

# Expanding Civic Information Access for AAPI Communities in Greater Boston

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In partnership with Free Press



*Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities remain underserved by and underrepresented in traditional media, despite being the fastest-growing immigrant population in the US.<sup>1</sup>*

This summer, I worked with **Free Press**, a **nonprofit fighting for media and technology justice**. As part of its Future of Journalism team, I worked with the **Media Power Collaborative**, a coalition focusing on reimagining public media and advocating for public funding for local media by **putting communities' needs first** — especially communities underserved by traditional media. I supported their Massachusetts state campaign, focusing specifically on **AAPI communities in Greater Boston and their civic information needs**. To that end, I embarked on a listening tour with Greater Boston ethnic media outlets and community organizations, both virtually and in-person in Greater Boston.

## Our listening efforts

- Met with 10 ethnic newsrooms and community organizations, including *The Boston Korea*, Governor's Asian American and Pacific Islander Commission, Asian American Resource Workshop (AARW), and Quincy Asian Resources, Inc. (QARI)
- Met and spoke with local residents & community leaders in both Boston's Chinatown and Quincy (part of Greater Boston, considered a "satellite" Chinatown).
- Attended Chinatown's annual August Moon Festival (one of its biggest events), hosted by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association.

I'm deeply grateful to the ethnic media outlets and community organizations who shared their time and insights with me, as well as the energizing support and mentorship of Sarah Stone, Free Press's National Field Director.

## Local ethnic media face affordability and profitability struggles

- The local ethnic news scene (for AAPI communities) is quite weak. Community organizers described how many outlets had either shut down or "devolved" into papers that didn't deliver "real news".
- Due to limited resources, the ethnic news outlets that do still exist face a choice between what's profitable vs. what's "important".

## For AAPI communities with limited civic engagement, civic information is often an "add-on," not a primary need

For example, *The Boston Korea's* app has a marketplace with ads; 60% of users use the app for the marketplace and 40% of users for actual news.



Sarah Stone (Free Press), Myong Sool Chang ("The Boston Korea"), and me during our Greater Boston listening tour. *The Boston Korea* is one of Boston's only hyperlocal ethnic media outlets focused on Boston's Korean-American community.

*I was grateful to also support Free Press's public-interest technology advocacy work.*

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## Reaching AAPI communities requires trust and creativity

- Many AAPI communities don't actively seek out civic information, and therefore do not rely on formal news networks. Instead, they seek out services (e.g., cultural events to be in community with others), and community organizations "add on" the civic information.
- Generally, AAPI community members rely on word-of-mouth and informal networks to receive civic information.

For example, to reach Asian queer men for AIDS awareness, Quynh Dang (pictured) and Amiham Matias (Governor's AAPI Commission) organized sewing circles, then slipped in information about resources. Queerness was deeply stigmatized at the time, especially among Asian communities.

Sarah Stone (Free Press) and me meeting with Kevin Lam (Asian American Resources Workshop) and Quynh Dang (Massachusetts Department of Public Health) at the VietAID Community Center, the nation's first Vietnamese-American Community Center, in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood.



- **Organizing in AAPI spaces is deeply relational. Civic information providers must meet AAPI communities where they are. Being on the ground matters.**
- **Civic information comes from sources beyond formal news ecosystems. Policymakers should expand their definitions of "public media" to include alternative media providers when considering funding.**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/05/01/key-facts-about-asians-in-the-us/>