



# RESISTANCE RESILIENCE REFORM

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STORYTELLING AS AN ADVOCACY  
TOOL FOR THE AAPI DIASPORA

**CACF**

AAPI STORIES ARE ROOTED IN POWER

# INTRODUCTION

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Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) stories matter. Our stories are rooted in the manifestation of power, diversity, and the amplification of our cultures. The AAPI Diaspora is diverse in languages, traditions, cultures, and ethnicities where our voices are unique and individualistic. It is through the storytelling of individuals who comprise our community, the collectives that advocate for representation, and the shared struggle of policies that have prevented social progress and justice by which we can identify common issues and cultivate solutions to address them.

AAPI storytelling is becoming more important than ever, as our diaspora continues to grow across New York. Our voices can no longer be ignored, and collectively we can make sure they won't.

# PURPOSE

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To provide insight and amplify the stories of individuals and communities about the experiences of living as AAPI people in New York. In creating this toolkit, we hope to both empower the collective experiences and illuminate the collective struggles that our communities face.

**The primary goal of this toolkit is to assist community- and advocacy-based organizations on how to build narratives and cultivate effective testimonials and community driven stories centered around the AAPI Diaspora as an asset to effect positive impact and promote social justice.**

We hope that upon reading these stories, we can illuminate the lived experiences of individuals and communities that comprise our diverse diaspora, and ensure that we disrupt the truth of our communities being "Othered" and create a platform to ensure that our voices no longer remain unheard.

# BE INTENFUL AND THOUGHTFUL

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- Be clear about your intentions and maintain transparency throughout the process of gathering and sharing AAPI stories.
- Ensure that individuals and communities feel seen, heard and respected. Ensure those who have stories to tell have agency in the storytelling process.
- Understand and inform individuals and the community of the risks and benefits of sharing their stories, particularly if they have a pending legal case.
- When facilitating an interview with the press, ensure that individuals are fully informed and help them prepare to share their story.
- When asking individuals and the community to share their story as part of an advocacy campaign, build a relationship before asking them to share their story, and stay connected with them after the project is complete.
- Develop ongoing, professional relationships with individuals and communities.

# STORYTELLING AND ADVOCACY

Storytelling within activist spaces can be defined as a specific anecdote or series of events that connect others to your cause at an emotional level. Stories told should be based in a personal anecdote, which makes them compelling and emotional to others, as it appeals to empathy.

A story should have a “why,” otherwise a purpose for why that story is being told to justify your cause. This essentially acts as a lesson for the listener to take away from the experience.

This “why” can be expanded upon with a greater call to action. The call to action is similar to the “why,” as it shows the importance of your story, but there is a difference. Whereas the “why” is more of a self contained lesson for the story, the call to action ties the story and the lesson to a greater social cause or movement that your advocacy is directed towards, showing how this personal story isn’t just an isolated incident. A call to action can incorporate data to help sell this point. The call to action essentially shapes the story into a bigger picture.

A call to action can also include a “how” section, which serves to illustrate what your plan/strategy is to address the issues your story talked about. A “how” section can also be used to appeal to your organization’s credentials.

Apart from the “why,” call to action, and “how”, other features of a story include a narrative structure. This being a clear protagonist, or main character(s)/individual(s) the story is following, a challenge that they’re facing, how this was addressed and the outcome, and the lesson.

Storytelling in activist spaces should be rooted in personal anecdotes and experiences, but these personal experiences can be so much more than self-expression. When you tell your own story you pick which details you share, this includes your struggles, your choices, your lessons. Storytelling unravels your unique moral character and perspectives, which you can then share with others. Storytelling in activist spaces can and should be a leadership tool that can be used to inspire others, and most importantly show them why they should work with you and your cause. This can be better understood through the story of self, us, and now.

## THE SELF

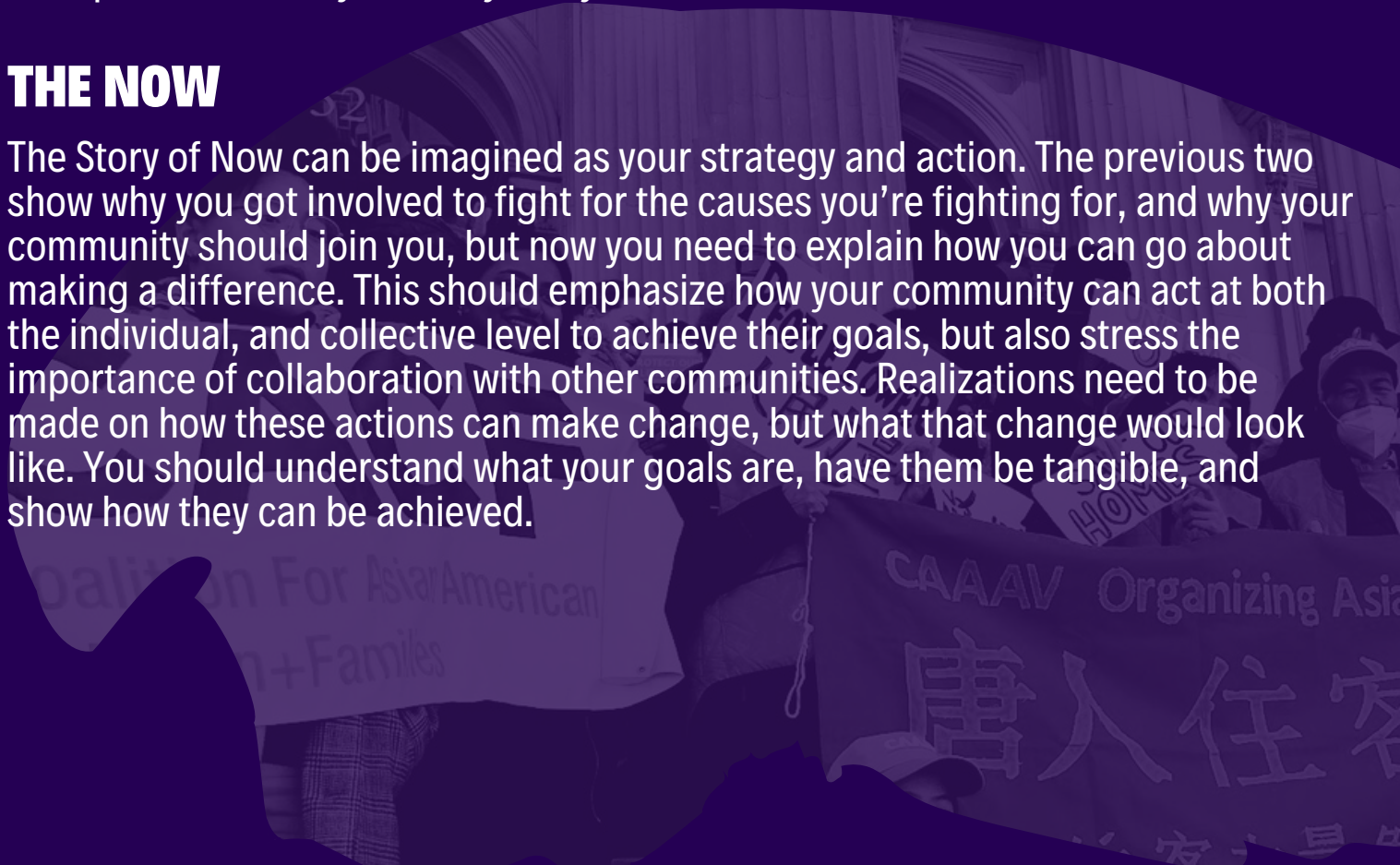
The Story of Self can be imagined as your call to leadership, and why you became who you are. Think about why you were motivated to get involved, what challenges triggered that, the choices you made, and the values that those experiences instilled in you. When thinking about a story to tell, especially one that will be used to motivate others, these questions have to be asked as they offer insight into your motivations, your values, and why they should be heard.

## THE US

The Story of Us can be imagined as connecting the values and experiences that motivate you to broader values that members of your community share or experiences that are common or relatable within your community. The idea of “us” or your community is what you make of it, “us” can be the ethnic diaspora you feel attached to you, your religion, a pan regional diaspora etc. but it is important that you understand which of these you’re speaking to. Look at this “us” and find shared experiences and values that motivate the community at large, and how you can speak to that in your story and your own individual motivation.

## THE NOW

The Story of Now can be imagined as your strategy and action. The previous two show why you got involved to fight for the causes you’re fighting for, and why your community should join you, but now you need to explain how you can go about making a difference. This should emphasize how your community can act at both the individual, and collective level to achieve their goals, but also stress the importance of collaboration with other communities. Realizations need to be made on how these actions can make change, but what that change would look like. You should understand what your goals are, have them be tangible, and show how they can be achieved.



# WHAT IS AAPI POWER?

AAPI POWER COMPRISES A VARIETY OF THINGS —  
ACTIVISM, RESILIENCE, RESISTANCE, DIVERSITY, CULTURE.

Advocates who mobilize to reform an education system to illuminate AAPI History, Coalitions who fight for an equitable budget that invests in AAPI communities, Youth who answer the call of social justice, Communities demanding to be represented in government data, and Leaders who disrupt racial inequities in the healthcare system.

Our stories are our history, such as an immigrant daring to dream and build a new life, youth who challenge the model minority and status quo, elders who pass down languages and traditions, and so many more.

**We encourage you to celebrate AAPI stories and the power they hold.**

THOUGHT EXERCISE



## WHAT DOES AAPI POWER MEAN TO YOU?

# POWER IS ROOTED IN

- Youth who challenge the status quo and stand up against complacency and the “model minority”
- Grassroots coalitions that advocate for governmental transparency and accountability
- Parents and elders resisting pressures of conformity and amplifying our cultures, traditions, and languages
- Advocates who are empowered to dismantle the patriarchy and liberate LGBTQIA+ rights
- Immigrants, migrants, and refugees steadfast in their conviction to be seen and heard
- Movements to ensure that corporate interests do not exploit low income and working class communities
- Collectives confronting the Eurocentric views to history that ignore the deeply rooted history of AAPI communities and other communities of color
- Activists who oppose pipelines to deportation and incarceration

## **YELLOW CAB STRIKES**

The 1998 Yellow Cab Strike was a landmark incident that illustrated the collective power of the AAPI community in creating change. Headed by founders Bhairavi Desai, Biju Mathew, and Javaid Tariq, the predominantly South Asian taxi drivers struck over excessive fines from the Taxi and Limousine Commission, discrimination they faced on the job, and poor wages. The coalition united South Asian taxi drivers of different backgrounds through focusing on inclusivity, shared kinship, and collective issues. Though the strikes initially failed, the coalition made waves within city politics, growing into the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, and using its rhetoric of kinship to not just unite South Asians, but to become a truly multiethnic coalition that later had incredible success advocating for taxi drivers in the city.

## **LAU V. NICHOLS**

Lau v. Nichols was a court case heard in 1973, and was a major victory for the AAPI community over language accessibility in public schools. After schools in San Francisco officially desegregated, many Chinese students found themselves in classrooms that were exclusively taught in English, but had little knowledge of the language. The school district in response offered little assistance to these students, many forced into special education classes or forced to repeat classes. The Chinese community in the city, led by the students who were suffering, fought back, filing a class action lawsuit that eventually made its way to the supreme court. The decision was unanimous, and led to the further institutionalization of language access and bilingual education, which had a ripple effect outside of the AAPI community.

## **FIGHTING AGAINST UNJUST DEPORTATION**

In 2002, changes to US refugee law saw the unjust deportation of permanent US residents over decades old non-violent offenses, one community targeted was the Cambodian community. Instituted in the height of xenophobia against immigrants following 9/11, countries like Cambodia were pressured into signing deportation agreements for US residents who committed petty crimes such as marijuana possession. Hundreds of US residents of Cambodian heritage, many of whom had fled as children and had no knowledge of Cambodia or Khmer, and were separated from their families. This triggered responses from advocacy groups such as the Southeast Asian Freedom Network who stood up for these residents in the face of government tyranny, fighting against a problem that persists to this day. The decade of work done by Southeast Asian advocacy groups led to the introduction of the Southeast Asian Deportation Relief Act of 2022.

# **THIS IS AAPI POWER**



# **SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER**

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- Utilize a picture or headshot to accompany the following stories
- Accumulate video responses from the community
- Create a comfortable atmosphere for the individual to record their response
- Be clear and transparent that the story will be used for advocacy and external purposes
- Add specific questions to expand relevance to your specific community
- Explain an important picture of your family or heritage

# THE STORY OF SELF

- What is your name?
- What ethnicity do you identify as? Where are you or is your family originally from?
- What does your culture mean to you?
- What does a typical day in your life look like?
- What do you do for a living? What motivates you to do that and why?
- What challenges do you face on a typical day? What challenges make a day in your life difficult?
- Why are those challenges present? How do you think they can be overcome?
- What does quality, accessible, and affordable mean to you?
- What is a key moment that impacted your life? How did it impact you?
- What is a problem that you or your family faced in the past living in NYC? How has that problem changed today if at all? Why did it change?
- What is something that you believe people need to live a good life in NYC? Does your family have access to that? Do you think most families have access to that?
- What are some obstacles (if any) that may prevent you from the life you want to live in NYC?

# MEET GURSIMRAN PADDA

AGE: 21

QUEENS VILLAGE, NEW YORK

My name is Gursimran Padda. I identify as Punjabi ethnically, but also with the broader Indian, and Desi community. My parents are originally from India. My cultural background, to me, represents resilience in the face of adversity. Despite colonial domination from the British, violence during the breakup of India and Pakistan which particularly was damaging to border communities like Punjab, modern day ethnic violence in India, or even pressures to leave Punjabi culture behind, I'm still here. I come from a part of the world that is no stranger to violence and oppression, and depending on the time it seems inescapable in the US too, but my family, and others like us, have still persevered and kept our culture strong.

A typical day in my life involves trying to learn new things and develop my skills while I have the time and opportunity to. Within a day I try to balance this while also helping my family, working, and doing school work. Currently I work as a budget policy intern with CACF. What motivates me to do this is the feeling of giving back to the AAPI community. I know the majority of our community in the City has ties to immigrants, whether their grandparents or parents came, or if they came. I recognize through my own family story how difficult this can be, and how not everything that is available to you is immediately apparent or even accessible. It motivates me to help and give back.

Quality, accessible, and affordable, and what they mean to me, tie back to this previous question. For something to be both quality and accessible would mean for everything to be apparent and available to those that need it. This means having services that cater to cultural and linguistic needs, with such services being provided by professionals or those knowledgeable. The aspect of affordability would be another side to accessibility, making sure services are available to those that need it with a low or non-existent barrier to entry in terms of both money, but also time.

A key moment that impacted my life was when I spoke to my Mom about when she first came to the US. She told me about how she wanted to be a teacher back in India, and that she always wanted to teach biology. When she came here, it wasn't that she could no longer achieve these dreams, but that it just became harder. She had to start working immediately, she didn't have time to go to school. She ended up taking night classes at Queens College, but there was no guidance for her on how to move forward and become a full time student. Her parents, my grandparents, and the Indian community as a whole, were quite new in the City and as such had no knowledge on how to assist her, with part of the issue there being the language barrier. My mom told me that when she first came here she'd work and see students going to school and feel like crying, feeling that the lack of accessibility took away her opportunity to do the same thing. What kept her going was knowing that hopefully it would only be her who felt this way, and not me. The story impacted me as it showed me how a lack of accessibility to services can put you at a disadvantage, effectively trapping you from achieving anything in spite of your own qualifications. It also showed the struggles of new immigrants, and how much of a sacrifice it really is to be first generation. Whenever times get tough at school or at work, I think of this story to motivate and keep me going. I'm not doing what I'm doing just for me, but for my Mom too.

The main problem that my family has faced living in New York was, and continues to be, culturally and linguistically accessible services. I pointed out previously the story of my Mom, but my Grandparents still don't speak English very well. Whenever they need to make a call to the medicare office, they need either my parents or myself present to translate for them. I've been going to the pharmacy with my Grandma since I was a little kid to help translate. This issue I feel still hasn't improved.





# THE STORY OF US

- What would you define as your community? Why?
- What is the history of your community in New York?
- What do you enjoy most about being part of your community? What are some memories you hold about your community?
- When did you first become aware of yourself as a member of your community? What does power mean to your community?
- Who do you think of if you were asked to describe an important member of your community? Why do you think of them? How has this leader advocated for your community?
- What are the most important challenges in your community? Is that problem internal or external?
- What is the biggest myth people believe about your community?
- What is an issue that you believe your community is overlooking?
- Do you think other communities face similar issues? Give an example of a story you heard from someone else.

# MEET YU HIN YU

## AGE: 21

### MILL BASIN, NEW YORK

When I think of my "community," the Chinese American diaspora in New York is what comes to mind. This community is a vibrant tapestry, intertwining the historical roots of China with the modern hustle of the Big Apple. The history of the Chinese American community in New York can be traced back to the 1850s when the first immigrants arrived in search of a better life. They faced adversity, from exclusionary laws to racist sentiments. However, they built a tight-knit community, establishing what we now know as Chinatown in Manhattan.

Being part of this community is a unique experience. It's an amalgamation of East and West, old traditions and new beginnings. I cherish memories of celebrating Lunar New Year, where the loud sounds of firecrackers were as prominent as the skyscrapers surrounding us.

My realization of being a part of this community was during a Chinese school event when I danced the lion dance, embodying the spirit of my ancestors and the resilience of my community. Power, for us, isn't about dominance but about unity, resilience, and understanding.

When asked about an important member of our community, I think of Maya Lin. As the designer of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., Lin carved a space for Asian Americans in U.S. history. Her advocacy has been subtle, yet powerful, emphasizing the importance of representation and respect for our community.

However, challenges persist. The rise in anti-Asian hate crimes, especially post-COVID-19, is an external problem that deeply affects us. Internally, the generational divide between older immigrants and American-born Chinese is a rift that needs addressing. The myth that many believe is that we are the "model minority", an oversimplified view that overlooks the struggles we face, from language barriers to discrimination. Another issue that is severely overlooked within the community is mental health. The cultural emphasis on resilience and stoicism often prevents individuals from seeking help. Struggles of racial prejudice resonate in other communities as well. A friend from the Mexican-American community once shared stories of discrimination, echoing the challenges my community faces.

To address these problems, open dialogue is essential. Intergenerational conversations can bridge the gap within, while inter-community discussions can forge alliances with others.

Personally, I strive to inspire change by being an advocate for cultural understanding in schools and workplaces. Our community, united, can push for representation in media, policy-making, and other sectors.

If I were to create a community event, it would be a "Culture Exchange Fest." A day where diverse communities share their traditions, food, and stories. It's not only about highlighting our community but learning from others, fostering mutual respect.

Awareness is the first step to addressing these issues. Following that, we must be proactive, whether it's through peaceful demonstrations, community outreach, or mentorship programs. I believe that by understanding our history, celebrating our achievements, and confronting our challenges head-on, the Chinese-American community can inspire change and continue to be a testament to resilience and unity in New York.





# THE STORY OF NOW

- Now that you've thought about problems that you or your community have experienced, both present and current, what do you think needs to happen to address these problems?
- What do you think you can do to inspire change in your community?
- What can your community do as a collective to address these problems?
- Imagine that you were tasked to create a community event, either to address a present problem or try to inspire others to a cause you're passionate about, what would that event be and why?

## NOTES:

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# HERE IS AN EXAMPLE RESPONSE OF INCORPORATING THE STORY OF SELF, US, AND NOW

My name is Gursimran Padda, I identify myself as part of the Punjabi, Indian, and Desi communities in New York City. Both my parents are originally from Punjab, India. My cultural background means a lot to me and has motivated me to get involved with CACF. Hearing stories of resilience in the Greater New York area, whether that be the 90s Yellow Cab protests, or standing up against the racist “dotbusters” movement in New Jersey, has shown me what can happen when members of the community stand together and fight for their right to simply exist in America without facing discrimination in their work or in their daily lives.

I first became aware as a member of my community after a shooting at a Gurdwara in Wisconsin made national news. I was only 10 years old when that happened, and had to grapple with the fact that people that look like me were shot and killed, purely because of how they looked. Despite this shadow cast over our community, we persevered. I remember going to my gurdwara the next day and seeing a press release, attended not just by my own community, but also by people of other backgrounds who came to show solidarity. Seeing so many different faces there to show support also made me aware of my community in Queens Village. This is what power means to me, it means people from all walks of life coming together to stand up for what’s right, it means pushing back and showing resilience to challenges that affect your community.

The problem of hate crimes isn’t something that just affects the larger Desi community, and is something that minority groups have always faced and continue to face in America. Within the larger AAPI space, I heard stories from my East Asian friends during COVID how they were scared to even go outside due to the rise in hate crimes. This showed to me that the solidarity I saw in 2012 cannot just be a one time thing, and must be backed by action.

I think I can inspire change in my community through getting involved within advocacy spaces. I joined CACF as an intern working on this storytelling guide, and through the assistance of the community around me, I was able to show how the use of narratives and storytelling can play a major role in advancing social movements. I hope my community, whether that be the Desi community or the larger AAPI community, can then make use of this guide and use their own stories to show legislators that our voices can no longer be ignored.



# REFLECTION EXERCISE

- What do you believe the strengths and purpose of storytelling is?
- What do you think was difficult about answering those questions? What was easy?
- What did those questions tell you about your own values? The values of your community?
- Try connecting the issues you've faced, the issues your community faces, and the policy responses of the city. How can this shape the narrative you're trying to tell and the strategy you'll use to make changes?
- How can you connect the challenges you and your community have faced to challenges of other communities?
- What questions would you ask that you felt were left out?

## NOTES:

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