



Asian and Pacific American Heritage Month

Programming Guide

Updated May 2023





May is [Asian American and Pacific Islander \(AAPI\) Heritage Month](#), an annual observance first conceived by U.S. congressional staffer Jeannie Jew, then formalized by Representatives Frank Horton and Norman Y. Mineta in 1977. It wasn't until 1990, though, that President George H.W. Bush signed a bill passed by Congress to extend Asian American Heritage Week to a month-long commemoration to recognize important people, events, and achievements within the Asian and Pacific American communities.

Since the late 1500s -- long before the United States gained independence -- people of Asian and Pacific Island heritage have enriched the nation's culture, customs, and traditions and worked alongside other immigrant communities to build its economic and intellectual strengths. Their contributions in art, engineering, technology, poetry, cooking, healthcare, education, infrastructure, governance, and more have enriched American society and history.

Yet there is also a long throughline of traumatic history surrounding Asian and Pacific Americans, and a resurgence of racist behaviors since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated this history. According to the most recent [hate-crime statistics](#) from the FBI, 746 attacks on people of Asian heritage were reported in 2021, triple the number in 2020 and the most in 30 years. Flames of anti-Asian sentiment have been fanned by misinformation about COVID-19, and racist political rhetoric brought into the open many long-festering stereotypes surrounding immigrant identity, '[model minority](#)' myths, and ethnocentrism.

Dialogues about these issues have and will continue to be relevant to the development of effective and inclusive professional spaces and communities. Moreover, recognizing and celebrating employees' racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds can be crucial to building psychological safety and enhancing employee engagement.

Celebrating Asian and Pacific American Heritage Month in the workplace is an excellent way to achieve that goal — but May should not be the only month when the contributions of these communities are valued and recognized. Cultural curiosity and historical awareness should be explored all year long.

Race in the workplace has only recently become a conversation that employers are willing to broach as, historically, many organizations proclaimed to be “colorblind” in a misguided attempt at establishing equality. However, we have come to realize that when companies downplay demographic differences, they actually increase underrepresented employees’ perception of bias from White colleagues and thereby reduce engagement, collaboration, innovation, and problem solving at work, often leading to higher attrition and an adverse company culture.

In the spirit of inclusion, everyone in your organization should be encouraged to participate in this month’s programming. It shouldn’t be the sole responsibility of employees who identify as Pacific Islander or Asian American to organize their own recognition, and you’ll find that it’s transformative to have employees of every background participating and learning during Asian and Pacific American Heritage Month. In that same vein, it would be wise to avoid the assumption that a member of your professional community wants to be involved simply because of their ethnic background.

The guide below will provide you with some tips and ideas for creating your Asian and Pacific American Heritage Month programming.



Communicate



Internal

While your employees, no doubt, read your organization's social media and peruse the internal newsletter, having special internal programming is equally important. Note: if you are not already prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at your organization, Asian and Pacific American Heritage Month programs may appear hollow or performative. Make sure that this programming is supplementary to existing DEI initiatives. If you don't already have DEI embedded into your organizational values, consider outlining some foundational initiatives before diving into specific and in-depth programming.

Consider adding [Asian American and Pacific Islander history makers](#) who relate to your industry to your Monday team meetings, morning stand-ups, or monthly company meetings. Add brief, informative reading to a general #Slack channel or other internal communication platform. Or, consider asking interested employees to share their personal experiences of being Asian American or Pacific American in the U.S.



External

Make a plan to share your organization's recognition of Asian and Pacific American Heritage Month on social media and in your public-facing newsletter. Highlight your supplier diversity, partnerships with diverse organizations, and employees that are making a difference in multicultural communities.

Avoid negative messaging in your communications. While our society has systemic issues to address, this month is about celebration and empowerment. Shine a light on historical contributions, changemakers, and significant events in your community, share inspiring stories, and push for positive change.

Keep your messages relevant. Some social media campaigns intend to honor Asian American or Pacific Islander individuals, but they have nothing to do with the business or the community they serve. Find ways to make connections that make sense for your brand — don't force a narrative for the sake of checking a box.

Educate



Teach Outside the Box

Work to place recognizable Asian American and Pacific American leaders at the forefront, while recognizing that there are far more people to be honored and amplified outside of the historical context. For example, if you are a tech company, you might spotlight Asian American and Pacific Islander inventors; if you are a healthcare organization, highlight the strides that Asian American or Pacific Islanders are making in medicine. Highlight key innovators in the media, finance, or nonprofit spheres. Who – from an Asian American or Pacific American heritage – is making history in your community today?

Bring in a Speaker or Plan a Workshop

Engage an external speaker, or organize a panel of experts to speak to employees about race relations, civil rights, and other critical topics surrounding the Asian American or Pacific Islander experience. Alternatively, consider a workshop. Workshops are unique in that participants are encouraged to be hands-on and to think critically about what they're learning in real-time. These are good opportunities for connectivity exercises.

You could also plan a museum tour at the [Asian Pacific American Center at the Smithsonian](#), which offers interactive, immersive online tours.

Educate

Read, Watch, Listen, LEARN

There are often a number of Asian and Pacific American Heritage Month events that you can find in your local community. However, with the required restrictions on events and congregations due to COVID-19, online events and experiential apps like [TDM Connect](#) are ways to engage and learn more safely. Here is a short list of resources that may be helpful in challenging yourself to broaden your own perspective on Asian and Pacific American histories and experiences.

Podcasts

[Deep Pacific Podcast](#)

[They Call Us Bruce](#)

[Asian Americana](#)

[American Desis Podcast](#)

[Memoirs Pasifika](#)

[Native Stories](#)

[The Bishop Museum](#)

Documentaries/Movies

[Minari](#)

[Far East Deep South](#)

[Hamtramck, USA](#)

[Standing Above The Clouds](#)

[Deported](#)

[Marks of Mana](#)

[Hawaiian Voice](#)

[American Revolutionary](#)

[Good Luck Soup](#)

[The World Before Her](#)

Books

[Sharks in the Time of Saviors](#) by Kawai Strong Washburn

[Minor Feelings](#) by Cathy Park Hong

[Black Marks on the White Page: An Anthology](#)
Edited by Witi Ihimaera and Tina Makereti

[Family In Six Tones](#) by Lan Cao and Harlan Margaret Van Cao

[Language of the Geckos and Other Stories](#) by Gary Park

[Asian American Dreams](#) by Helen Zia

[If I Had Your Face](#) by Frances Cha

[Shark Dialogues](#) by Kiana Davenport

[From a Native Daughter](#) by Haunani-Kay Trask

[On Earth, We're Briefly Gorgeous](#) by Ocean Vuong

[The Diaries of Queen Liliuokalani Of Hawai'i](#)
edited by David W. Forbes

[Good Talk: A Memoir in Conversations](#) by Mira Jacob

[Strangers in Their Own Land](#) by Francis X Hezel

[Unfamiliar Fishes](#) by Sarah Vowell

Historical Texts, Primary Sources, and Archives

[The Chinese Exclusion Act](#)

[Petition Against Annexation of Hawaii](#)

[The Vietnam War](#)

[Chinese Immigration to the United States](#)

[Japanese Internment During World War II](#)

Serve / Donate



Acknowledging Asian and Pacific American Heritage Month can and should become more than just a short annual post on your organization's Facebook page. Below are some suggested ways to get involved all year.

Volunteer Your Time

Consider a day of service. Volunteering with local nonprofits and charities is an excellent way to help the community, bond with your team members, and inspire engagement and motivation in the workplace. Lending your support as an organization shows your commitment in an authentic way.

Feel free to research or even poll your team about where they would like to contribute time. If you are still unsure, explore [Charity Navigator's](#) Asian American and Pacific Islander categorized list that identifies and details worthy organizations for you to consider.

If your team isn't gathering in the office yet, consider allowing employees to schedule a day or a half-day to volunteer on their own, using [Volunteer Match](#) to find virtual volunteer opportunities.

Donate Your Funds

Consider making a donation to a worthy organization. Sometimes, the gift of money is the most impactful thing you can give to a charity, especially when it comes to education or legal funds. Again, Charity Navigator or Volunteer Match can give you valuable options or look to your local community to make a real difference in your own backyard.





Invest

/// Increase Supplier Diversity

Commit to increasing supplier diversity in your organization. This is one way to provide ongoing support to underrepresented communities all year long. A supplier diversity commitment also benefits your company because it promotes innovation through the introduction of new products, services, and solutions while driving competition (on price and service levels) between existing and potential vendors. Partnerships with diverse suppliers give your business a competitive advantage when facing changing customer demographics.

/// Support Asian American- and Pacific Islander-owned Businesses

Take this month to be intentional about supporting Asian American- and Pacific Islander-owned businesses in your community. From restaurants and goods to vendors for home projects, seek out ways to support the goals of others. By diverting your purchasing power to these businesses, you're helping strengthen local Asian American and Pacific American economies, contributing to shrinking the racial wealth gap, and fostering job creation for people and communities.

/// Support Community Restoration and Policy Reform Organizations

Service-specific organizations can always utilize investment from individuals and businesses intent on creating holistic opportunities for change. Curate cohorts of company affiliates or groups of employees to help invest in [community-restoration and community-enrichment organizations](#), as well as policy reform, social-justice and [legal defense organizations](#).

Collaborate

Be Inclusive


One of the best ways to foster inclusion is by seeking out and listening to the perspectives and opinions of the people you are trying to include. Reach out to Asian and Pacific American leaders in your organization and get their input on how they would like to be recognized during Asian and Pacific American Heritage Month and beyond. Keep in mind that intersectionality is a huge part of understanding true diversity and inclusion; communities aren't monoliths, and multiple identities can and do exist within any given body of the Asian American or Pacific American communities. Stay cognizant of the ways that community members who are multiracial, LGBTQ+, neurodivergent, or have disabilities may experience their culture.

Establish Groups to Encourage Belonging

Take it a step further by establishing a diversity, equity, and inclusion committee or employee resource group (ERG) at your organization. This act shows that your company is dedicated to making the work environment a better place, and encourages free-flowing ideas and feedback between employees and leadership. Employee recognition is crucial to building inclusive workplaces. Furthermore, studies show the correlation between belonging and engagement is stronger for underrepresented groups.

A company with great examples of successful AAPI ERGs is [AT&T](#), which promotes its FACES, InspirASIAN, and OASiS ERGs, as well as its Asian Pacific Women's Organization Employee Network.





Leveraging Asian and Pacific American Heritage Month to build understanding and awareness about Asian American and Pacific American history, accomplishments and culture is a valuable opportunity for companies. Organizations that invest the time to celebrate this month in thoughtful, impactful ways send a clear message to their employees and customers that they care about cultural competency.

One of the best ways to honor Asian and Pacific American Heritage Month is by strengthening your allyship. While you're reading up on Asian and Pacific American history, look for ways that you can use your [privilege](#) to benefit others and take intentional actions to promote inclusion, belonging, and equity while counteracting bias.

Focus on sustainable impact. The relationships built and actions taken during Asian and Pacific American Heritage Month can create long-lasting benefits beyond the four weeks of May.



Notes



Communicate



Educate



Notes

Serve / Donate

Invest

Notes

Collaborate

Other
