Political Capacity



Adhikaar organizes Nepali-speaking immigrants so that they can have a voice in determining policies that affect them.

Political capacity is an organization's ability to build, support, and activate community power to shape decisions, influence policy, and participate meaningfully in civic life. For community-based organizations, political capacity means equipping staff and residents—especially those historically excluded from power—with the tools, access, and confidence to engage in democratic processes and accountable governance to shape systems that impact their lives.

Political capacity may include:

- Creating accessible, ongoing opportunities for communities to learn about, participate in, and influence civic processes (civic engagement);
- Sharing power internally and externally by supporting community members to lead within organizations and public systems (leadership in decision-making); and
- Organizing and advocating to advance policy changes driven by community priorities and grounded in lived experience (policy influence).

In short, political capacity is about moving from participation to power—ensuring that communities are not only heard, but are actively shaping the decisions that affect them.

How Adhikaar for Human Rights and Social Justice Builds Political Capacity

Based in Jackson Heights, New York, Adhikaar for Human Rights and Social Justice is a women-led community and workers' center that provides direct services to the Nepali-speaking community and organizes low-income workers and impacted community members to promote social justice and human rights. Adhikaar's programs provide Nepali-speaking immigrants with limited English proficiency opportunities to access information, connect with one another, build skills, and advocate for themselves. One program is the English language program that provides more than just language skills. These classes offer a path to confidence, independence, and better opportunities. Members are able to navigate daily life, access services, and pursue jobs more effectively, thereby enhancing their overall sense of belonging and self-reliance.

Another example is Adhikaar's workforce training programs, including those for nail salon workers and domestic workers. These programs not only equip individuals with practical job skills but also foster awareness of workers' rights and safe labor practices, contributing to long-term economic empowerment. Many of its members then also take on leadership roles in advocacy campaigns—demonstrating clear leadership development and community mobilization.

Additionally, Adhikaar plays a vital role in supporting youth who often feel culturally isolated in schools and other public spaces. By connecting young people with others who share their language and cultural background, Adhikaar fosters emotional well-being, identity development, and leadership potential. These programs demonstrate its investment in building the skills, confidence, and social connections that allow community members to thrive. A key factor that enhanced the success of all these initiatives is its culturally rooted, linguistically accessible approach.

By offering services in Nepali and creating a safe, welcoming environment, Adhikaar is able to remove significant barriers to participation and learning, particularly for those with limited English proficiency. For many members, Adhikaar feels like a second home, a place where they can trust others, learn, grow, and feel a sense of belonging. Its holistic and intergenerational model ensures that support is not limited to one demographic. Adults, workers, and youth alike find relevant programs that speak to their specific needs, which helps build capacity not only at the individual level but also across families and communities. Adhikaar programs are also focused on real-life needs, whether it's learning English, getting job training, or building community, each program helps members improve their everyday lives.