is to bridge East and West by enriching families with educational, cultural, and social service programs. CCC meets the varied needs of Houston's Asian American community by supporting the learning and positive development of children and youth; helping people from low- to moderate-income households achieve financial resilience; helping older adults maintain their health, well-being, and connection to community; helping immigrants integrate successfully into American society; and promoting cultural awareness and appreciation for the breadth of Greater Houston's diversity. Today, CCC serves more than 20,000 people annually.

According to the U.S. Census, Asian Americans were the fastest growing racial group in Houston between 2010 and 2020. The exponential population growth in Houston makes the city one of 10 cities in the US with the largest AA & NHPI populations today. As the area's Asian American population has grown, so has the need for CCC to expand and diversify their services and programming. Today, CCC is the only housing counseling agency in Texas approved to offer services in Mandarin, and is one of only three housing counseling agencies in the state approved to offer services in Vietnamese.

INVESTING IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS

It doesn't have to only be CDCs that do these types of projects. National CAPACD's new CDFI could offer much support to emerging agencies. By offering technical assistance and low-interest loans, it would help organizations to get out of the scarcity mindset into an investing mindset — where we are focusing on opportunity.

- Chi-mei Lin, Executive Director of Chinese Community Center

