



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Asian American and Pacific Islanders Commission

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Executive Director

Amihan Matias

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Meeting Agenda

Community Engagement & Visibility Subcommittee Meeting

Tuesday, September 1, 2026, 4:00 - 5:00 PM

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82577402945>

The meeting will be held via teleconference in compliance with the Governor's Executive Order on the Open Meeting Law

Attachment:

- Draft Meeting Minutes for CE&V August 2026

Members and Staff**Commissioners Present:**

- Moana Bentin
- Leo Blandford
- Rakashi Chand
- Vaishali Gade (joined 4:36p)

Commissioners Absent:

- Christopher Huang (informed cannot make meeting time)

Staff Present:

- Amihan Matias
- Anita Yip

1. Welcome & Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 4:05 PM by Commissioner Chand, upon a motion made by Commissioner Bentin, with quorum confirmed.

2. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Commissioner Bentin to approve the minutes of the previous meeting.

Second: Commissioner Blandford

Moana Bentin - yes
Leo Blandford - yes
Rakashi Chand - yes

Result: X Yes, No, Abstain. Motion carried unanimously.



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Action: Approved

3. Communications & Outreach Update

a. Key challenges and opportunities

Commissioner Chand touched on current capacity, priorities, and the trajectory of its work, including questions regarding the initiatives the Commission can undertake given available resources, bandwidth, and purview.

Members discussed the importance of focusing efforts on measurable community outcomes and ensuring that outreach activities align with the Commission's priorities and capacity.

b. Community engagement initiatives

Commissioner Chand emphasized the importance of not losing sight of community-facing initiatives (e.g. virtual office hours, shared calendar of AAPI holidays and celebrations) while balancing the substantial planning requirements associated with the 20th Anniversary Unity Dinner.

c. Asian Caucus outreach

Executive Director reported on planned meetings with the Asian Caucus and opportunities for closer collaboration, noting that in past the Commission held quarterly meetings with the Caucus.

Members discussed strengthening communication, coordinating efforts, and focusing on outcomes for the AAPI community. Staff mentioned that a preliminary conversation with Representative Chan (originally for newsletter purposes) underscored the importance of having measurable outcomes and maintaining a contingency reserve.

Moana emphasized that engaging the caucus in demonstrating impact is also a budget protection strategy.

4. Unity Dinner & 20th Anniversary Planning

a. Gala format and fundraising considerations

The Commission discussed whether there was a need to pursue fundraising rather than offer a free event at the State House.



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Financial Context and Budget Pressures

- i. **State budget sustainability concern:** Independent research from Massachusetts Taxpayer's Foundation indicates that state government operational costs are rising while state revenue remains volatile; grants that have offset costs in recent years are expiring soon, creating a structural funding gap.
- ii. **Funding risks:** Anticipated federal cuts and potential 9C cuts mean the Commission could face a scenario where its budget is cut.
- iii. **Nonprofit fundraising avenue:** Commission has a nonprofit side that enables pursuit of additional funding and fundraising campaigns. The dual public-entity/nonprofit structure adds complexity but also opens doors to donations, corporate sponsorships, and grant applications.
- iv. **Visibility risk:** If the Commission cannot quantify its impact, it risks being among the first cut if the state makes budget reductions; getting in front of the Asian Caucus to demonstrate measurable outcomes was flagged as urgent.

b. 2027 event planning

Unity Dinner History and Financial Baseline

- i. **Event cost baseline:** Total spend for the last Unity Dinner was approximately \$26,000–\$27,000, with ~\$20,000 going to venue and catering alone; performers, awards, and incidentals made up the remainder.
- ii. **Inflation adjustment:** Given cost increases since the last event (held two years ago), the group estimated a revised budget of ~\$35,000 for the upcoming gala.
- iii. **Revenue history:** Upon cursory review, the event has historically just about broken even. Ticket sales is in the \$15,000+ range, with sponsorships on high end being ~\$10,000.
- iv. **Event Framing:** Members discussed the purpose of the event as an opportunity to celebrate the Commission's



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history, recognize its work, highlight its impact, and bring together members of the AAPI community. Members also saw importance in creating an event that reflects the Commission's statewide role and allows participation from communities throughout Massachusetts.

For last two Unity Dinners, fundraising was not a primary focus in the last two Unity Dinners; the events were framed as community celebrations with ticket sales as the sole revenue mechanism.

- v. **Attendance:** The last event drew close to 300 attendees, including performers who also sat down to eat; the ballroom was filled to capacity.
- vi. **Venue used:** The Doubletree in Westborough was used most recently and was noted as a positive experience — the hotel offered a tasting, was receptive to Asian fusion menu guidance, and handled all catering and setup in-house.

Fundraising Campaign Strategy

- vii. **Proposed campaign structure:** Proposal to launch a broader fundraising campaign built around the 20th anniversary, culminating in the Unity Dinner gala.
- viii. **Both-and framing:** Amihan proposed framing the event as simultaneously a community celebration and a fundraiser, with mechanisms like auctions and corporate sponsorships layered on top of ticket sales.
- ix. **Auction consideration:** A live or silent auction was discussed as a revenue tool; concern raised that professional auction facilitators charge fees, so a pro-bono arrangement would be ideal. Silent auction was also noted as more inclusive given the community audience.
- x. **Corporate sponsorship:** Identified as a key revenue lever to offset costs and generate surplus; Amihan noted she has strong corporate connections in Western Massachusetts that could be tapped if the event is held in Worcester or the central part of the state.
- xi. **Foundation sponsorship:** Moana raised the additional question of whether the Asian Community Fund could be



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approached for a grant specifically to support the Unity Dinner, noting the Commission has not historically submitted proposals to them despite their grant-making activity. Asian Community Fund has sponsored in past.

- xii. **Donation mechanism gap:** The Commission currently only accepts donations via PayPal, which many corporations do not use. It would be helpful to establish a more accessible payment mechanism (e.g., a "donate" button on the website linked to the nonprofit side) before the campaign launches.
- xiii. **Fundraising committee needed:** The group said a dedicated fundraising sub-group (within this subcommittee, not a separate body) is recommended, staffed by commissioners with fundraising expertise and who can explore potential philanthropic and corporate funding opportunities.

Members also discussed distinguishing fundraising responsibilities from event logistics while ensuring the two functions coordinate effectively.

- xiv. **Staffing dependency:** The fundraising plan is partially contingent on budget approval for a part-time administrative assistant, who would handle logistics, sponsorship follow-up, and solicitation tracking — tasks currently too burdensome for volunteer commissioners.
- xv. **Goal-setting required:** The group noted the need to establish clear fundraising goals, a formal plan, and a sponsorship outreach list before the next meeting.

Logistics: Timing, Venue, Themes

- xvi. Timing
 - **Date:** With past precedence of being held in April and May, members discussed the possibility of holding the event in April 2027 rather than May, in order to avoid competing with other events in May, be the first of AANHPI month celebrations, and potentially improve venue availability.

Flexibility on the exact date was recommended — better to match a venue's availability and secure a good deal than to hold firm on a specific date. No



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date was finalized.

- **Day of Week:** Friday and Saturday evenings are preferred but book quickly; the group flagged this as a constraint to plan around.

xvii. Venue criteria

- Must **accommodate ~300 guests** with room to grow.
- **Must be self-sufficient:** in-house catering, tables, chairs, linens, and AV — the Commission does not have the staff bandwidth to source and manage separate vendors.
- Must be **accessible by public transportation** to avoid excluding community members without cars.
- **Food is non-negotiable:** The AAPI community's relationship with food means catering quality cannot be compromised; the priority is finding a venue willing to accommodate an Asian fusion menu.

xviii. Venues discussed:

- Hotels
 - a. Doubletree, Westborough — used previously, positive experience
 - b. Sheraton, Framingham — large hall but was unavailable for past event
- College/Universities
 - a. UMass Boston — large and well-located but with some operations considerations
 - b. Northeastern University (Emerging Technologies College), Boston — Commissioner Gade described as a large, beautiful hall
 - c. Amihan noted many options with good meeting space in the western part of the state
- F9 Building, Boston (near Pedro Street) — Vaishali described as a beautiful venue with staff handling setup; cost unknown but she offered to



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inquire.

- Mechanics Hall, Worcester — beautiful venue but likely requires union labor for all services, including food, which would require negotiations to bring in outside catering
- Casino venues (Encore, Springfield casino) — briefly floated for their large ballrooms, then dismissed; the Commission has received outreach from organizations addressing gambling addiction in the AAPI community (particularly among elders), making a casino venue inappropriate.

Location preference:

Worcester was identified as the first-choice location by Moana, with Amihan agreeing, as it is geographically central and shows how the Commission is more statewide. No decisions were made.

xix. Themes

- **Honoring Our Past, Shaping Our Future**
20 Years of Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Impact
- **20 Years Strong: Building Bridges, Creating Belonging**
Celebrating Two Decades of Community and Connection
- **Rooted in Community. Rising Together.**
Celebrating 20 Years of AAPI Leadership and Progress
- **A Legacy of Voice, A Future of Impact**
20 Years Advancing the AAPI Community

No final theme was selected.

xx. Guests

- Commissioner Chand noted that Commissioner Yu knows Mayor Wu personally, and Amihan mentioned also recently meeting Mayor Wu at a national AAPI museum planning event where Wu offered direct support and gave Amihan a public



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shout-out.

The Commission discussed the importance of reviewing historical event budgets and expenditures to inform future planning.

5. Next Steps

a. Upcoming meetings

- i. Doodle to be sent for 9/15 meeting to determine whether a meeting after 5pm is possible. This meeting will be focused entirely on Unity Dinner and fundraising planning.

b. Action items and assignments

- i. Rakashi:
 - Send a poll to all subcommittee members to find a mutual meeting time that works more broadly (e.g., 5:15 PM).
 - At the 9/1 monthly commission meeting, ask all commissioners whether they have fundraising experience or connections that can support the campaign and gala planning.
- ii. Anita:
 - Continue compiling past Unity Dinner sponsorship records from archives
 - Compile past Unity Dinner budgets (5-year lookback), including vendor names and dollar amounts for subcommittee to review
- iii. All members:
 - Brainstorm fundraising ideas, venue leads, sponsorship contacts, and donation mechanism options before the next meeting, proposed for 9/15

6. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Blandford and seconded by Commissioner Gade. The meeting was formally adjourned at 4:52 PM.