

SEPTEMBER 2025

STRONGER ORGANIZATIONS, STRONGER FIELD

Experiences from the ARP Support for Survivors Program



apigbv
ASIAN PACIFIC INSTITUTE
ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Welcome from Monica Khant

In March 2021, Congress passed the historic American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act at a critical moment, when the struggles and isolation of survivors were heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. With our 25-year history of serving survivors, API-GBV recognized the opportunity that these funds presented for Asian/Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander (AANHPI) and Middle Eastern (ME) survivors. While API-GBV has never served as a funder or grant maker, we were uniquely positioned to serve these communities in this role as an organization deeply grounded in their unique needs and experiences.

With the ARP funds, we sought to expand survivor services while also strengthening the infrastructure and capacity of organizations serving them. I understand the holistic support survivors need to heal and thrive. Having founded a local survivor-serving organization, and now leading API-GBV, I also recognize that the support and care that organizations themselves need is just as significant. Culturally-specific organizations serving AANHPI and ME survivors are powerhouses. They are experts navigating complex public systems and championing survivor needs and rights even with a limited budget and staff. Our central goal was to ensure organizations serving survivors left this program stronger, more resilient, and better equipped to address the service gaps in their community.



"I look back at API-GBV's experiences with the ARP Support for Survivors Program with pride, and our achievements would not have been possible without the passionate team behind all of it."

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "mmonica", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

- Monica Khant, CEO

I look back at API-GBV's experiences with the ARP Support for Survivors Program with pride, and our achievements would not have been possible without the passionate team behind all of it.

My deepest gratitude to the API-GBV team whose expertise, care, and dedication made this program a success. Our full appreciation to National Organization of Asians and Pacific Islanders Ending Sexual Violence (NAPIESV) for both their long-standing expertise and their partnership.

Finally, I send my best wishes, wholehearted appreciation, and solidarity to the grantees and all the culturally-specific organizations working with survivors every single day.

Introduction

Funded by the 2021 American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act, the Office of Family Violence Prevention and Services (OFVPS) awarded \$13.2 million to the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (API-GBV) to distribute to culturally-specific organizations that serve domestic violence and sexual assault survivors.

The ARP Act, which passed in March 2021, was an economic stimulus package designed to accelerate recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic and health impacts. A total of \$49.5 million was allocated to the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) program to award to culturally-specific domestic violence and sexual assault programs.

In partnership with the National Organization of Asians and Pacific Islanders Ending Sexual Violence (NAPIESV), API-GBV was one of five national culturally-specific centers selected to distribute funds to community-based organizations. NAPIESV provided expertise and technical assistance on supporting sexual assault survivors. API-GBV provided expertise and technical assistance on supporting domestic violence survivors.

Gender-based violence — domestic

violence and sexual assault, in particular — has often been overlooked in Asian/Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander (AANHPI), and Middle Eastern (ME) communities. Shelter-in-place mandates from the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the severity and frequency of racialized and gendered violence against AANHPI and ME individuals.

Although racism and misogyny toward AANHPI and ME women are not new, incidents of hate and violence spiked during the pandemic, fueled by xenophobia and anti-immigration sentiment. The April 2021 Atlanta spa shootings were a tragic example of how AANHPI and ME women, in particular, faced the violence that stemmed from their racial and gender identities.

The AANHPI and ME diaspora are highly diverse, with ancestral roots in more than 70 countries and ethnic groups across the

Asian continent and the Pacific Ocean. Amidst this diversity are a wide range of education levels, employment and income levels, migration histories, languages spoken, and levels of acculturation.

This report tells the story of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Support for Survivors Program, led by API-GBV. It draws upon program documents, surveys conducted by API-GBV's evaluation team, focus groups with select grantees, and interviews with API-GBV staff, NAPIESV staff, and external stakeholders familiar with the program. The report is organized into the following sections:

- **Overview of the ARP Support for Survivors Program.** Summary of program design, grantees selected, and the training and technical assistance offered.
- **Accomplishments: Stronger Programs and Services.** Overview of grantee accomplishments in strengthening survivor programs and services, including vignettes from three grantees.
- **Accomplishments: Greater Capacity for Organizations.** Overview of program accomplishments in bolstering capacity of program grantee organizations, plus vignettes from two grantees.
- **Lessons Learned for the Field and Potential Funders.** What API-GBV, NAPIESV, and grantees have learned about supporting culturally-specific organizations that serve survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.
- **Concluding Thoughts: A Call to Action**



Volunteers with Banteay Srei participate in a community engagement gathering, celebrating connection and shared commitment to supporting survivors.

Photo courtesy of Banteay Srei

Overview of the ARP Support for Survivors Program

In partnership with NAPIESV, API-GBV designed and implemented the ARP Support for Survivors Program to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on AANHPI and ME survivors in the United States.

To participate in the ARP Support for Survivors Program, funded organizations and projects must focus on preventing, preparing for, and responding to the impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency on survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault from AANHPI and ME communities in the United States. Program participants were required to either have 501(c)(3) nonprofit status with the IRS or be fiscally sponsored by a nonprofit organization with 501(c)(3) nonprofit status.

Goals of the program include:

i) Strengthening the capacity of community-based organizations to support the immediate needs of underserved AANHPI and ME survivors.

ii) Nurturing the growth and sustainability of community-based organizations serving AANHPI and ME survivors.

iii) Fostering collaboration and partnership among community-based organizations serving survivors.

iv) Respond to health disparities in the AANHPI and ME communities that have long affected survivors of gender-based violence and exacerbated by the pandemic.

v) Support AANHPI and ME community-based organizations in creating a disaster preparedness plan.

Outreach and Solicitation of Proposals

The ARP Support for Survivors Program was an unprecedented opportunity for community-based organizations serving survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

For the past decade and a half, the Department of Justice's Office of Violence

Against Women has disbursed between \$2 million and \$6 million annually to community-based organizations serving survivors. This grant, through the American Rescue Plan Act, totaled \$13.2 million in service for AANHPI and ME survivors alone. Other culturally-specific centers serving Black, Latino, Native American, and Alaska Native survivors received this grant as well to reach out to community-based organizations in their communities.

API-GBV and NAPIESV were intentional in leveraging these resources for long-term impact — strengthening organizational capacity and infrastructure, building long-term sustainability, developing tools and resources to guide future endeavors, and fostering a support network of community-based organizations. In their outreach and solicitation of proposals, they actively sought small community-based organizations and projects with annual budgets under \$1 million, and for whom this opportunity could be transformational. Many lacked 501(c)(3) nonprofit status and were fiscally sponsored — some participating organizations were entirely volunteer-run.

API-GBV and NAPIESV's shared commitment to supporting small community-based organizations translated into intentional and tailored outreach to seek applicants beyond their networks of typical partner organizations. After three months of intensive and targeted outreach, API-GBV and NAPIESV identified more than 150 community-based organizations serving AANHPI and ME survivors. Key features of

the outreach process included:

i) Community-informed proposal process.

A listening session with community-based organizations to inform an accessible proposal process. Themes included (i) reducing the time commitment needed to submit a proposal, (ii) simplifying the process, and (iii) ensuring accessibility to applicants with limited English proficiency.

ii) Informational webinars accessible to all time zones (from Eastern to Chamorro).

Two informational webinars were held to share details about the application and selection process, eligibility, and deadlines.

iii) Grant Writing 101 webinar. A session designed to support those who were new to proposal writing.

Selected Cohort of Grantees

The program received 92 proposals from the continental United States, Hawai'i, Alaska, and U.S. territories. API-GBV and NAPIESV selected 43 grantees, with 42 completing the program. One grant ended early due to nonperformance. As shown in Figure 1 on the next page, 39.5% of grantees served domestic violence survivors, 32.5% of grantees served sexual assault survivors, and 28% of grantees served both.

Consistent with the requirements set out by OFVPS, the program invited proposals focused on:

i) Culturally-specific supportive services

for AANHPI and ME survivors.

ii) Virtual services and data security

tailored to the needs of AANHPI and ME survivors.

iii) Meeting emergent and culturally-specific service needs of AANHPI and ME survivors impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

iv) Workforce expansions and capacity building for domestic violence and sexual assault programs serving AANHPI and ME survivors.

API-GBV and NAPIESV convened review committees to vet grantee proposals before finalizing their selections. The review committees included experts in domestic violence, sexual assault, nonprofit leadership and grantmaking, and the lived experiences of AANHPI and ME survivors.

Figure 2 on the following pages outlines the geographic and regional diversity of the selected cohort of grantees. Beyond geography, the cohort also reflected:

i) Focused programming on AANHPI and ME survivors of domestic violence and/or sexual assault.

ii) Diversity of ethnicities and communities within AANHPI and ME populations.

iii) Sound financial and organizational governance, including adherence to

Generally Accepted Accounting Principles, established organizational policies and procedures, existence of 501(c)(3) status or fiscal sponsorship, and track record of managing grant funds.

iv) A wide range of organization sizes.

Approximately half were small community-based organizations with annual budgets under \$1,000,000. The larger community-based organizations in the cohort were funded to start programs to meet the needs of specific underserved populations. Many of the larger grantee organizations served as fiscal sponsors for small startup groups.

Program Elements: Training & Technical Assistance

The ARP Support for Survivors Program offered a wide range of training and technical assistance to grantees during the program period from April 2023 through June 2025. Program offerings were

Figure 1. Types of Survivors Served by ARP-Funded Grantees

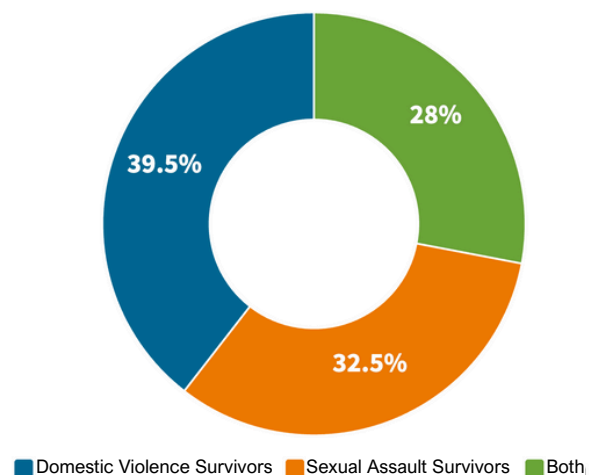
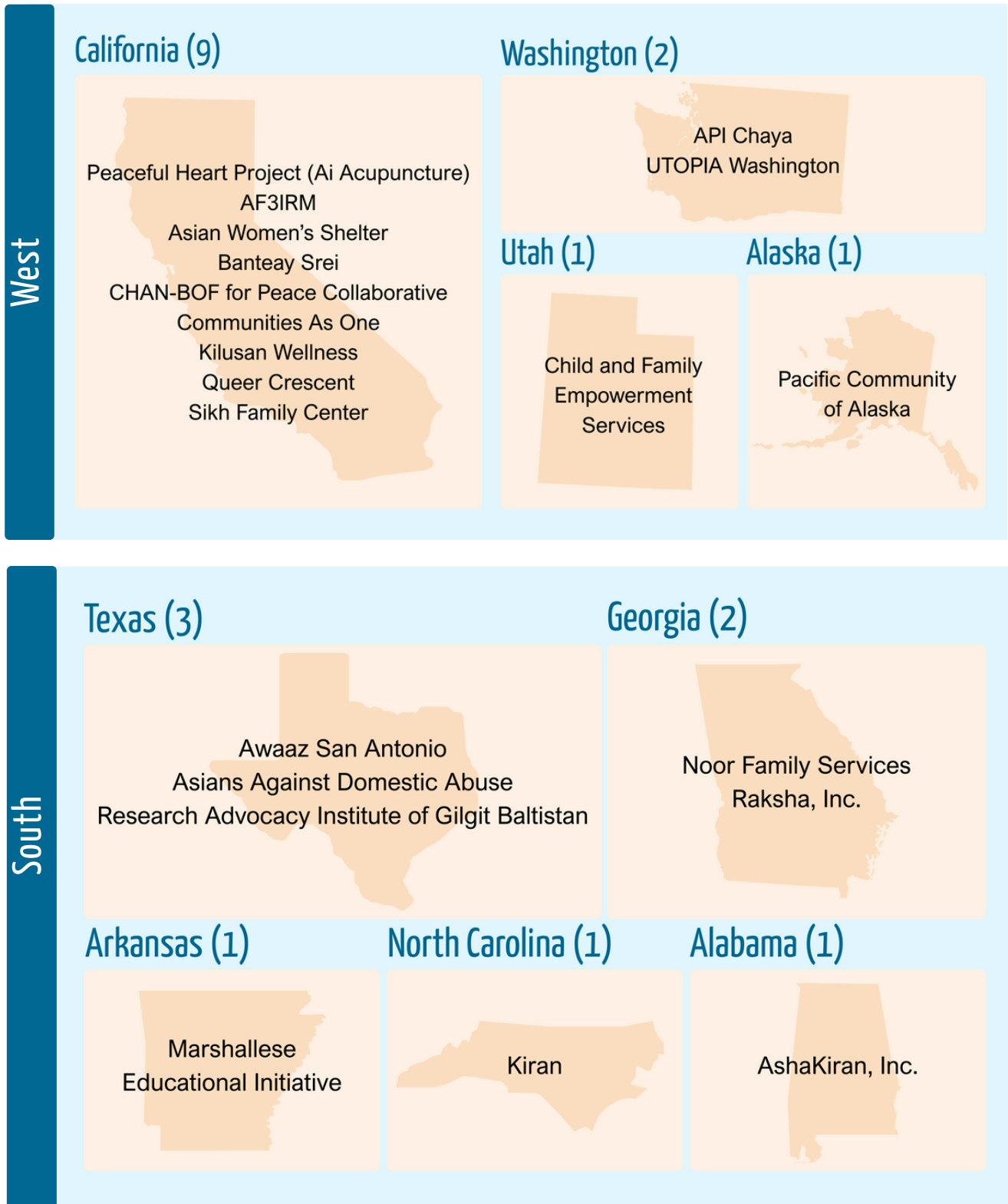


Figure 2. ARP Grantee Organizations/Projects by State and Region



Midwest

Minnesota (4)

Asian Women United of Minnesota
ManForward
SEWA-AIFW
Transforming Generations

Illinois (1)

Arab American Family Services

Iowa (1)

EMBARC

Ohio (1)

Community Refugee and
Immigration Services

Northeast

New York (4)

Karen Society of Buffalo
Laal NYC
Moving Rasa
Women for Afghan Women

Massachusetts (1)

Sahiyo US

Washington, D.C. (1)

Asian/Pacific
Islander Domestic
Violence Resource
Project

Pennsylvania (1)

Pennsylvania Immigrant & Refugee
Women Network

Hawai'i & Pacific Territories

Guam (3)

Guma' Mami, Inc.
Tohge, Inc.
Victim Advocates Reaching Out

Hawai'i (2)

Center for Pacific and Asian Communities
Ka Lei o Ka Lāhui

American Samoa (2)

American Samoa Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence
Intersections, Inc.

informed by input from grantees at the program orientation and through a needs assessment survey.

As displayed in Figure 3 on the following page, API-GBV and NAPIESV offered training and technical assistance on organizational development and program content, with opportunities for grantees to learn from one another through convenings and quarterly peer support meetings.

In the first year of the grant, training and technical assistance focused heavily on organizational development, aligning with the program's focus on strengthening the organizational capacity and sustainability of grantees. Over time, program support homed in on topics identified by grantees, with targeted one-on-one sessions for tailored support.

Program support was available in multiple formats to meet the diversity of learning

needs, developmental stages, and time zones of the grantees. Online trainings and webinars were offered at times that accommodated grantees from Guam to the East Coast, often with two different time options. Grantees also had opportunities to receive one-on-one support through office hours and in-person site visits.



A group photo taken at the 2023 Peer-to-Peer National ARP Convening held in Washington, DC.

Photo courtesy of API-GBV

Figure 3. Program Impact & Accomplishments



Survivors were supported not only through direct services, but also through the strengthened capacity of organizations — with resources, virtual engagement, and in-person gatherings all contributing to this impact as illustrated by the impact highlights below.

Virtual Engagement



Resource Development



In-Person Engagement



Accomplishments: Stronger Programs & Services

Survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault often face intense victim-blaming, shaming, and silencing within their families and communities. Often, their pain and suffering remain hidden from others, and sometimes even from themselves as their minds suppress memories of trauma to cope. It takes tremendous courage to admit the abuse to oneself and others.

Healing requires ongoing compassion, safety, support, and care to begin rebuilding one's life. Many survivors also encounter barriers from accessing services, including language barriers, stigma, shame about domestic violence and sexual assault, and fear of blame or judgment. These are deep-rooted challenges that require tailored approaches that are community-driven and culturally-responsive.

"Sexual assault looks so different in Asian Pacific or other South Asian communities because, in the Western concept, consent is a big thing. But when [your community] has experienced colonization or slavery, consent doesn't even come up. You don't have a choice and sometimes it's just survival."

- Farzana Safiullah, PAIRWN
(Pennsylvania)

From April 2023 through June 2025, grantees of the ARP Support for Survivors Program reached over 11,400 clients. This section summarizes key accomplishments that enabled grantees to expand and deepen their survivor services, with specific examples that illustrate how grantees brought their culturally-specific expertise to bear.

Grantees Were Flexible & Resourceful in Addressing Urgent Needs from the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic was marked with uncertainty and fear for all Americans. The stresses and challenges of the pandemic were particularly acute, however, for AANHPI and ME survivors. Survivors were disconnected from support during a time of heightened stress, isolation, and depression. For those experiencing violence in the home, the stresses of the pandemic may have exacerbated the abuse as stay-at-home orders continued for months.

EMBARC's grantee highlight on the next page illustrates the challenges experienced by Burmese survivors in Iowa. The struggles in their community prompted EMBARC to establish a 24-hour statewide crisis helpline with interpreters in numerous languages and nurse practitioner support.

Ethnic Minorities of Burma Advocacy & Resource Center (EMBARC)

About EMBARC. *Ethnic Minorities of Burma Advocacy and Resource Center (EMBARC) was founded in 2012 by refugees from Burma, for refugees. EMBARC believes that sustainable change comes from communities empowered to help themselves. Their vision is for refugee families in Iowa to thrive with the skills, resources, and support needed for life. EMBARC strengthens self-sufficiency through advocacy, education, and community development across the state.*

Location | Iowa

Annual Budget | \$3,000,000

Languages Spoken | English, Karen, Karenni, Hakha Chin, Zomi Chin, Mizo Chin, Falam Chin, Burmese, French, Swahili, Arabic, Spanish (25+ total)

Burmese Refugees in Iowa

Between 2008 to 2009, refugees from Burma began resettling in Iowa after fleeing the country's 70-year civil war. Since then, more than one million people have been forced to flee Burma, with nearly 10,000 refugees making Iowa their home. Upon arrival in the United States, refugee families receive only about 90 days of assistance.

EMBARC was founded to fill this gap in the social safety net — specifically to meet the needs of Karen, Karenni, Chin (including Falam, Hakha, Mizo, and Zomi), Rakhine, Shan, and Kachin ethnic minority communities from Burma. These close-knit and resilient communities survived decades of conflict and persecution in their home countries.

A majority of EMBARC's clients were born or spent years, sometimes decades, in refugee camps. In these camps, refugees lacked access to modern amenities such as indoor heating and stoves and postal services, let alone basic health care and education. Past experiences with government persecution in Burma left many refugees reluctant to ask for help or voice complaints for fear of retribution.

In addition, many refugees from Burma are not literate in their first language (with more than 20 mutually-unintelligible dialects), much less in English. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the deep vulnerabilities Burmese ethnic minorities faced due to language and cultural barriers.

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT: EMBARC

Client Experiences During the Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, EMBARC's staff became de facto emergency responders. Calls poured in at all hours from families struggling to navigate the fear and uncertainty of hospitalization, illness, and public health protocols. These challenges were especially acute for individuals with limited English proficiency.

Grace Htee, Crisis Advocacy Program Coordinator at EMBARC, recalled: "Overnight, our entire office became an emergency response team. I still try to help them even though my English is not good. I was nervous about becoming their interpreter." Grace then shared several harrowing experiences faced by community members, highlighted in the pull quotes on this page.

EMBARC translated public health mandates, connected ICU patients to their families via Zoom, and launched 24-hour multilingual helplines in Des Moines and Waterloo. Their impactful community-wide response underscored a core principle: culturally-specific organizations are not merely support systems, they are lifelines.

Greater Capacity, Stronger Organization

The ARP Support for Survivors Program

"Moms called saying their child couldn't breathe and they didn't know what to do. We had to help them call an ambulance and stay on the phone so that they could communicate with the emergency services. [Because of these experiences], we initiated a multilingual helpline with a nurse practitioner and trained interpreters in 12 Asian languages dialects and six African languages."

- Grace Htee,
EMBARC (Iowa)

"Our community members had elderly family members and loved ones in the ICU. They had not heard anything for weeks, and they cannot visit their loved one. They were so scared. Without realizing I was supposed to quarantine during COVID, I sat down together with them and helped them set up a Zoom meeting. I saw such relief on their faces, being able to see their mom or dad or uncle was alive in the ICU. I felt so proud."

- Grace Htee,
EMBARC (Iowa)

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT: EMBARC

came at a pivotal time for EMBARC. The funding provided the flexibility to respond to emerging needs of survivors while also expanding their programming and organizational capacity. With ARP funds and technical assistance, EMBARC:

- **Added staff capacity** in the Karenni language.
- **Built a 24-hour multilingual statewide helpline** infrastructure for the Crisis & Advocacy Program.
- **Funded legal services** to support divorce proceedings and enable survivors to leave abusive situations.
- **Strengthened the Healthy Mind Cycle program**, a culturally-aligned group counseling model that blends peer support and coping skills.
- **Launched trauma-informed yoga classes** and mental health field trips.
- **Developed educational videos and flyers** to break the silence and stigma around domestic and sexual violence in Burmese, Karen, and Karenni.

EMBARC staff valued the program's quarterly peer support meetings as a safe space to share challenges, celebrate successes, and build collective strategies across the field.

Lastly, ARP-funded technical assistance — including leadership, sustainability, and capacity-building consultations — helped EMBARC strengthen its board and long-term sustainability.



EMBARC participants engage in a trauma-informed yoga class.

Photo courtesy of EMBARC

Small nonprofits serving survivors were similarly experiencing turmoil, struggling to continue providing care while protecting the safety of staff. Many grantees were small organizations — with up to five full-time equivalents (FTEs) or entirely volunteer-run — trying to adhere to safety policies and protocols while still meeting urgent and growing client needs.

As Samuel Ilesugam, Executive Director of Guma' Mami, Inc. (Guam), shared: “We were anxious and there was a lot of uncertainty at first. We had to close the office almost every week — not only were staff getting infected, but they were also getting exposed. We had this policy that if you ever get close with someone who later tested positive, we had to close the whole office and put everyone on 14 days’ quarantine.” The pandemic challenged community-based organizations to strengthen their protocols and find creative solutions to meet the needs of survivors.

Grantees Created Many Doors to Care and Support for Survivors

AANHPI and ME survivors face additional layers of complexity and barriers to service. Mainstream services often fall short in supporting AANHPI and ME survivors and helping them build a better future. Grantees of the ARP Support for Survivors Program drew on deep community expertise — designing programs and events to maximize receptivity, building trust and relationships with survivors who are wary, and reaching clients who live in constant fear. Their

accomplishments offer valuable insights on how to better support survivors of any racial or ethnic background.

Leading with cultural connections opens the door to trust. Cultural connections can be a powerful tool to building trusting relationships with AANHPI and ME survivors.

“Many survivors fear judgment for seeking help, particularly when navigating divorce or emotional trauma,” asserted Lifei Chen, Impact and Data Coordinator at Asian Women’s Shelter (California). “By creating a culturally safe space, we empowered survivors to break their silence, share experiences, and heal collectively. By leading Iftar and Ramadan gatherings, we honored the community’s traditions while integrating support for survivors into moments of collective reflection and solidarity. These events became powerful platforms for healing, resource-sharing, and reinforcing the message that violence has no place in their lives or faith.”

“Tapping into our roots and engaging our community through Talanoa (dialogue) and through storytelling with songs and dances was critical. We built genuine relationships founded on trust.”

- Tepatasi Vaina, UTOPIA Washington

Being in community with other survivors deepens connections with oneself and with others. For many survivors, the journey toward a better future may feel impossible, but it becomes easier when undertaken with others.

As Sasanna Yee, Executive Director of Communities As One (California) explained, “Importantly, healing occurred not just individually, but collectively. One participant shared that from the very first circle, they felt a weight lift. They realized they were not alone and that their trauma did not define them. Others spoke of rediscovering personal agency, releasing long-held grief, and learning to move their energy rather than staying stuck in it. The practice of harmonizing the body’s energy centers (*dan tien*) became symbolic of a larger process: reclaiming the sacredness of the self and reconnecting with community.”

Focusing on health and well-being can unlock pathways to healing. EMBARC (Iowa) launched programs that offer group counseling and trauma-informed yoga sessions.

“We go in an indirect way to help with their mental health,” explained Dim Muan Kim, Crisis Advocacy Program Manager at EMBARC. “It sounds so much better when you go the indirect way, especially for our communities that don’t believe in the counselor section or family therapy section. But we see [greater receptiveness to] the indirect services. Our clients keep saying the yoga class is very helpful — they can

sleep at night! Sometimes we refer them to a counselor and they don’t think the counselor was helpful. They are more likely to find our Healthy Mind Cycle and the trauma-informed yoga classes helpful.”

Supporting survivors’ agency and leadership. PAIRWN (Pennsylvania) supported survivors with life coaching and economic empowerment coaching to reclaim their lives and their futures. The grantee highlight on the following pages illustrates these efforts in practice.

Similarly, Moelili’a Seui, Executive Director of Intersections Inc. (American Samoa) emphasized the importance of youth leadership in building safe spaces together: “Through our peer-led initiative, high school leaders are stepping up to educate middle school students about sexual assault, grooming, healthy relationships, and how to set boundaries. These young advocates are equipping their peers with the language and tools to recognize abuse and take action.”

By courageously speaking their truth, survivors can begin to heal, and the process is made easier with the support of caring adults and friends. “In powerful moments of courage, youth have come forward — sharing their own experiences of sexual abuse in the home. With trusted friends and trained teachers ready to listen, these stories are not staying hidden. They’re being reported, and predators are being removed, making homes safer for the most vulnerable. This is what happens when youth lead: truth is told, healing begins, and real change takes root,” explained Seui.

Pennsylvania Immigrant & Refugee Women Network (PAIRWN)

About PAIRWN. *Pennsylvania Immigrant & Refugee Women's Network (PAIRWN) promotes honor, understanding, respect, and friendship in communities across Central Pennsylvania. Established in 2001, its founders recognized the need for newly arriving women to gain skills and self-confidence for a successful transition to a new life. PAIRWN primarily serves Asian American, African, and Middle Eastern women.*

Location | Pennsylvania

Annual Budget | <\$50,000

Languages Spoken | English, Arabic, Swahili, Dari, Pashto, Urdu, Hindi, Spanish, Vietnamese, French

Immigrant and refugee women surviving domestic violence and sexual assault often arrive in the United States with deep emotional wounds and limited support. Language barriers further complicate their ability to access the services they need to build a better future.

“We knew that there were survivors in the community who needed help and what kind of help that they needed. The top priority was economic stability, the second was to build self-sufficiency, and the other one was to build emotional resilience through emotional healing,” explained Farzana Safiullah, Executive Director and former board member.

Reclaiming Their Lives and Their Futures

PAIRWN offers life coaching and economic

empowerment coaching — a powerful pairing that offers survivors practical tools while rekindling their strength, dignity, and voice. With support from the ARP Support for Survivors Program, PAIRWN offered:

i) Life coaching sessions focused on healing and clarity. These sessions helped survivors recognize their worth and make brave decisions, with some leaving abusive situations they had previously felt powerless to escape.

ii) Story circles and group gatherings. Through shared reflection, survivors fostered community and found comfort and solidarity. Many said they no longer felt alone for the first time in years.

iii) Support in achieving economic security. Through tailored one-on-one

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT: PAIRWN

coaching, some survivors secured jobs for the first time, while others started their own businesses. PAIRWN hosted global marketplace events to promote client products and services.

PAIRWN's programs are grounded in honor, understanding, respect, and friendship — foundational values that enable survivors to reclaim control of their lives and futures. One survivor reflected on this impact, sharing: "I see myself in you. One day I will be a leader like you!"

Supporting Clients' Personal Journeys

The COVID-19 pandemic was especially difficult for survivors struggling with domestic violence or sexual assault.

Saima Mumtaz, Life Coach at PAIRWN, worked with several women whose perpetrators were family members with mental health disorders. "What do you do when they're at home with you, and there's nowhere to go, and there's a pandemic that's going on? ... It is very difficult for the refugee population to come out and say what they are struggling with because there is a lot of shame involved. The pandemic forced many women to ask for help because they experienced how bad it could get," recalled Mumtaz.

PAIRWN offers in-language life coaching to help survivors build self-confidence and understand healthy relationships. Gaining a sense of agency is a necessary step for survivors. "[Realizing that you have the power of] choice is very empowering because refugees haven't had choices. If they had a choice, they would have stayed in their home countries if it was safe. They're displaced for a reason," emphasized Safiullah.

The ARP Support for Survivors Program enabled PAIRWN to formalize and expand its work by hiring staff with diverse language skills and by adding coaching capacity focused on economic empowerment. Survivors left with new tools and, importantly, a renewed belief in themselves and what is possible.

As Mumtaz explained, "I believe all of these



Photo courtesy of PAIRWN

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT: PAIRWN

things start with choices — letting them know that this possibility is for them. You may not have known it before but it's here now! That makes a huge difference.”

After attending the 2023 grantee convening, PAIRWN was inspired to start a wellness series for survivors of sexual assault. In a series of six monthly gatherings, survivors met in community spaces such as the local museum, with childcare and interpreters provided to ensure accessibility. The wellness series created a safe space for a community of survivors to learn about healthy relationships and the resources available to them.

Greater Capacity, Stronger Organization

Through ARP funding, PAIRWN gained the resources and support they needed to hire staff and restart a program for survivors.

The team is passionate about serving survivors, with many team members working part-time at PAIRWN in addition to other jobs or careers. This model has enabled PAIRWN to offer their services in more than ten languages, reaching numerous underserved populations throughout Central Pennsylvania.

“This gave us the flexibility of representing at least six cultural identities on staff. Our

staff are Vietnamese, Afghan, Pakistani, Indian, Palestinian, and El Salvadorian. We have skilled expertise [in life coaching and economic empowerment]. They are from the same communities as the survivors, so they are able to build that trust with survivors,” explained Safiullah.



Community members and participants gather at a PAIRWN event.

Photo courtesy of PAIRWN

Grantees Developed Expertise in Engaging Men on Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence

While the majority of domestic violence and sexual assault survivors identify as women, cycles of violence cannot end without engaging men. “If the end goal is to stop the violence, men need to be engaged as part of the solution,” asserted Sarah Khan, Director of Programs at API-GBV, “We must engage the whole community and the entire ecosystem of survivors.”

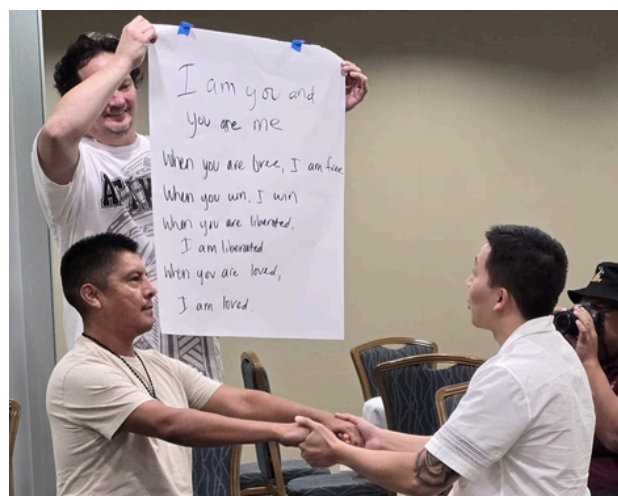
The trauma of domestic violence and sexual assault impacts not only survivors, but their loved ones as well — children, partners, and others who care about them. The ripple effects permeate across individuals and even generations. The highlight of Guma’ Mami, Inc.’s efforts to engage Pacific Islander men in Guam on the following pages offers a glimpse into this vital work.

The program was intentional in bringing together grantees working with men on topics of sexual assault and domestic violence. NAPIESV convened the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) Men’s Involvement in Ending Sexual Violence Roundtable to support peer-to-peer learning. API-GBV connected grantees to [A Call to Men](#), a national nonprofit promoting a healthy, respectful manhood. “[Our discussions] altered the way I view what it means to be a man, as well as challenged my perception and current ingrained beliefs about masculinity,” recalled a participant from the Roundtable.

“Led by Black men and men of color, their work brings an invaluable lens on gender norms, power, and privilege, and how these intersect with race, culture, and community. Their framework is also rooted in the U.S. context, addressing dynamics that affect all communities of color,” shared Matāpuna Levenson, Program Manager at API-GBV.

Several grantees participated in A Call to Men’s [“State of Masculinity 2025”](#) Initiative. Andrew Suseno, Founder and Executive Director of Moving Rasa Possibilities found the connection to A Call to Men and to peers doing similar work highly valuable.

“Inspired by this first meeting, I applied to their annual Leadership Academy to network and expand my ARP learning community to others from around the country doing this work under the mentorship of A Call to Men.”



At the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) Men’s Involvement in Ending Sexual Violence Roundtable, participants engaged in exercises fostering connection and healthy masculinity.

Photo courtesy of NAPIESV

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT: GUMA' MAMI, INC.

Guma' Mami, Inc.

About Guma' Mami, Inc. *Founded in 1981, Guma' Mami's mission is to promote the full inclusion and integration of individuals with disabilities into their communities. The organization provides dignified, compassionate individual and family support, with a focus on human rights and the richness of cultural diversity. Guma' Mami believes in the value and dignity of every person. They recognize that people with intellectual and other disabilities are like everyone else in many more ways than they are different.*

Location | Guam

Annual Budget | approx. \$1,500,000

Languages Spoken | English, Chamorro, Tagalog, Ilocano, Chuukese, Carolinian, and other Micronesian and Southeast Asian languages

Guma' Mami, Inc. viewed the ARP Support for Survivors Program as an opportunity to bolster its culturally responsive services in Guam, particularly for individuals with disabilities. The program enabled Guma' Mami to hire its survivor advocate full time, formalize virtual access to survivor support, and develop Guam's first curriculum designed to engage Pacific Islander men in addressing sexual violence. In addition, Guma' Mami supported capacity-building efforts for a group supporting Chuukese women on the island.

Addressing Sexual Assault with Men

Guma' Mami recognized the need to engage men on the topic of sexual assault. Data show that 90% of survivors of sexual assault in Guam are female, and in 89% of cases the perpetrators are known to the

survivors — most often family members or partners. To prevent the violence experienced by women in their community, they needed to address the patriarchal norms.

Guma' Mami launched the *Man-Up Against Sexual Violence Project* to spur dialogue among men about sexual assault. Though outreach was initially challenging, the response was overwhelming once participants experienced the sessions.

Samuel Ilesugam, Executive Director of Guma' Mami, recalled: "From the first session, once they felt safe in our space together [they had so much to say] and we had to put time limits!" The men who attended recognized that sexual assault was a problem and saw the the importance of

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT: GUMA' MAMI, INC.

dialogue on the topic. Guma' Mami highlighted three key lessons learned:

- **Men want to engage on this topic — they just need a safe space.** “One of our assumptions into the work was that men were not going to talk about sexual violence because it is a cultural taboo... [But] that assumption was not current. It's all about ensuring that we create a safe space for everyone.” — Samuel Ilesugam, Executive Director
- **Word-of-mouth recruitment from trusted messengers is powerful.** “We started with people we know in our organization and through our personal connections. Once we got people there, then the word started spreading out, and it was easier for us to recruit.” — Samuel Ilesugam, Executive Director
- **Cultural specificity matters.** “It's easier for them to understand when we develop a curriculum from our culture instead of a curriculum [from outside].” — Tino Kintoky, Project Manager of *Man-Up Against Sexual Violence Project*

Guma' Mami noted that the support they received from API-GBV, NAPIESV, and peer grantees was pivotal to their success. As Ilesugam explained: “Those connections really helped us along the way, especially with this work on engaging men. It's a new

thing for us. If we didn't meet with folks at the conferences, we would not know what to do next. We were able to meet up with organizations who are doing similar work and learn from them. Even now, anytime we have questions, we can reach out to them.”

Importance of Flexible Funds

The ARP Support for Survivors was intentionally designed to respond flexibly to needs that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. These resources were particularly important for clients of Guma' Mami, as people with disabilities experienced acute challenges during this time. “Because of the way that the program was designed, we were able to tweak our programs to better meet our community's cultural needs and enable us to help survivors in more relevant and culturally appropriate ways,” reflected Ilesugam. He shared some poignant examples:

- **Transportation and basic needs.** Guma' Mami serves survivors who are unhoused, for whom transportation can be a significant barrier to service. “We were able to get a leased vehicle to offer transport to the survivors, especially when the government implemented the stay-in-place. People who were most affected were out there on the street.”

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT: GUMA' MAMI, INC.

- **Online paperwork.** In the aftermath of the pandemic, many public services and paperwork moved to online platforms. “Most offices were closed and you can only submit forms electronically. They needed to scan documents and send them electronically so we found ways to help them by starting locations for online services.”

This flexible support came at a critical time. Residents of Guam received government aid later than residents of the 50 states, including unemployment benefits.

Meanwhile, Guma' Mami faced uncertainty about whether staff could be paid and which expenses would be eligible for federal reimbursement. The resources provided under ARP Support for Survivors filled a vital gap that kept essential services in place.



A group of participants supported by services provided by Guma' Mami, Inc.

Photo courtesy of Guma' Mami, Inc.

Accomplishments: Greater Organizational Capacity

In the United States, more than 1 in 3 women (35.6%) and 1 in 4 men (28.5%) have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.¹ Nevertheless, domestic violence and sexual assault continue to be viewed as niche issues and many vital services continue to be provided by volunteer-run organizations.

API-GBV and NAPIESV were intentional in harnessing the ARP funds to strengthen the capacity of organizations serving AANHPI and ME survivors. They sought to walk alongside grantees every step of the way — gaining their input on what they needed most, bringing in expertise to support organizational needs, and troubleshooting on challenges that arise. Grantees saw API-GBV as more than a funder: API-GBV was their partner and champion. They were invested in the success of their grantees.

This section outlines key accomplishments at the organizational level — how grantees strengthened their infrastructure and capacity and how the program has strengthened the field as a whole.

Intentional Organizational Growth and Development Support for Small Nonprofits

Many of the grantees were smaller nonprofits that showed strong potential but were rarely prioritized for federal grants like this one despite meeting program requirements. Despite a history of serving survivors for years, many lacked access the resources needed to strengthen their organizational infrastructure and capacity.

The program offered a breadth of technical assistance (see the *Program Elements* section) in partnership with topical experts. Through webinars, one-on-one consultations, and site visits, grantees received support in five areas of organizational development: finance, operations, communications, leadership, and evaluation.

Before joining the program, Moving Rasa Possibilities (New York) was a single-person organization. The ARP Support for Survivors Program offered the resources,

¹ National Domestic Violence Hotline (<https://www.thehotline.org/stakeholders/domestic-violence-statistics/>)

technical assistance and coaching for them to hire staff and gain 501(c)(3) status. Moving Rasa's highlight on the next few pages offers more insight into their experiences.

Andrew Suseno, Founder and Executive Director asserted: "API-GBV and NAPIESV really understood how to facilitate a capacity grant for small organizations. I started as a one-person team passionate about our programming, with little experience in communications, finance, and the know-how of operations for a new four-person part-time team. Throughout the financial cycle, API-GBV provided us with guidance to keep our records straight for proper reporting for federal reimbursement, as well as mentors to support our becoming a nonprofit."

Expanded Staff and Program Capacity to Address Known Service Gaps

With additional funds, grantees brought on the talent and facilities needed to offer high-quality, culturally competent survivor services. This section shares examples of how grantees strengthened their services and addressed service gaps in their communities.

Crisis response expertise means lives saved and greater capacity at Sikh Family Center (national). "Given the nature of [a national helpline for survivors], we need specific skills," asserted Sanjog Kaur, Director of Programs. "We can't always default to our volunteers, nor can we

offer competitive salaries to hire experts in the field. We don't get the applicants we need when we post jobs and the time dedicated to fundraising takes away from programming time and energy." The ARP Program enabled Sikh Family Center to hire the expertise needed for their helpline. As a result, peer counselors were better trained and Sikh Family Center had the expertise needed to take on the highest lethality cases, which can be the difference between life and death for some survivors and very young children.

Specialized team with the language and cultural expertise to support Arab survivors at Asian Women's Shelter (California).

Asian Women's Shelter established the Arab Women's Services Program in collaboration with RAMS, a Bay Area community health provider. Through an Arabic language helpline and group therapy sessions, they provide emotional support, safety planning, referrals, and intake services. "To prepare participants, we designed educational programs that demystified therapy, emphasizing its role in strength and resilience," said Lifei Chen, Impact and Data Coordinator. "Topics such as parenting after trauma, managing anger, rebuilding self-love, navigating life after divorce, and protecting children from domestic violence resonated deeply, blending practical guidance with emotional support."

Office space and shelters that are more geographically accessible to survivors at Kiran, Inc. (North Carolina). Proximity can

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT: MOVING RASA POSSIBILITIES

Moving Rasa Possibilities

About Moving Rasa Possibilities. *Moving Rasa Possibilities supports people of all backgrounds in transforming their relationship to masculinity, culture, and the body through Southeast Asian-rooted somatic practices. A central concept in Moving Rasa's approach is Bhineka Tunggal Ika, which means "unity in diversity" in Indonesian. It is the belief that at the core of our differences is the same divine essence. Only by leaning into our differences can we confront conflict generatively, heal, and create harmonious coexistence. Moving Rasa envisions a world where difference becomes a source of connection, where people move through life with joy and integrity, and where cultures of care replace cycles of violence.*

Location | New York

Annual Budget | <\$50,000

Languages Spoken | English, Indonesian, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Spanish, Ilocano, Chamorro, Karen, Khmer, Lao, and other Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander languages

By cultivating joy, healing, and leadership across communities, Moving Rasa Possibilities seeks to disrupt patterns of harm and create cultures of connection.

Founder and Executive Director Andrew Suseno reflected: "Through ARP support, we created safe, culturally resonant spaces for survivors to reconnect with their bodies, practice movement, and cultivate community. Many of our participants shared that this was the first time they felt seen and supported without needing to explain their cultural background... Our virtual and in-person offerings reduced isolation and helped survivors access supportive networks and resources. The funding also allowed us to collaborate with other organizations to strengthen referral pathways and provide continuity of care."

Growing Capacity & Scaling What Works

Under the ARP Support for Survivors Program, Moving Rasa grew from a single-person limited liability company (LLC) into a full-fledged 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The support from API-GBV and NAPIESV helped Moving Rasa establish internal structures such as bylaws, governance systems, financial processes, and a communications strategy — all while remaining grounded in a healing-centered mission.

Suseno explained: "I could hire staff members [to support operations]. I hired a lead facilitator on the West Coast, which expanded our program to the West Coast. I hired communication staff who helped me understand branding and build internal

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT: MOVING RASA POSSIBILITIES

infrastructure. What it meant to build an organization was beyond me — and this additional capacity meant capacity to work with partners and build together with communities. We needed administrative capacity to keep up with all the different parts.”

This new infrastructure enabled Moving Rasa to shift programming into virtual settings while expanding to the West Coast and Guam. “When COVID hit, that took away the ability to do things in person and in site-specific ways — everything became virtual,” shared Suseno. In response, Moving Rasa launched a virtual movement-based program, *Breathe Again*, which continues weekly to this day. The meetings provide a space for participants to share life experiences and engage in tangible, movement-based practices to process the stresses of daily life.

Addressing Sexual Assault with Men

Moving Rasa had previously worked with survivors drawn to its open wellness spaces. With ARP funding, Moving Rasa developed a survivor-specific curriculum and launched a program that became the steppingstone for future work with Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander men. Two major outcomes included:

i) A virtual space for Southeast Asian men (with ManForward). Moving Rasa found that clients valued connecting with peers who shared identity and culture. “In *Breathe*

Again, one session just happened to be participants who were all Southeast Asian men. We were stunned. We collectively realized that we had never been in a space with only Southeast Asian men. We split off a separate offering for Asian American men, where we reflected on our lives through movement and conversation, making connections around shared upbringing, perceptions of the world, and experiences,” Suseno shared.

ii) Culturally relevant engagement for Pacific Islander men (with Guma’ Mami, Inc.). Over two years, the groups held listening sessions, developed a curriculum, and tested ideas with participants in Guam. “When I was in Guam for our final in-person training, I shared a card game that we were developing. Our hope is that participants can play the game with one another to continue to develop embodied practices of witnessing, movement and vulnerable sharing,” recounted Suseno.

Foundation for Broader Impact

Moving Rasa is part of a growing field of practitioners who support individuals in finding strength through connection and embodied practices. Their growth as an organization and as an emerging leader in the field has affirmed the need for movement-based, culturally-specific healing practices.

be a significant factor in survivors' ability to access services and shelter. Seema Kak, Executive Director shared: "This ARP project allowed us to have a satellite office in the area where most of our clients reside. We had been trying to find funding to pay the rent at this new location so our clients did not have to travel longer distances to meet us. In addition, this grant allowed us to provide reliable temporary shelter to survivors ready to leave their abusive situations. We were able to move the client and their children to safe places whenever emergency shelter was needed. The uniqueness of this grant was that it allowed us to offer assistance with situations not typically covered with other grants."

Fostering Connections Across Grantees to Strengthen the Field

Supporting survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault is emotionally taxing, severely underresourced, and often isolating.

The ARP Support for Survivors Program provided vital opportunities for grantees to connect with peers throughout the country. Over the course of the grant period, API-GBV and NAPIESV convened multiple gatherings and learning opportunities:

i) ARP Grantee Orientation (2023, virtual). A two-day orientation to launch the program and connect with peer grantees, API-GBV, NAPIESV, and OFVPS.

ii) Peer-to-Peer National ARP Convening (2023, Washington, DC). An in-person

convening of ARP grantees, including grantees of other culturally-specific national resource centers supported by OFVPS.

iii) ARP Sexual Assault Grantee Convening (2024, Honolulu, HI). A three-day convening for sexual assault program grantees to strengthen their programs, cultivate partnerships, foster shared learning, and grow service networks across the Pacific Islands.

iv) Asian and Pacific Islander (API) Men's Involvement in Ending Sexual Violence Roundtable (2024, Honolulu, HI). A two-day roundtable hosted by NAPIESV and ManForward to engage Asian and Pacific Islander men in the movement to end sexual violence in their communities.

v) Quarterly Peer Support Meetings (2023-2025). Semi-structured peer support meetings and discussions focused on topics of interest identified by grantees.

vi) Additional opportunities in the field. In 2023, the Administration for Children and Families hosted a roundtable on child welfare in Asian and Pacific Islander communities. In 2024, API-GBV hosted the Growing From Our Roots National Summit in San Francisco.

These gatherings fostered powerful peer connections where grantees found inspiration for new approaches and partnerships, generated ideas for future programs, and gained reassurance that they were not alone in their struggles.

Gaining new perspectives, ideas, and

approaches. Through convenings and peer support meetings, grantees shared best practices from their work and helped one another troubleshoot challenges. As Saima Mumtaz, Life Coach at PAIRWN expressed, “It was a great opportunity to peek into different windows to see what other organizations are doing. They’re doing similar work and you come out with so many ideas. You come out with so much inspiration and support, and you get a bird’s-eye view of what is going on because sometimes this work is really hard.”

For organizations new to certain areas of work, these peer exchanges were transformative. Guma’ Mami, Inc. (Guam) was new to working with men on the topic of sexual assault, and the Asian and Pacific Islander Men’s Involvement in Ending Sexual Violence Roundtable that NAPIESV led was particularly valuable. “If we didn’t meet up with others at the conferences, we wouldn’t really have any idea what to do next. We listened to organizations doing similar work and tried to learn from them. Even up to now, we can reach out to them anytime we have questions,” explained Samuel Ilesugam, Executive Director of Guma’ Mami.

Developing partnerships that strengthen

survivor services. The ongoing opportunities to connect with peers in-person and virtually nurtured a network of support. Kamilah Torres from AshaKiran (Alabama) reflected: “Collaborating with other agencies and learning from them



A group of attendees from the 2023 Peer-to-Peer National ARP Convening in Washington, DC.

Photo courtesy of API-GBV

enabled us to expand our thinking and approach. We not only expanded how we outreach to different communities — we diversified our intervention methods.”

As Jinny Suh, Executive Director of Awaaz San Antonio (Texas) expressed: “While certainly our work is focused on a local level, it is incredibly helpful to be part of a network of organizations across the nation, hear about their experiences, and network with them. At this point, Awaaz is known in New York, California, Minnesota, and all over. We would not have been able to accomplish that without API-GBV being there to encourage the engagement and create space for us all to meet up and learn from each other.”

The next grantee highlight (pp. 31-33) shares Awaaz San Antonio’s journey from strengthening internal capacity to becoming a regional voice for survivors.

Building peer networks of mutual support sustains the work and the field.

The network of peer support serves as an antidote to the isolation many experience in this work. Grace Htee, Crisis Advocacy Program Coordinator at EMBARC (Iowa) explained: “Quarterly peer meetings were a supportive space where participants could openly share their challenges, exchange ideas, and celebrate successes. The collaborative atmosphere encouraged candid discussion and allowed us to tap into the group collective knowledge. [We appreciated] knowing that we're not alone, and that others are feeling the same. We have got to keep going.”

Saima Mumtaz, Life Coach at PAIRWN (Pennsylvania) echoed this sentiment: “Others are facing the same issues. We hear how people are overcoming these challenges, and you feel like you're not alone. It was one of the first conferences that I went to that was [mainly] people of color, and that, to me, was just amazing as well. It was a really safe space to say the things that you needed to say.”

Connections such as these are crucial to retaining talent, building organizational resilience, and sustaining a field. Many of the individuals drawn to this field are survivors themselves — to support the staff is to ensure the sustainability of the field.



A group of panelists in an engaging discussion at API-GBV's 2024 Summit in San Francisco.

Photo courtesy of Joyce Xi Photography

Awaaz San Antonio

About Awaaz San Antonio. *Founded in 2011, Awaaz San Antonio is the only organization in South Texas providing for South Asian survivors of domestic violence. Centuries-old concepts of gender roles have often discouraged community members from intervening and prevented survivors from leaving their perpetrators. Awaaz understands that culturally-specific assistance is crucial for South Asian survivors.*

Location | Texas

Annual Budget | <\$50,000

Languages Spoken | English, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Odia, Assamese (and others)

Awaaz, meaning “voice” in Hindi and Urdu, recognizes the significant unmet needs of South Asian survivors in the South Texas region. With support from the ARP Support for Survivors Program, Awaaz San Antonio evolved from an all-volunteer hotline to a nonprofit with hired staff and internal infrastructure. The funding expanded services while also laying the groundwork for long-term organizational sustainability.

By hiring staff, clarifying board roles, and strengthening internal systems, Awaaz was able to fully participate in statewide coalitions and policy spaces as a respected community voice. It has now grown into a recognized voice in regional initiatives impacting survivors.

From Helpline to Influencing Policy

Awaaz San Antonio serves a region and community marked by high need and geographic spread. With support from the

ARP Support for Survivors Program, the organization grew from a volunteer-run helpline into a staffed 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that speaks to the needs of survivors of domestic violence. This transition elevated Awaaz’s reputation and visibility in the region, amplifying its impact and voice in policy and decision-making. Executive Director Jinny Suh described several key developments:

i) Volunteer-run to staffed organization.

“It’s a big gap from all-volunteer to having staff; from having one federal grant to having more federal grants and the opportunity to have a seat at the table. Before having staff, Awaaz was invited to discuss policy or coalition building, but the other partners knew that we would only be able to participate in a limited way. Now Awaaz can be a key player in the discussion and drive toward a more comprehensive solution for survivors.”

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT: AWAAZ SAN ANTONIO

ii) Legitimacy as a go-to support for survivors.

“At this point, if someone hears about a survivor, or gets a call from a survivor that is in our service area, they know Awaaz is there. We're the first group they call to do the warm handoff. They know we have staff and programming in place and the client will be taken care of to the best of our ability.”

iii) Engagement at the community and state levels.

“There are lots of community events that we are now participating in. Not just in our local area, but statewide! We're able to engage in policy advocacy at the state capitol and advocate for the needs of our survivor community.”

iv) Capacity to share expertise with public agencies.

“Stronger organizational infrastructure has freed us up to have meaningful discussions about expanding programming. For example, developing a community education program or training for local agencies, district attorneys, and police departments. [...] We also explored offering trainings to fellow domestic violence and sexual assault agencies on the things they should watch out for in South Asian clients.”

The resources, capacity, and financial stability afforded by the ARP Support for

Survivors Program were critical to Awaaz's growth. They enabled Awaaz to expand and deepen their services while thinking strategically about meaningful ways to share expertise more broadly. Today, Awaaz is part of a network of agencies across Texas serving survivors from San Antonio to Houston, Dallas, and Austin.

Importance of Flexible Funds

The ARP Support for Survivors Program was designed to respond flexibly to emerging needs from the COVID-19 pandemic. This flexibility proved critical to the survivors Awaaz served.

“A lot of our client assistance is in the form of financial support — whether to pay for transitional housing, long term housing,



Awaaz San Antonio tabling at a community event.

Photo courtesy of Awaaz San Antonio

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT: AWAAZ SAN ANTONIO

utilities, or legal assistance. Those are the things that survivors need. In the past, those resources had to be raised from private donations,” explained Suh. “With the ARP Support for Survivors Program, we can include it in our budgets and have that money set aside. It really freed up our client advocates to support clients in a more comprehensive way. We learned how to provide financial assistance to clients in a responsible way that ensures compliance and grant restrictions are met.”

Maintaining Gains Moving Forward

The ARP Support for Survivors Program propelled Awaaz from survival to strategy, from service to leadership. Awaaz is a vital and visible force for survivor justice for South Texas.

Suh reflected: “The ARP Support for Survivors Program was incredibly helpful in getting us from step one to step two: having an all-volunteer run organization to having one with staff now. For the next three to five years, my focus is on going to step three where we have a self-sustaining, stable presence in South Texas. There are a lot of opportunities because of the uniqueness of what we offer to the community. The challenge is fundraising and being able to hire more staff to secure ourselves as the agency for the survivors of South Texas.”



Awaaz leaders and staff honored by the India Association of San Antonio.

Photo courtesy of Awaaz San Antonio

Lessons Learned for the Field

The ARP Support for Survivors Program intentionally selected a diverse group of grantees. They represented a wide range of ethnic groups, geographic regions, and organizational sizes and stages of development.

Some grantee organizations started in recent years, while others were mature and established. Some focused on supporting survivors of domestic violence, others on survivors of sexual assault, and some focused on both forms of gender-based violence. To meet this diversity of needs, API-GBV and NAPIESV provided a broad spectrum of training and technical assistance, supplemented by tailored support for organizations as needed.

Across the board, grantees reported positive experiences with the program and emphasized how the support from API-GBV support increased their capacity and advanced longer-term sustainability. The collective feedback among grantees highlights five important lessons for the field, especially when funding small nonprofits:

- Commit to grantees' success and what it takes to get there
- Release funds upfront rather than by reimbursement
- Allow flexible use of funds to maximize impact

-
- Facilitate stability and impact through multi-year grants
 - Invest in self and collective care for nonprofit staff

As Lina Juarbe Botella of *A Call to Men* reflected: "My experiences learning about the beauty and complexity of cultures in AANHPI and MENA communities has shown me that it is the *community* that has the answers, not me as a 'DV expert.'"

Commit to Grantees' Success and What it Takes to Get There

API-GBV's approach went beyond traditional grantmaking — they were committed to each individual grantee's success. API-GBV walked alongside grantees, offering support, care, and compassion in the many challenges they faced. "They were just there for us and, as a funder, the relationship was very nurturing [rather than transactional]," asserted Farzana Safiullah, Executive Director of PAIRWN (Pennsylvania).

API-GBV was highly responsive, brought deep knowledge of gender-based violence, and offered practical solutions that respected the cultural context of their work.

“From the beginning, API-GBV treated our organization not just as a grantee, but as a partner in a shared vision for liberation and healing,” said Hamida Yusufzai, Program Manager at Banteay Srei (California). “I valued their culturally-responsive technical assistance, their flexibility in adapting to emergent needs, and their encouragement of innovation allowed us to tailor our programming in ways that felt authentic and effective. Our hope is that this kind of survivor- and community-rooted investment becomes the standard, not the exception.”

API-GBV helped small nonprofits navigate the complexity of growing an organization on a reimbursement funding model.

“The program was geared towards an organization like ours that didn't have that experience, so there was a lot of

patience and a lot of learning. We are better able to evaluate our clients' needs and offer them support in a way that doesn't negatively impact Awaaz. We can make sure that funding is there while also ensuring that it won't put us in a tough situation and we can still be there for the client,” explained Jinny Suh from Awaaz San Antonio (Texas).

API-GBV staff had lived experience and deep understanding of Pacific Islander culture.

“API-GBV understands Pacific Islanders better than others with whom we collaborate, so for us, the success was a stronger program that meets our community's needs,” reflected April Brown, Founder and Director of Operations at Marshallese Educational Initiative (Arkansas). “There are things we want to convey or ask, and it may be difficult to put into words. They understood,” echoed Tino Kintoky, Project Manager of Man-Up Against Sexual Violence Project at Guma' Mami (Guam), underscoring the value of having Pacific Islanders on staff at API-GBV.

“The trust [API-GBV] placed in our organization as we've grown has allowed us to build sustainable programming that will continue serving our community for years to come.”

- Cristina Arias,
Domestic Violence Action Center
for CPAC (Hawaii)

API-GBV's relational approach as a funder demonstrated that investing in success requires more than funding; it requires care, patience, and expertise. Grantees consistently conveyed their appreciation of API-GBV's staff. They brought lived experience, cultural understanding, and practical solutions to the complex work of supporting survivors.

Release Funds Upfront Rather than by Reimbursement

For many smaller nonprofit organizations, reimbursement-based payment schedules can create cashflow issues — a significant challenge for some grantees. While traditional funders might see cashflow concerns as reason to avoid funding small organizations, API-GBV recognized these financial hurdles were not individual weaknesses of the organizations, but developmental realities of small nonprofits.

“You’re asking these organizations to run a \$10,000 to \$20,000 tab every month that they must carry on their own. These two-person small organizations just can’t do that. If you want to invest in culturally-specific funding and you want to invest in these communities, you must be realistic about the restraints that they have,” explained Courtney Peters, Grants and Compliance Manager at API-GBV.

Upfront disbursements help small nonprofits plan effectively and deliver services without the constant strain of financial precarity. “It’s an investment. [Releasing funds upfront will] set them up for success instead of being on survival mode,” asserted Matāpuna Levenson, Program Manager at API-GBV.

Allow Flexible Use of Funds to Maximize Impact

Rigid grant requirements often limit nonprofits’ ability to respond to urgent or culturally-specific needs. In contrast, the ARP Support for Survivors Program provided flexibility on how grantees could use the funds to respond to the emergent

challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are two examples of how grantees used this flexibility in service of survivors:

i) Grantees covered transportation costs for survivors to access services. Many survivors lack adequate access to transportation — they may live in areas with limited public transit, or they may not own a car or know how to drive. Some grantees also serve clients who are unhoused. With most grants, the maximum allowed for direct expenses such as transportation is insufficient to meet the volume of need. With the flexibility of this grant, PAIRWN (Pennsylvania) covered rideshare costs for clients and Guma’ Mami (Guam) was leased a car to transport clients to and from their programs.

ii) Grantees instituted new programs and approaches based on what they have learned. Due to the flexibility of the grant, PAIRWN (Pennsylvania) redirected grant funds to launch a new survivor wellness series after attending the Peer-to-Peer ARP National Convening. The flexibility afforded by the program enabled them to apply what they learned right away, to the benefit of survivors they serve.

“When we had survivors who needed assistance with situations not typically covered with other grants, this project was flexible enough to evaluate the need and as long as all criteria were met, we were able to help our clients.”

- Seema Kak,
Kiran Inc. (North Carolina)

Facilitate Stability and Impact with Multi-year Grants

Short-term grants can undermine an organization's ability to build capacity or sustain programs. The ARP Support for Survivors Program offered two-year grants, giving grantees both stability and credibility, which allowed them to hire staff. The multi-year grant augmented their impact on survivors and enabled them to take on leadership roles pertaining to local policy.

Multi-year funding enabled Sikh Family Center (national) to hire the expertise needed, make the case for continued funding, and develop a referral network.

The multi-year grant enabled Sikh Family Center to hire and sustainably staff their national helpline with the level of expertise they needed. Executive Director Mallika Kaur explained: "Having secure funding for the position for two years, meant an easier time making the case for her salary [because we could] show her impact to community funders." Sikh Family Center's

new hire brought the expertise needed to support survivors living in potentially lethal situations.

Their increased capacity enabled them to develop a network of referral agencies across the country that includes domestic violence shelters, housing agencies, prosecutors, and Family Justice Centers. The Sikh Family Center is well-positioned to advocate for the unique needs, risks, and protective factors of the survivors they serve.

Multi-year funding enabled Awaaz San Antonio (Texas) to build their reputation as a community leader and have a voice on policies and projects impacting survivors.

Before the grant, Awaaz was invited to coalitions and other tables to discuss policies and programs impacting survivors, but their capacity to participate was limited as a volunteer-run organization.

After bringing on paid staff, Awaaz is now a recognized community leader with a voice on comprehensive solutions for survivors. Awaaz was invited to provide input to DVBeds, a web-based solution for finding shelter for clients, to offer greater transparency to survivors with concerns based on their faith or dietary restrictions. Building on these gains, Awaaz has cultivated relationships with public agencies to develop a community education program that trains local agencies, district attorneys, and law enforcement on the experiences and needs of survivors.



Two women interacting joyfully at Sikh Family Center.

Photo courtesy of Sikh Family Center

Invest in Self and Collective Care for Nonprofit Staff

Investing in self and collective care is essential for all staff in nonprofit organizations serving survivors. Domestic violence and sexual assault work is emotionally demanding and many nonprofit staff are survivors themselves. API-GBV emphasized the importance of self-care and collective care practices, both of which proved essential for staff and organizational resilience. Briana Neale from the Karen Society of Buffalo (New York) reflects on this issue: “It’s important to recognize the toll the work takes on the staff and to give them the time and space needed to process the plethora of information necessary to provide advocacy.” With support and encouragement from API-GBV, several grantees created opportunities for care in group settings, underscoring the value of collective care practices alongside individual self-care.

Banteay Srei implemented a structured staff wellness and mental health support initiative as an integral component of their program, which markedly shifted their organizational culture. “This program allowed us to move beyond crisis response and toward healing justice — an approach rooted in cultural memory, survivor leadership, and collective care,” shared Hamida Yusufzai, Program Manager at Banteay Srei (California). “[It recognizes] the emotional labor and vicarious trauma often experienced by staff working closely with victims/survivors of trafficking and exploitation. We prioritized internal care to sustain our frontline workforce.”

The organization established partnerships with acupuncturists, ashatsu bodyworkers, breathwork coaches, and wellness mentors to offer holistic and culturally relevant modalities of care to support staff mental health and wellness.



A group of participants from Pu'u'honua 'o Ka Ululehua, a Hawaiian cultural services program offering a holistic approach to assist survivors in healing after violence.

Photo courtesy of Ka Lei O' Ka Lahui

Concluding Thoughts: A Call to Action

Over the two-year grant period, grantees reached more than 11,400 survivors. Organizations evolved into full-fledged 501(c)(3) nonprofits, transitioned from volunteer-run to staffed, and launched new programs led by experts. Together, they built a connected network of advocates strengthening services for domestic violence and sexual assault survivors and the field as a whole.

The ARP Support for Survivors Program provided a critical infusion of funding and support to nonprofits working tirelessly to meet the needs of their communities while strengthening the sustainability of a field. Yet these hard-won gains face a central question: *What comes next?* In the post-program survey, grantees consistently named funding as the primary barrier to sustaining program successes. Additionally, further support is needed to lock in these successes and take their work to the next step. Grantees identified needs in policy advocacy, grant writing, legal expertise, and data and evaluation to fully realize their potential as survivor advocates and leaders.

Without regular continued investment, the sustainability and continuation of the accomplishments, programming, and services of the ARP Support for Survivors Program are all at risk. Rebuilding would be difficult — and survivors cannot afford to wait. The accomplishments of this program underscore the clear and urgent

need for public agencies and funders to further commit to addressing domestic violence and sexual assault. This field is full of compassionate change makers, innovative violence prevention advocates, and powerful community voices with invaluable lived experiences. They require the resources to fully harness their potential.

We call on funders, policymakers, and community leaders to invest boldly and consistently in organizations serving AANHPI and ME survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Nonprofits serving survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault cannot continue to be undervalued, underfunded, and sidelined as a niche issue. The impact of domestic violence and sexual assault on our communities cannot be deprioritized any longer. **With sustained support, these organizations can save more lives, grow their leadership to strengthen communities, and build a future free from violence.**

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