

Introduction to the Immigrant Rights Popular Education Toolkit for API Community Organizing

By the API Caucus of the Bay Area Immigrant Rights Coalition
and the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

The purpose of the document is to provide organizers and activists with language that addresses what we identified as the major barriers in Asian and Pacific Islander communities around immigration related issues. We hope these toolkit can serve as talking points or as background reading for organizers as they work with their community on immigration-related issues.

In our work as organizers and members of those communities, we found that the deeply held-beliefs around immigration that hindered API identification with immigrant rights formations were often based on societal reinforced racist and gendered stereotypes. We take the approach that reframing those stereotypes and educating immigrants and refugees – our family members, friends, aunties, teachers, cousins, neighbors, schoolmates, colleagues and comrades – about histories of movements, struggle and contemporary facts and figures, are sometimes effective in helping to move people towards a human rights framework, and towards creating an ethic of movement building that is multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-issue.

The second part of the toolkit provides some concrete exercises, tools and handouts that we use in community education. We come from a popular education perspective, meaning that we feel that lectures are not the only way to provide useful information. Popular education fundamentally believes that all people are experts in their own experience, and asks people to begin the transformative process of examining our experiences against our beliefs, and to shift frameworks towards liberation through processes of dialogue, education, reflection and action.

The organizations in the API Caucus are based in the Bay Area and work primarily with East Asian and Filipino immigrant, refugees and their US born and/or raised children, so this toolkit reflects that bias and experience in our examples and in our analysis. We also recognized that in terms of API communities, many recently arrived immigrants and refugee primarily hold their own national identities, or even regional or ethnic identities within a national origin. Further work would have to be done to refine each of the tools for any particular ethnic or national community.

While we aimed this toolkit to be useful to API communities, we have drawn from the insights and resources of many communities, movements, struggles and projects. We hope that this document is a place to begin, and that folks who wish to extend this type of work for their own communities will find it useful, and that you WILL adapt this document and the tools inside as they apply to your own community and region.¹

About the API Caucus

We came together in 2006 & 2007 because we recognized that API communities were not highly represented in the massive immigration related mobilizations that rocked the US nation-state. We also recognized that to the extent that API community members participated in the marches and other mobilizations – in particular, low-income immigrants and refugees themselves – they did not feel that those spaces were “for us.” That is, API community members did not feel represented in those spaces, nor

¹ We recognize that in the same time period that we developed this document, SAALT developed a similar document for use with South Asian and Muslim communities. We believe the two documents are complementary and serve as an example of how these documents and frames work differently in different national and ethnic communities.

did they feel that those spaces represented their needs and issues with respect to immigration policy or necessarily their experiences as immigrants and refugees.

We also began meeting to educate ourselves and to provide a stronger progressive view on immigration policy than the options that were present at the time, who we felt did not represent a progressive political analysis nor did it represent solidarity with other communities that would be affected by the proposed policies.

This “Myths & Realities” document draws on the groundwork of Filipinos for Affirmative Action (2006, “Myths & Realities”)² and the work of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (2002, “Advancing An Asian Agenda for Immigration Reform”).³

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² Insert cite / link.

³ Insert link.