Establishing & Sustaining Authentic AAPI Partnerships



Centering trust, lived expertise, and long-term reciprocity in marine conservation.

Authentic partnership with Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities is not a one-time engagement activity. It is a sustained practice built through relationship, accountability, shared power, and recognition of diverse cultural and place-based knowledge.

Engagement is strongest when communities help define the priorities, process, and measures of success.

Start with relationship

Invest time before asking for participation or endorsement.

Recognize diversity

Avoid treating AAPI communities as a monolith; account for distinct identities, languages, histories, and relationships to place.

Share power

Build community leadership into planning, decision-making, and implementation.

Sustain reciprocity

Return value, resources, information, and credit to community partners.

Principles for Building Trust Over Time.

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PRINCIPLE	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
1. Listen before leading	Enter with humility. Learn community priorities, concerns, and existing work before defining an engagement strategy.
2. Engage early and consistently	Bring partners in at the earliest stages—not after goals, timelines, or decisions are already set.
3. Compensate expertise	Community members contribute professional, cultural, and lived expertise. Budget for participation, translation, facilitation, and partnership infrastructure.
4. Make participation accessible	Adapt outreach, meeting formats, language access, scheduling, and communications to community needs.
5. Close the loop	Clearly communicate what was heard, what changed as a result, and what remains unresolved. Follow-through builds credibility.

Honorarium Guidance

Pay AAPI partners for the time and expertise you request, beginning with an introduction. Understand your mutual goals and allow the partner to help define a paid scope with you so that it is a shared enterprise.

Best practices:

- Budget for meeting preparation time, meeting time, and follow-up time.
- Account for costs, and provide clear interpretation, or other expenses separately when relevant.
- Ask whether payment should go to the organization or an individual, and a clear, prompt payment process; and never condition payment on endorsement of a decision to partner.

SOURCES
MPLACI Climates of Belonging (2026)
California climate investments (Proposition 4)
U.S. Census 2020/2021 estimator

Resources for Authentic AAPI Partnerships

Organizations and practical starting points for sustained AAPI engagement

The following lists of organizations are meant to be a starting point. The lists are not meant to be an endorsement of these organizations or meant to be a definitive resource. MPACN members are strongly encouraged to research and explore their local communities and do outreach with organizations engaged in these spaces.



Recommended next steps for collaboratives:

1. Start with listening to conversations.
2. Ask what ocean or coastal issues already matter to the community
3. Offer co-designed engagement, not pre-packaged programs
4. Budget for community partner compensation
5. Build relationships before funding deadlines
6. Create a project implementation deadline

Statewide / Multi-Region (California)

Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) Focus: Environmental justice, climate, power-building. Why relevant: Deep expertise in community-led environmental policy and organizing.

Asian Americans Advancing Justice - California Affiliates Focus: Civil rights, language access, policy advocacy. Why relevant: Language justice, civic engagement, data disaggregation.

Asian Pacific American Civic Engagement (APACE) Focus: Voter engagement, leadership development. Why relevant: Connecting ocean issues to civic power and public decision-making.

National CAPACD (California members) Focus: Community development, anti-displacement. Why relevant: Coastal access, housing, and environmental displacement.

Northern California (North Coast, Bay Area)

Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) Focus: Grassroots organizing, immigrant rights. Relevance: Trusted community partner engagement with working-class coastal users.

Oakland Asian Cultural Center Focus: Cultural preservation, community space. Relevance: Cultural programming and storytelling tied to land and water.

Filipino Advocates for Justice Focus: Youth leadership, civic engagement. Relevance: Youth pathways and leadership development.

Hmong Innovating Politics (HIP) Focus: Civic engagement, youth organizing. Relevance: Inland-coastal connections, refugee community leadership.

Central Coast (Monterey Bay, Santa Cruz, San Luis Obispo)

Fewer but highly strategic partners for place-based coastal engagement.

Monterey Bay Asian Cultural Association Focus: Cultural education and events. Relevance: Entry point for culturally grounded ocean engagement.

Building Healthy Communities Monterey County (AAPI partners)Focus: Health equity, community organizing. Relevance: Coastal access, environmental health framing.

Southern California (Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange County, San Diego)

Large, diverse AAPI populations with strong youth, arts, and justice movements.

Santa Barbara Asian American and Pacific Islander Solidarity Network Focus: Cultural connection, community. Relevance: Community development, cultural preservation.

Korean American Federation of Los Angeles Los Angeles Focus: Civic engagement, social services. Relevance: Voter education, policy engagement.

Thai Community Development Center Focus: Environmental justice, labor, displacement. Relevance: Model linking environmental, housing, and health justice.

Little Tokyo Service Center Focus: Community development, cultural preservation. Relevance: Place-based stewardship and anti-displacement.

Pacific Islander-Led Organizations (Cross-Regional)

Especially critical for ocean and marine stewardship, given ancestral ocean relationships.

Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC) Focus: Pacific Islander civic engagement, health, policy. Relevance: Ocean justice, health, policy.

Pacific Islander Education and Retention (PIER) Focus: Education, youth leadership. Relevance: Career pathway into conservation and policy.

Tongan Community Service Center Focus: Cultural preservation, social services. **Re**levance: Family-centered engagement, ocean culture.



Source: MPACN, AAPI Engagement in Marine Conservation (2026), Resources section.

SAMPLE PARTNER OUTREACH TEMPLATES [DRAFT]



The draft is meant to serve as starting points for engagement. They are meant to be tailored to your organization's mutual priorities and needs.

01 AAPI Organization Outreach

Note: The potential AAPI partner may already work on public policy, environmental health, access, or community leadership.

Subject: Exploring shared priorities for coastal access and stewardship.

Hello [Name],

I'm [name] with [organization], an MPACN member working on [local coastal or marine protected area work]. I've been learning about [specific initiative] and your organization's work on [priority]. I'm reaching out because decisions about coastal access and stewardship may intersect with issues your community is already addressing.

We would value your perspective on where that intersection is real - and where our organization may be missing it. We are interested in building a relationship before defining a project. If there is a useful opportunity to work together, your organization should help set the priorities, scope, and measures of success.

Would you be open to a 30-minute introductory conversation? We have budgeted for your partnership but would appreciate designing the paid scope in partnership with you.
. If there is mutual interest, we can follow up with discussion that clearly sets out roles and decision-making for the paid partnership.

Thank you for considering it.
[Name]
[Role, organization, contact]

Personalize: Cite a real initiative, explain the local overlap, and be prepared to hear that your proposed issue is not the partner's priority.