

The Safety and Spirituality Project (2019-2026)

*Strengthening Asian Immigrant Faith
Communities' Capacity to Prevent and
Respond to Domestic Violence and
Sexual Assault*

FALL 2026 | RESEARCH AND EVALUATION



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Executive Summary

Between 2019 and 2026, the Safety and Spirituality Project, led by the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (API-GBV), mobilized three distinct partnerships to transform how Asian immigrant faith communities prevent and respond to domestic violence and sexual assault (DV/SA). Operating within Taiwanese Christian, Punjabi Sikh, and Korean Christian networks, the project recognized that while faith leaders are often the primary cultural anchors community members turn to during crisis, they historically received little to no preparation to safely handle abuse disclosures.

To bridge this critical gap, API-GBV partnered with deeply trusted cultural experts: Ellen Hong and Li-Shun Hong for the Taiwanese Christian community, the Sikh Family Center for the Punjabi Sikh community, and Korean American Family Services (KFAM) for the Korean Christian community. Together, these project partners sought to dismantle social stigma, deliver trauma-informed DV/SA education and training, establish survivor-centered protocols, and build the localized leadership required to sustain this work permanently.

With each partnership navigating a highly distinct religious tradition and socio-cultural context, the project rejected rigid, one-size-fits-all programming. Instead, it offered complete flexibility for project partners to build custom, grassroots strategies that honored each community's specific native languages, leadership models, and foundational levels of readiness. This community-driven approach allowed each partnership to build directly on existing strengths and deep cultural pride while relentlessly advancing safety.

When localized strategies were given the room to thrive, their combined momentum transformed into a movement of historic scale. The multi-year initiative achieved remarkable, nationwide breakthroughs by engaging more than **1,400 faith leaders and community members**, delivering **51 educational events**, and mobilizing **112 faith institutions across 20 states**. Across the partnerships, these efforts led to specific actions on the ground:

- **The Taiwanese Christian Partnership** co-developed an intensive two-day curriculum specifically grounded in scripture and ministry case studies, creating a vital training pipeline through regional seminaries to prepare future clergy before they enter local pulpits.
- **The Punjabi Sikh Partnership** built a highly sustainable Community Advocacy model that equipped volunteers to guide outreach within local gurdwaras, established youth prevention education via the Sehj Series, and organized survivor listening circles for communal healing.
- **The Korean Christian Partnership** implemented a rigorous 40-hour training cohort for ministers and pioneered specialized, culturally grounded healing spaces designed specifically for female faith leaders to break generations of isolation and silence.

These collective accomplishments extend far beyond traditional metrics. The most profound impact lies in a permanent culture shift: transforming local faith institutions from spaces of silence into proactive, safe sanctuaries. Today, local leaders report an unprecedented openness to discussing DV/SA openly within their faith communities, a measurable rise in confidence when handling crises, and formalized referral networks with specialized advocates.

The Safety and Spirituality Project proves that meaningful change within Asian immigrant faith communities cannot be forced from the outside. True transformation is built through patience, deep cultural humility, and long-term investment in the trusted community leaders who hold the keys to collective safety.

Introduction

Project Overview

Faith plays an important role in many Asian immigrant communities, extending well beyond religious practice. About 68% of Asian American adults identify with a religion, highlighting the significant place faith can hold in the lives of many community members.¹ Churches, gurdwaras (Sikh faith centers), and other faith institutions often serve as vital community hubs where individuals and families build relationships, seek guidance, celebrate milestones, preserve cultural traditions, and access essential support. Because faith leaders are trusted sources of guidance and influence, they are uniquely positioned to recognize abuse, safely connect survivors with life-saving resources, promote healthy relationship dynamics, and encourage community-wide accountability.

At the same time, domestic violence and sexual assault (DV/SA) can be difficult to address within faith settings due to stigma, concerns about family privacy, limited training, and uncertainty about how faith leaders can respond while honoring both safety and spirituality. Recognizing both the profound influence of faith communities and the barriers they face, this project was designed to engage them as active partners in supporting survivors, fostering healthy families, and strengthening the collective response to ending DV/SA environments.

The Safety and Spirituality Project was launched in 2019 by the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (API-GBV) to strengthen faith communities' capacity to prevent and respond to DV/SA. The project advanced this work through three distinct partnerships working with the Taiwanese Christian, Punjabi Sikh, and Korean Christian communities. The shared goals across these partnerships were to increase awareness and knowledge of DV/SA among faith leaders, strengthen survivor-centered responses, develop culturally and faith-responsive educational resources, and cultivate the local leadership needed to sustain this work over time. While each partnership reflected a different faith tradition and community context, they all adapted their activities to meet the precise needs of their respective communities.

A defining feature of the project was its deeply rooted partnership model. API-GBV collaborated with project partners who were already recognized and trusted within both anti-violence advocacy and their own faith communities, enabling the project to build long-term, collaborative relationships. Rather than introducing an externally developed model, these partners built upon existing community strengths to create opportunities for dialogue, learning, and collaboration

¹ Pew Research Center. (2023, October 11). *Religion among Asian Americans*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/10/11/religion-among-asian-americans/>

that fully reflected each community's language, culture, faith traditions, and leadership structures.

Each partner brought unique expertise and pursued goals shaped organically by their specific faith community's needs:

- **Ellen Hong and Li-Shun Hong**, a specialized consulting team, led the work with the Taiwanese Christian community, focusing on increasing faith leaders' capacity to respond to survivors and to develop survivor-centered practice protocols.
- **The Sikh Family Center**, a national gender justice organization founded in 2009, led the work with the Punjabi Sikh community, focusing on growing the leadership and knowledge of gurdwara leaders and institutions to identify protocols and resources for survivors.
- **Korean American Family Services (KFAM)**, a Los Angeles-based social service agency founded in 1983, led the work with the Korean Christian community, focusing on developing faith leadership on DV/SA and preparing advocates to partner effectively with faith leaders.

Activities evolved naturally as partners responded to emerging needs and opportunities. Across the three partnerships, activities included leadership development, faith leader trainings, youth engagement, community outreach, technical assistance, educational resource development, and relationship-building with congregations across the country. While the specific approaches differed, all emphasized sustained engagement as the foundation for this vital work.

About This Report

This report documents the experiences, lessons, and recommendations that emerged from the Safety and Spirituality Project between 2019 and 2026. The findings presented here are drawn from comprehensive project documentation and the deep, reflective insights of the three project partners. Together, these sources provide a window into the documented accomplishments of their efforts, the relationships they cultivated, the strategies they refined, and the lasting community changes that developed over the seven years of this project.

Accomplishments by Faith Community

Taiwanese Christian Communities

The work with the Taiwanese Christian community prioritized building long-term, trust-based relationships with pastors, church leaders, seminaries, and congregations to cultivate safe spaces for conversations about DV/SA. Rather than relying on one-time interventions, the project team – Ellen Hong and Li-Shun Hong – conducted sustained local and national outreach over multiple years, gradually expanding their reach through established church networks and seminary partnerships. As these relationships deepened, faith leaders became increasingly willing to confront complex topics surrounding survivor support, healthy relationships, and the protective role faith communities can play in responding to abuse.

A major milestone of this partnership was the co-development and delivery of a signature, two-day DV/SA training curriculum tailored specifically for faith leaders serving Taiwanese Christian communities throughout the United States. Rejecting a one-size-fits-all approach, the project team built the curriculum from scratch, incorporating scripture, culturally relevant case studies, and examples drawn directly from their own experiences in ministry and advocacy. The resulting coursework seamlessly combined foundational DV/SA education with theological reflection and practical response strategies. Over time, the curriculum evolved to address highly complex dynamics, including survivor safety, crisis response, and culturally grounded family support. Beyond the classroom, they offered technical assistance to help churches establish formal protocols for responding to disclosures. Recognizing the importance of accountability and safety, several congregations proactively brought their core leadership together to design custom action and communication plans, ensuring survivors receive consistent, structured support.

The project team delivered these intensive trainings in Taiwanese, Mandarin, and English to a diverse cross-section of participants, including pastors, seminary students, elders, deacons, and congregation members. Participants consistently recognized the situations presented in the case

Taiwanese Christian Communities – Project Highlights

Reach	391+ participants engaged through trainings, workshops, panels, support groups, and technical assistance.
Training & Capacity Building	Delivered 21 educational events , including 15 two-day signature DV/SA trainings that equipped 229 faith leaders across 13 churches and seminaries in 7 states , followed by 2 advanced trainings for 77 returning participants .
Community Engagement	Conducted outreach to 37 churches and seminaries , expanding awareness and building relationships with Taiwanese faith communities.
Lasting Resources	Developed and expanded culturally tailored DV/SA curricula for Taiwanese-, Mandarin-, and English-speaking faith leaders.
Long-Term Impact	Established a network of trained faith leaders equipped to recognize, respond to, and prevent DV/SA within their congregations.

studies because they mirrored exact challenges occurring inside their own pews. These raw discussions helped faith leaders move beyond viewing DV strictly as physical abuse, allowing them to examine deeper patterns of coercive control and the ways cultural gender expectations can compound harm. One of the most frequent questions asked, "*What's the difference between a bad marriage or an unhealthy relationship and domestic violence?*" became a vital entry point to deepen faith leaders' understanding and strengthen their ability to recognize abuse within their own communities.

Building on the success of these signature trainings, seminary partnerships emerged as a critical pipeline to equip future clergy before they entered the field. The immediate response from seminary students was profound; as the project team shared, seminary students frequently remarked, "*We've never heard this before,*" with many pledging to bring the same training to their future ministries. This momentum sparked a massive, nationwide demand for culturally grounded, faith-based DV/SA advocacy. While the project initially focused on Southern California, the necessary pivot to virtual training during the COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly unlocked nationwide access. Each year, the announcement of a new training cycle drew applications from approximately 10 churches across the country. Although strict funding limits and staff capacity meant the project team could formally onboard only three churches annually, they frequently chose to conduct additional, unfunded trainings out-of-budget, refusing to leave faith communities without support.

This unprecedented access was made possible by the project team's deep, organic roots within the Taiwanese Christian community. Reflecting on past outreach through a local DV/SA organization, Ellen Hong noted that churches often view outside advocates with skepticism, assuming they do not understand or respect their faith. In contrast, this project leveraged decades of shared faith, cultural nuances, and respected leadership to establish instant credibility. Li-Shun Hong's prominent standing and theological training within Taiwanese church networks opened doors that would otherwise remain closed to secular organizations. As the team summarized, "*When it was relationship-based, we could access that kind of entry into the faith community. If it was a cold call, it was met with skepticism.*"

This trust extended a critical lifeline to isolated immigrant churches in states like Hawai'i, Ohio, Florida, and Maryland, where local, culturally and linguistically appropriate DV/SA resources are virtually non-existent. Because these immigrant churches frequently double as central community hubs, faith leaders are routinely expected to handle crises far beyond spiritual care. The project team shared that many pastors expressed immense gratitude for the training, particularly because it connected them with experts who understood both their native language and the unique systemic pressures facing immigrant families. For many participants, the training provided support and resources lifeline they felt were otherwise difficult to access.

Today, this deeply rooted trust has transformed how these communities handle abuse. Churches no longer seek guidance purely through abstract, formal training; instead, they actively consult the project team when navigating active, real-time DV/SA crises within their congregations. Pastors and lay leaders regularly reach out for technical assistance regarding survivor safety, clergy response boundaries, and complex interventions. As the project team powerfully observed, the question heard at the end of a training session is no longer whether DV/SA exists within their walls, but an urgent, action-oriented, "*So what do we do?*"

Impact in Practice – Taiwanese Christian Context

One of the stories that best illustrates the project's impact began in the classroom and continued long after the training ended. After participating in a two-day seminary training, students began recognizing situations involving DV/SA within the churches where they were serving. Rather than feeling overwhelmed or remaining silent, many reached back out to the project team for guidance and encouraged their own congregations to participate in the training. Over time, seminaries invited the team back semester after semester to educate new cohorts of future pastors, while churches increasingly requested consultations when difficult situations arose. These repeated invitations represented one of the clearest signs that authentic trust had been established. As the project partners reflected, "*These seminary students would become our outreach people. They'd say, 'Our church needs to do this training.'*" What began as a capacity-building effort ultimately created a growing network of faith leaders who were better prepared to recognize abuse, support survivors, and encourage their own churches to engage in conversations that had previously remained unspoken.

Trust also showed up in moments of deep crisis. When a DV homicide profoundly affected an immigrant congregation, the church leadership did not retreat into silence or handle the tragedy internally. Because of the foundation laid by this project, they immediately reached out to the project team for crisis consultation, who provided immediate, trauma-informed support to help the congregation navigate communal grief and ensure the ongoing safety of surviving family members. This response transformed a moment of profound isolation into a coordinated, compassionate community intervention, proving that the church had evolved into a true partner in the fight against gender-based violence.

Punjabi Sikh Communities

The work with the Punjabi Sikh community expanded substantially over the course of the project, growing from localized outreach into a coordinated national strategy that engaged gurdwaras across multiple states. The Sikh Family Center collaborated closely with gurdwara leadership and management committees, volunteers, youth groups, Sikh student organizations, and community members to integrate critical conversations about DV/SA into everyday community life. Rather than relying on a single training session or isolated outreach event, the project prioritized building authentic, long-term relationships. This work demanded deep patience and persistence; as the Sikh Family Center noted, substantial time must be spent simply building that initial foundation of trust. As those relationships matured, faith leaders increasingly invited the project team into their sacred spaces, requested additional outreach activities, and directly connected survivors with available resources.

A defining accomplishment of this project was the development of a community-led outreach model that extended the work far beyond what staff members alone could achieve. Through a specialized Community Advocacy model, volunteers from across the country received the training and support necessary to become trusted leaders within their own networks. These advocates introduced the Sikh Family Center to local faith leaders, organized regional outreach events, distributed culturally relevant educational materials, and sustained vital relationships within their local gurdwaras. Because these local advocates already possessed deep, existing trust within their communities, they successfully unlocked doors and created opportunities for dialogue that otherwise would not have existed. By investing in these volunteers, the project built sustainable local leadership that will outlast the life of the grant.

The project also systematically strengthened relationships between Sikh communities and mainstream DV/SA service providers. Through technical assistance, training, and ongoing consultation, the Sikh Family Center helped secular organizations understand Sikh faith traditions, cultural values, language needs, and effective approaches for respectfully engaging

Punjabi Sikh Communities – Project Highlights

Reach	206+ individuals trained and 720+ community members reached through education, listening circles, outreach events, and community engagement.
Training & Capacity Building	Delivered 25 educational events , including trainings for gurdwara leaders, community advocates, youth, facilitators, and volunteers .
Community Engagement	Engaged 75 gurdwaras across 20 states , 10+ youth groups , and provided 38 technical assistance responses supporting community-led implementation.
Lasting Resources	Developed bilingual (Punjabi-English) outreach and training materials, including the Family Violence Resource Guide for Gurdwaras and the Sehj Series youth and train-the-trainer curricula.
Long-Term Impact	Built leadership capacity across faith, youth, and advocate networks to strengthen community-based responses to DV/SA.

gurdwaras. In many regions, the project team served as an essential bridge, helping local service providers and faith leaders build mutual connections. This advocacy ensured that mainstream providers became equipped to conduct appropriate outreach within gurdwaras, expanding culturally and linguistically responsive support for Sikh survivors.

Concurrently, the Sikh Family Center invested heavily in youth leadership and prevention education through its Sehj Series workshops and subsequent train-the-trainer sessions, developed in partnership with Sikh university students. This initiative equipped young people to lead honest conversations with their peers about healthy relationships, consent, communication, and family violence. By expanding the Sehj Series into a train-the-trainer curriculum, the project created a self-sustaining network of young educators. Youth participants expressed deep gratitude for the opportunity to discuss these topics through a distinctively Sikh lens, which helped connect advocacy concepts with their personal lived experiences. Workshops frequently ran over their scheduled times because youth participants requested additional case scenarios and longer discussions, proving that the Sehj Series successfully normalized conversations about healthy relationships before violence occurred.

To support this infrastructure, the Sikh Family Center produced a wide range of culturally and linguistically responsive outreach tools, including Punjabi-language educational resources, flyers, and safety materials. A cornerstone of these resources was the Family Violence Resource Guide for Gurdwaras, used to train local institutions on how to safely meet the needs of Sikh survivors. Throughout this work, the project team found that conversations about DV/SA were most successful when introduced through a holistic framework of community health and family wellness, rather than as a stand-alone topic. Incorporating discussions on immigration resources, community safety, and family well-being reduced social stigma and met community members exactly where they were. As the Sikh Family Center explained, *"Our goal is not to separate families. Our goal is really about holistic care and collective action."* This intentional framing increased community comfort while demonstrating that DV/SA prevention is inseparable from the overall health of the community.

While expanding outreach in gurdwaras, mobilizing youth, and training secular providers, the Sikh Family Center also designed a historic, first-of-its-kind safe space to hold survivor experiences. These survivor listening circles were facilitated by a trained DV/SA advocate and a mental health consultant, centering the discussions on faith, trauma-informed care, and collective healing. Demonstrating the impact of this space, one survivor participant shared: *"I never imagined being in a community space discussing my experience of abuse would be so liberating. There were no feelings of doubt, or even pressure to say something. Hearing from others, speaking up felt so right. The facilitator, a survivor herself, made me feel like I belonged, and I could be myself."*

Impact in Practice – Punjabi Sikh Context

The power of this compounding trust is best illustrated by a community member who initially connected with the Sikh Family Center simply to learn more about basic advocacy. Over time, her involvement deepened significantly. When a series of DV-related homicides profoundly impacted a local Sikh community, she stepped forward to help lead the community's response. She brought together local volunteers, mobilized faith leaders, and ensured that culturally relevant safety resources reached the families who needed them most.

During one of these community outreach events, a survivor learned about the organization's confidential services and later contacted the helpline to seek support for a high-risk situation. Reflecting on this turning point, the Sikh Family Center observed that while small acts of outreach can initially feel insignificant, they compound over time into life-saving community protection. This journey demonstrates how investing in grassroots relationships and community leadership creates a protective web that ultimately saves lives.

Korean Christian Communities

The work with the Korean Christian community focused on strengthening faith leaders' ability to recognize, understand, and respond to DV/SA through education, leadership development, and long-term relationship-building. Korean American Family Services (KFAM) collaborated closely with the Korean Faith Advisory Council and other church leaders to develop training opportunities, educational resources, leadership programs, and community assessments that reflected the distinct needs of Korean churches. KFAM identified DV as a topic that has long been considered taboo within many Korean faith communities, making prevention work an ongoing uphill battle. As the KFAM team reflected on prevention work broadly: *"Prevention work is always hard. It was always hard, it is hard, and it will always be hard."* Rather than expecting immediate change, the project focused on building trust, meeting communities where they were, and gradually expanding opportunities for learning and dialogue.

Korean Christian Communities – Project Highlights	
Reach	102+ faith leaders and community members engaged through trainings, panels, leadership programming, and needs assessment activities.
Training & Capacity Building	Delivered a 40-hour DV training, 2-day clergy retreat , advocate training, and panel discussion while launching an ongoing leadership development series for female faith leaders .
Community Engagement	Conducted a needs assessment with 34 faith leaders from Korean English Ministry (EM) churches and collaborated with the Korean Faith Advisory Council to strengthen faith community engagement.
Lasting Resources	Developed faith leader and advocate resources, including 40-hour DV and healthy relationships curricula and multiple Korean- and English-language PSA video series on DV/SA prevention and response.
Long-Term Impact	Created a lasting library of culturally tailored resources and leadership infrastructure to support Korean faith communities' response to DV/SA.

A major accomplishment of this project was the development and implementation of an intensive, 40-hour training program for pastors, seminary students, and female faith leaders. This training provided participants with practical knowledge about DV, available resources, survivor support, and the role faith leaders can play within their congregations. The training sessions also helped identify leaders who wanted to continue learning and become champions for the work within their own churches. Participants frequently recommended the training to colleagues, and in one instance, a pastor encouraged every minister within his church staff to complete the entire program. KFAM complemented this intensive training with video-based education, panel discussions, leadership development opportunities, and targeted resources to reach faith leaders at different stages of learning, recognizing that individual churches varied considerably in their readiness to engage with DV/SA prevention.

Another defining achievement was the cultivation of leadership opportunities specifically for female faith leaders. KFAM recognized that women often work most closely with children, parents, and families within Korean churches, placing them in a unique position to recognize signs of abuse and offer immediate support. Because many women also shared lived experiences shaped by traditional gender roles within Korean culture, these gatherings created opportunities for deeper conversations that rarely emerged in general faith leader trainings. Over time, these meetings transcended educational sessions and evolved into trusted spaces for connection and healing. As KFAM shared, *"Now they start talking about the violence that they have experienced, and they can provide emotional support with one another."* This shift represented an important cultural breakthrough within a community where conversations about DV have traditionally been suppressed by social stigma and silence.

The project also demonstrated the vital importance of listening to communities before expanding programming. A comprehensive needs assessment conducted with Korean English Ministry (EM) churches revealed that faith leaders possessed widely varying levels of understanding about DV. While some participants had previous training, others viewed DV strictly as physical abuse or believed responding to survivors fell outside the role of faith leaders. These findings directly shaped the next phase of the project, informing the development of introductory educational resources, video-based learning, and multiple training tracks designed to meet faith leaders exactly where they were in their learning journey. The KFAM team returned to this lesson repeatedly, explaining that meaningful change required patience because *"you cannot make this baby walk when they cannot even crawl."*

As relationships deepened, faith leaders increasingly became active partners in expanding prevention efforts within their own communities. Pastors and church leaders began sharing educational opportunities with colleagues, circulating program announcements within their church networks, and encouraging others to participate in trainings. Some participants who completed the 40-hour training recommended that additional pastors from their churches attend

future cohorts, while others took on ongoing leadership roles in advancing prevention efforts within their churches. The partners also observed a surging interest from English Ministry churches, challenging their initial assumption that English-speaking congregations already had sufficient resources. Together, these developments reflected a growing network of faith leaders who were not only participating in prevention efforts but also helping sustain and expand them within their own church communities.

Impact in Practice – Korean Christian Context

The profound impact of this work is beautifully illustrated by the evolution of the women's leadership program. As participants gained a deeper understanding of DV, conversations gradually shifted from discussing the issue in the abstract to sharing personal experiences. Women who had never spoken openly about violence they had experienced began recognizing that what had happened to them was not their fault and found mutual support from one another within the group.

Over time, these conversations continued long after the formal leadership program concluded, creating an ongoing network of peer support among participants. For KFAM, this transformation represented one of the clearest examples of culture change to emerge from the project, reflecting a movement away from silence and shame and toward healing, connection, and collective support within the faith community. As these leaders grew more comfortable discussing DV openly, several also became more willing to raise the topic within their own congregations, gradually normalizing conversations about abuse for the broader congregations these leaders serve.

Cross-Cutting Findings

Each project partner pursued tailored local activities but shared a unified mission: strengthening the capacity of faith communities to recognize DV/SA, support survivors, and promote healthy relationships through culturally grounded, community-led approaches. While the partnerships reflected distinct faith traditions, community contexts, and implementation strategies, several powerful common themes emerged. Strategies were intentionally adapted to meet the unique priorities of each faith community, revealing shared methodologies that unlocked deep engagement around highly sensitive issues. Together, these findings illustrate how the project partners and local congregations built trust, developed leadership, grew community capacity, and created a permanent foundation for DV/SA prevention and survivor support.

Across the three partnerships, documented accomplishments included reaching more than 1,400 faith leaders and community members, delivering 51 educational events, engaging 112 faith institutions across 20 states,

Collective Project Accomplishments			
1,400+	51	112	20
Faith leaders & community members reached	Educational events delivered	Faith institutions engaged	States represented
<i>*Documented accomplishments; actual reach likely higher.</i>			

developing culturally tailored educational resources, strengthening faith and community leadership, and expanding referral pathways between faith communities and DV/SA organizations. These figures reflect documented project activities and likely understate the project's full reach, given the many informal consultations, relationship-building efforts, and ongoing collaboration that also contributed to the work. The partnerships also helped equip faith leaders with knowledge and resources to recognize signs of abuse, respond to survivors, and connect community members with appropriate support. As these leaders remain active within their communities, the relationships, leadership, and capacity developed through the project will likely continue to support DV/SA prevention and survivor support beyond the grant period.

Long-Term Relationship Building Created Trust

Trust served as the indispensable foundation for this entire project. Investing heavily in deep relationship-building created rare opportunities for meaningful, uninterrupted engagement with faith communities around DV/SA. The project partners invested years in decoding local leadership structures, honoring specific cultural values, and understanding institutional priorities while demonstrating an unwavering, long-term commitment to collaboration. These sustained relationships generated the safety needed to introduce sensitive conversations, navigate historically taboo topics, and maintain community engagement through challenging moments.

The pathways to cultivating this trust matched the distinct nature of each community:

- **Ellen Hong and Li-Shun Hong** expanded their network incrementally through churches and seminary classrooms, engaging future and current Taiwanese Christian clergy over multiple semesters.
- **The Sikh Family Center** relied on gurdwara leadership, community advocates, and youth leaders to foster dialogue directly within Punjabi Sikh communities, including through gurdwaras, local community organizations, and student networks.
- **Korean American Family Services** worked alongside pastors, the Korean Faith Advisory Council, and other church leaders, recognizing that introducing conversations about abuse required patience and a gentle pace that respected each congregation's institutional readiness.

These diverse strategies illustrate that trust is never achieved through a single, transactional intervention; it is built exclusively through consistent visibility and mutual respect. Project partners emphasized that relationship building is an ongoing, non-linear process, as communities naturally varied in their willingness to confront abuse. However, as these relational roots deepened, faith leaders became increasingly eager to seek out expert guidance, request advanced training, formalize referral pathways, and explore how their own ministries could actively support survivors and champion healthy relationships. The project proved that trust was not merely a passive prerequisite for program delivery; it was the core implementation strategy that made lasting community transformation possible.

Investing in Trusted Leaders Strengthened Community Capacity

A second cross-cutting finding was the undeniable impact of strengthening leadership from within each faith community. The project partners recognized that meaningful, permanent change must be championed by people who already held trusted positions and fully understood the cultural, linguistic, and spiritual nuances of their communities. Across the lifespan of the project, these internal champions included pastors, seminary students, gurdwara management committees, community advocates, women's ministry organizers, and youth leaders. While their specific titles differed, each group successfully created safe avenues for complex conversations that were grounded in pre-existing relationships and community safety.

Leadership development reflected the unique social structures of each faith tradition:

- **In the Taiwanese and Korean Christian contexts**, efforts focused on equipping pastors, seminary cohorts, and women leaders to serve as trusted theological messengers within their networks.
- **In the Punjabi Sikh context**, the focus centered on empowering gurdwara committees, youth, and community advocates to act as localized resource bridges.

While these approaches looked different in practice, they shared the exact same goal: anchoring critical advocacy skills permanently within the community so that expertise remains local long after the funding cycle of this project concludes.

As these leaders gained technical knowledge and personal confidence, many spontaneously expanded their involvement to extend the project's reach. Faith leaders regularly requested additional trainings, urged their external clergy colleagues to participate, established tighter referral relationships with DV/SA groups, and seamlessly wove safety concepts into existing youth ministries, sermons, and community events. By the end of the project, leadership development had evolved way beyond a simple training strategy. It had permanently enhanced each community's independent capacity to recognize abuse, protect survivors, and sustain prevention education through trusted, local voices.

Faith Communities Increasingly Recognized Their Role in Addressing DV/SA

One of the clearest evolutions achieved across the partnerships was a fundamental shift in how faith leaders and congregations view their spiritual responsibility in addressing DV/SA. Early interactions frequently focused on basic awareness, debunking harmful misconceptions, and dismantling deep-seated social stigma. However, as relationships matured and faith leaders grew comfortable handling these concepts, the conversations shifted rapidly from abstract awareness to practical, operational execution. They began asking precise questions about how their institutions could build safety protocols, strengthen external referrals, teach healthy relationship dynamics to youth, and actively prevent DV/SA. This progression reflected a growing communal realization that responding to abuse is entirely consistent with, rather than separate from, the core spiritual mission of a faith community.

This institutional awakening manifested beautifully across the partnerships:

- Many faith leaders sought intense, case-specific consultations following formal training sessions or requested advanced, specialized educational tracks.
- Others explored proactive ways to integrate safety concepts directly into weekly sermons, ministry activities, and community programming.
- Congregations forged stronger, explicit collaborations with local DV/SA organizations, creating clear, dignified pathways for survivor support.

These advancements developed gradually through ongoing, respectful dialogue and repeated opportunities to engage with the material over time. Faith communities were never expected to become experts in DV/SA advocacy nor did the project partners expect every congregation to respond in an identical manner. Instead, the project helped each community identify meaningful, safe roles that perfectly reflected their own existing institutional strengths, values, and leadership styles. By the end of the project, many faith leaders saw themselves not just as spiritual guides, but as essential, active partners in supporting survivors, fostering healthy families, and strengthening the collective response to violence.

Adapting Approaches to Each Community Increased Engagement

Although the project partners shared a common goal of engaging faith communities around DV/SA, no single standardized approach would have been effective across all three distinct groups. Instead, they consistently tailored their strategies to reflect each community's unique faith traditions, cultural values, organizational structures, and foundational readiness to engage with the topic. These careful adaptations directly shaped how conversations were introduced, who delivered the messages, the specific linguistic terms and examples used, and the opportunities created for continued learning and dialogue.

The modifications extended well beyond simply translating existing educational materials into community languages. The project partners intentionally incorporated scripture and theological reflection, developed culturally precise case examples, and framed sensitive conversations in ways that resonated deeply with each community's core values and priorities. Leadership development also reflected each partnership's unique context:

- **Ellen Hong and Li-Shun Hong** focused heavily on seminary integration and current clergy within Taiwanese Christian networks.
- **The Sikh Family Center** prioritized gurdwara management committees, community advocates, and youth-led initiatives.
- **KFAM** concentrated on intensive pastoral cohorts and specialized leadership circles for female faith leaders within Korean Christian churches.

Although these execution strategies looked completely different on the ground, they were guided by the exact same underlying principles of cultural humility, community partnership, and rigorous responsiveness to local needs.

The project proved that genuine, culturally responsive engagement cannot be achieved through a rigid, pre-packaged curriculum or a top-down implementation model. Instead, success depends on understanding a community intimately enough to adapt evidence-informed strategies in ways that feel authentic, respectful, and immediately relevant to the people. This deliberate flexibility allowed project partners to build directly on existing cultural strengths while maintaining an unwavering commitment to survivor safety. The resulting framework provides a powerful, adaptive model that can be replicated across diverse faith traditions without expecting every partnership to look identical.

The Project Built a Foundation for Lasting Impact

The three partnerships produced deep systemic changes that extended far beyond individual grant activities, creating a permanent foundation for continued advocacy within each community. The specialized educational resources, local leadership development, strengthened referral networks, and trusted ongoing partnerships have positioned these faith communities to independently build upon the progress made over the seven-year project period. By the conclusion of the project, all project partners reported a surging community interest in advanced trainings, specialized crisis consultations, and structured opportunities to expand this work to entirely new congregations and regional faith leaders.

Equally important, the project permanently bridged the historical gap between local faith communities and the specialized advocacy groups providing culturally responsive DV/SA expertise. These newly forged connections created reliable, dignified pathways for ongoing clinical consultation, immediate crisis referrals, and future programmatic collaboration. This

infrastructure has dramatically increased local confidence that DV/SA can be addressed openly in ways that are both culturally safe and deeply grounded in each community's faith traditions.

Ultimately, the lasting impact of this project is reflected not just in the final tally of trainings delivered or faith leaders reached, but in the self-sustaining relationships, local leadership pipelines, and independent community capacity that will continue to protect vulnerable families long after this grant closes. As these trained pastors, advocates, elders, and youth carry this vital knowledge into their day-to-day community roles, their capacity to intercept abuse and support survivors will naturally ripple outward, extending the project's life-saving impact to a growing number of families over time. Collectively, these partnerships offer a brilliant, field-tested roadmap for engaging faith communities that remains deeply flexible, profoundly respectful, and fiercely protective of community well-being.

Lessons Learned

The Safety and Spirituality Project highlighted several invaluable lessons to inform future efforts aimed at engaging faith communities in DV/SA prevention and response. While each partnership navigated distinct religious landscapes and cultural contexts, their collective experiences reveal a unified set of field-tested principles for teams seeking to undertake similar work. These lessons highlight the exact conditions that support deep, meaningful engagement and the community-centered strategies that successfully strengthen local relationships, grassroots leadership, and long-term community safety.

Trust Takes Time to Build

Cultivating authentic relationships with faith communities requires sustained, long-term visibility that extends well beyond individual training sessions or isolated project activities. Across all three partnerships, trust developed gradually through consistent presence, active listening, deep mutual respect, and reliable follow-through. The project partners invested years into understanding localized community priorities, participating in existing community events, and demonstrating a genuine commitment to overall community well-being before introducing heavy conversations about DV/SA. This intentional groundwork made it possible to eventually engage faith leaders in increasingly vulnerable, open dialogues about survivor safety and community accountability.

Key Takeaway: Trust is an ongoing implementation strategy built through sustained, visible relationships, never through transactional, one-time engagements.

Effective Engagement Begins with the Community

The project partners achieved maximum impact because their implementation approaches grew out of the existing priorities, strengths, and foundational readiness of each specific faith

community. Shifting beyond a universal model, they adapted educational content, outreach methods, leadership tracks, and operational timelines to fit exact local contexts. This deliberate flexibility allowed sensitive safety conversations to develop in ways that felt culturally and linguistically meaningful, honored their distinct expressions of faith, and respected each community's unique pace of institutional learning.

Key Takeaway: Faith communities are most deeply engaged when advocacy honors and builds upon their unique cultural strengths, internal leadership structures, and immediate priorities.

Trusted Leaders Are Essential Partners

Faith leaders, seminary cohorts, youth advocates, and other community figures played an indispensable role in expanding the reach and long-term sustainability of this work. Their pre-existing relationships and established credibility created the safe environment needed to introduce historically taboo topics, encourage community-wide participation, and safely connect survivors with life-saving resources. As these internal champions grew in confidence and expertise, they naturally took ownership of the work, permanently integrating DV/SA prevention into their own ministries, congregations, and networks.

Key Takeaway: Trusted local leaders are the essential foundation for building self-sustaining community capacity that outlasts external grant funding.

Ongoing Support Strengthens Learning

Classroom training alone is insufficient to catalyze and lock in lasting institutional change. The project partners consistently emphasized that continued technical assistance, advanced training tracks, peer-to-peer learning circles, and structured opportunities for regular reflection are vital as faith leaders begin applying new advocacy knowledge within their complex, real-world congregations. Maintaining these long-term relationships allowed the project partners to answer highly complicated crisis questions, troubleshoot immediate safety challenges, and steadily deepen the confidence of faith leaders over multiple years.

Key Takeaway: Deep advocacy learning and true institutional change occur through ongoing relationship-centered mentorship long after the initial training session concludes.

Lasting Change Happens Incrementally

Meaningful culture shift within faith communities unfolds gradually through intentional, compounding milestones. Progress was rarely linear; instead, it manifested through a series of crucial, smaller developments. These included an increased willingness among faith leaders to openly discuss DV/SA, stronger collaborative ties between local churches or gurdwaras and advocacy organizations, proactive requests for additional learning opportunities, and a measurable rise in faith leaders' confidence when handling disclosures. Over time, these

incremental, quiet victories created the essential communal conditions for broad, permanent shifts in collective awareness, institutional infrastructure, and community-led safety.

Key Takeaway: Permanent community transformation is built one deliberate, respectful step at a time, moving securely from awareness to action.

Recommendations

The Safety and Spirituality Project outlines critical opportunities for federal agencies, DV/SA organizations, faith leaders, and evaluators to systematically strengthen future DV/SA prevention and response. These recommendations provide a practical framework to build or expand deeply rooted faith-based partnerships within Asian American and immigrant communities. Ultimately, they reinforce a core insight of this multi-year effort: faith communities achieve their greatest, most protective impact when they are engaged as long-term partners through trusted relationships, grassroots leadership, and culturally grounded approaches.

Federal Agencies and Grant Makers

Authentic engagement with faith communities develops incrementally through sustained relationship-building, patience, and ongoing collaboration. Future funding opportunities must recognize these activities as essential, billable components of implementation rather than preliminary, uncompensated work.

- **Invest in Multi-Year Timelines:** Grant structures that support multi-year partnerships, flexible implementation plans, and culturally responsive adaptations are far more likely to strengthen community safety capacity than short-term investments focused strictly on rigid training outputs.
- **Redefine Success Metrics:** Funding approaches should explicitly recognize relationship-building, internal leadership pipelines, and institutional community readiness as highly meaningful outcomes that directly contribute to long-term violence reduction.

DV/SA Organizations and Partners

Organizations, specialist consultants, and community advocates seeking to engage faith communities must prioritize long-term relationship-building, adapt implementation strategies to reflect each community's specific spiritual and cultural context, and maintain consistent engagement long after the initial training activities conclude.

- **Practice Radical Flexibility:** Successful implementation requires deep cultural humility and an unwavering willingness to build upon existing community strengths, pre-existing relationships, and leadership structures.

- **Establish a Community of Practice:** Future initiatives should create intentional, regular opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and collective problem-solving among practitioners carrying out faith-based advocacy within Asian immigrant spaces. Building a dedicated network of practitioners will strengthen individual partnerships while scaling the field's collective expertise.

Faith Communities and Leaders

Faith leaders, management committees, and lay leaders are uniquely positioned to promote healthy relationships, support survivors, and drive violence prevention within their congregations and broader community networks.

- **Embed Advocacy into Existing Infrastructure:** Building on the trust, knowledge, and leadership developed through this project, faith communities can seamlessly integrate safety education into existing youth ministries, scripture studies, and community activities.
- **Develop Multi-Tiered Leadership:** Cultivating advocates at multiple levels, including senior clergy, youth coordinators, women's ministry leaders, and trusted community members, helps insulate this work from staff turnover while ensuring long-term sustainability.
- **Formalize Survivor-Centered Protocols:** Faith communities should proactively design custom, localized response protocols that explicitly clarify how leaders must handle disclosures, maintain strict confidentiality, respect emotional boundaries, and immediately connect survivors with specialized, culturally responsive services.

Researchers and Evaluators

Future evaluations of efforts seeking to strengthen faith-based responses to DV/SA must focus heavily on analyzing how trust, organic relationships, local leadership, and community capacity develop over time.

- **Capture the Relational Nature of Change:** Evaluation methodologies should be designed to capture both nuanced implementation processes and long-term culture shifts, recognizing that the most meaningful outcomes emerge gradually and are frequently missed by traditional grant reporting metrics.
- **Utilize Mixed-Method Designs:** While traditional quantitative process measures provide valuable data points, they cannot fully articulate the relational and incremental nature of community transformation. Combining qualitative narratives with quantitative metrics provides a complete, authoritative understanding of how partnerships evolve, how communities build true capacity, and how lasting safety occurs over time.

Conclusion

The Safety and Spirituality Project demonstrated that meaningful engagement with faith communities is both possible and profoundly impactful when it is grounded in authentic trust, cultural responsiveness, and long-term partnership. Although each partnership navigated a distinct faith tradition, community context, and implementation framework, their combined experiences point to a singular conclusion: lasting change is built through relationships. By investing heavily in trusted leaders, adapting approaches to local contexts, and supporting communities over time, these partners created safe spaces for faith communities to confront DV/SA in ways that were both culturally relevant and deeply sustainable.

This project's accomplishments extend far beyond the impressive numbers of trainings delivered, leaders engaged, or educational resources developed. Equally transformative were the invisible milestones: the trust that was painstakingly built, the confidence faith leaders gained to address historically taboo issues, and the courageous leadership that emerged from within local congregations. Most importantly, this work ripples beyond the leaders themselves to the survivors and families sitting in their pews, who now have direct access to faith leaders who are fully equipped to recognize abuse, maintain strict confidentiality, and respond to their exact safety needs. Together, these outcomes have permanently enhanced community capacity and created a foundation for continued action.

Collectively, the three partnerships proved that faith communities can play an indispensable role in DV/SA prevention and survivor support when they are engaged through trusted relationships, community-driven adaptations, and sustained leadership development. While no single approach will be appropriate for every congregation, the core principles identified throughout this report provide an adaptable blueprint that can be tailored to diverse cultural and faith contexts. Rather than serving merely as passive settings for outreach or education, the participating gurdwaras, churches, and seminaries successfully transformed their independent knowledge, confidence, and leadership to serve as active, permanent partners in creating safer, healthier communities.