



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Asian American Commission

**AAC Retreat minutes  
2012.08.11**

**1:00PM Start of meeting.**

**Icebreaker**

## **Paul gives AAC background.**

In the mid-1990s, then-Governor Weld formed the original AAC by executive order to advise the Governor on issues affecting the MA Asian American communities. Through the support of his wife, Susan Weld, an Asian studies scholar, the AAC was representative of many Asian ethnic groups and geographic regions throughout MA. Over the years, activities of the AAC diminished as Governor Weld's successors were less engaged with the AAC until the AAC was totally inactive under then Governor Romney.

In 2006, then-Treasurer Cahill supported legislation to create a permanent, broadly representative AAC not dependent solely on the Governor. The current AAC provides for a maximum of 21 Commissioners, three each appointed by the Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, Auditor, Treasurer, Speaker of the House and Senate President, to serve staggered three year terms. Initially some of the appointing officers may not have taken the appointments seriously enough, so issues occurred with attendance and participation by some members. Another issue was that members were appointed without much knowledge nor expectations of their duties. The Commission was most effective when it had a staff member to execute on its activities. When the first executive director left, the AAC became relatively inactive with only the annual Unity Dinner continuing. The updating of members' terms and reappointments was also neglected. In the past year or so, the AAC has regained its energy with Jason as the executive director. In the last two years, with many of the original members reaching their term limits, a large number of new, energetic members have been appointed to the Commission. This has re-invigorated the Commission.

The purpose of today's retreat is to educate the Commissioners on the history, purposes and goals of the AAC, to give them an opportunity to get to know each other to facilitate effective working relationships, and to establish long and short term plans for a program of activities to serve the AMA Asian American community.

## **Commissioner Roles**

Attendance has historically been an issue for the monthly meetings. In May 2012, taking advantage of a new provision of the OML, the bylaws were amended to allow remote participation. We still need 1/3 of members present to make quorum, that's 7. We ask local members to try to attend in person. However, those members who can't travel to Boston for a one hour meeting in the middle of a workday can participate by conference call. It was also pointed out that some members have a

conflict with the Tuesday noon meeting time because of other meeting commitments. It was agreed that we should consider changing the meeting dates to better match members' schedules. Some members suggested having the meeting towards the end of the work day and have it be 90 minutes instead of the usual 60 minutes. Jason will poll the members by Doodle to establish a more convenient meeting time.

Jason and Karen reviewed the Open Meeting Law (OML), which provides that every Commissioner is considered a public servant and must abide by the laws.

Important points to know.

1. the meeting be posted with the Secretary's office ahead of time
2. every Commissioner must sign a form to acknowledge receipt of OML
3. OML also applies to subcommittees

Our bylaws list possible subcommittees to match governing expertise to the Commission's activities. We discussed the need to reorganize them to fit our needs.

As an example, Chris described the subcommittee structure for the MA Commission on the Status of Women (MCSW) deal with subcommittees. There are three, Program & Planning, Legislative and Public Policy, Budget & Personnel, plus the Executive Committee. Every member sits on one or more committees. The fundraising event, Unsung Hero, is put together by the Program & Planning. Budget & Personnel works closely with the Executive Director.

The Commissioners agreed to create three committees for the time being: Finance and Administration, Public Relations / Legislations, and Programs with program subcommittees for Healthcare, Youth, Unity Dinner and Economic Development. Also, the Executive Committee will continue with the officers. We currently have 19 members and can create these subcommittees to start us off. A signup sheet was passed around for members to sign up for subcommittees and serve as Chairs/Co-chairs and secretaries for minutes.

Jason also pointed out that the bylaws provide for appointment of Honorary Commissioners as a way to broaden our base of supporters. Paul said this may be a good way to engage past Commissioners.

Paul mentioned that despite limited resources, the AAC is accomplishing a great deal, particularly compared to other Asian American Commissions in other states, based on his conversations with the national groups working with state AACs. But we can do more. Ken An and others suggested that we can get additional staff capacity with student interns.

Paul explained that the Commission currently gets all its operating budget from the annual Unity Dinner. The dinner generally raises over \$40k and nets \$25-30k. Major expense is staff salary and the current staff cost \$25k/year with 20 hours/week.

This year's dinner demonstrated the importance of having a tax exemption status. Ken An has arranged a meeting for 8/21 with a pro bono lawyer to start on it. Priti had recommended using a fundraising consultant but timing was an issue. Chris: MCSW had bad experiences with past fundraising consultants, doing on their own was more effective. Our biggest sponsor has always been

State Street but we cannot count on it continuing. We need to develop additional funding sources. This year's dinner made over \$40k only because of the generosity of The Boston Foundation which agreed to repurpose \$10K of its previously paid \$25K grant for the Dinner. Paul said the dinner serves a dual purpose: to raise funds for our operations and to bring our community together. It was asked whether we should consider two dinners/luncheons, one for outreach and the other for fundraising. Grace said the CRJ asks their honorees in advance to bring additional attendees and revenue. The Commission may need to be more upfront and direct with the honorees/keynotes about funding expectations. 2013 healthcare theme may bring in pharmaceutical dollars. Om's connections with the pharmaceuticals require a tax exemption status and 90 days notice, it is important that we get the status soon. May is a popular month, should we consider another time?

Should we ask Commissioners to give/get a certain amount for the dinner? It is difficult for Chris. Karen: some are more capable of contributing through efforts than monetarily. Grace: maybe use a buddy system to fill tables, where two members or more work together. Would requiring members to give/get be a deterrent from joining the Commission? Paul: fundraising is all about using one's network, and we need to strike a balance between setting ambitious targets in order to meet our funding needs as well as to emphasize the importance of fundraising to all our members, while not deterring good people from serving as Commissioners. All good questions for the Unity Dinner Subcommittee.

Jason reported that the annual report has not been written yet. It should be done soon for it to be a tool to report to the appointing authorities. Paul said our goal should be for our leadership and appointees to meet annual with each appointing authority to update them on our activities and seek their support, as well as to discuss new appointees. It was suggested that we consider asking the appointing authorities to contribute to funding our operations.

### **Working with the Executive Director**

The meeting went into executive session to discuss the ED's contributions to the AAC's programs and activities. It was agreed that a formal annual evaluation will be conducted by the end of 2012.

### **Programs.**

Karen and Ken An led a discussion of the AAC's programs.

The Young Leader Symposium has an agenda, speakers, and set for Friday 9/21 8:30-3pm at the State House. The program seeks one sponsor with \$3k as goal. Approximately 50 attendees are expected. The program will cultivate the next generation of leaders on what does it mean to serve the state, life of a bill, and others. There are three sessions, networking, and luncheon which all the Commissioners can attend.

The Resource Fair has been going on since February. It is a replicable program to bring state and federal government to the people at events throughout the Commonwealth. The Commission pays the event fees and we invite agencies to attend to get to know the communities. We will continue to think about other agencies to partner with and geographic events to attend.

Health professionals are well represented on the Commission. It may be the theme for the 2013 Unity Dinner. Jason and certain Commissioners are meeting with various community health care groups to assess needs in order to develop our programs. One aspect will be to possibly address disparities in reporting of Asian health conditions.

Gaming bill passed and funds are allocated to address gambling issues. Significant percentage of Asian Americans gamble and have serious issues. The Gaming Commission is looking for staff attorney, it will be beneficial to insert an Asian American there. Eileen Glovsky, previously with the Treasurer, and now the deputy director. Throughout the state, there is only one psychologist who deals with gambling addictions in Asian Americans. The AAC is reviewing the best ways to advocate for the needs of our community.

Paul & Geoffrey work with AALAM to prepare candidates for interviews for state and federal judgeships and then to advocate for them. Several Asian American candidates have benefited from this program. Due to the down economy, many more senior lawyers are applying for judgeship, therefore, stagnating the program's younger candidates. We are continuing to advocate for the need for more Asian American judges.

Other suggestions?

Grace: in regards to economic development, there is a market for financial literacy programs to educate on retirement, small business loan, budget 101, et. It could bring in potential banking partners/funders. Chris: Brookline hosts community events and banks underwrite everything, happens four times a year, 5:30-7pm. We can work more with local banks than national ones. The Treasurer invests funds to local community banks targeting small business, he encouraged us to work with him. Karen: targeting individuals and small businesses are two different things. Boston has a small business assistance center but does not target Asian Americans.

Vesna: partnerships with local groups are key. Grace: Lowell is a good location due to many developments happening. Sophy is in the financial business and can help vet ideas. Grace, Larry, Sophy, and Kay can think about bringing a financial program to Lowell.

Each subcommittee will put together a one page report/finding.

### **SWOT analysis**

Strengths – professional diversity and stature of members, good geographic representation, broad set of talents and connections, congenial group, hard-working, energetic, desire to serve the Asian American community

Weaknesses – poor public relations & communication capabilities, lack of physical presence, no state funding. Identity/branding is still weak. Is mission statement too broad, given our capabilities?

Opportunities – Become the Asian American organization known to be committed to promoting unity and collaboration in our community, social media, address concerns from all Asian American communities, be more involved with appointing authorities, push our Asian American public officials – for funding?, to help Commissioners in their outreach, create nametags and/or business cards for Commissioners

Threats - confusion with Governor's AAC, lacking of funding

Other thoughts: brand unity dinner as must attend event to network. Reach out to other non-Asian American entities. Team up with other vocal groups. Work with Governor's AAC on healthcare?

### **Visions for AAC**

Long-term: have people recognize AAC as the organization promoting unity and representing the needs of the Asian American community. When issues arise, we want people to immediately think of AAC. Be proud of impact on healthcare disparities. Be a substantive resource for the Asian American population & legislatives. Have presence in the State House, lead legislative activities for Asian American gain. Be a tool for Asian American nonprofits. Have a presence within all facets of the public/private activities.

Short-term: Summary of the retreat. 1) Form subcommittees to increase activities and distribute workloads. 2) Move monthly meeting to end of a workday to better accommodate people's schedules. 3) Obtain tax exempt status as soon as possible. 4) Reconsider how the annual dinner is run to maximize fundraising opportunities. 5) Give an annual evaluation of the Executive Director. 6) Write the annual report and use it to engage the appointing authorities at least annually. 7) Recognize our SWOT.

Other thoughts: AAC was created not to serve any one individual person in office, it serves the entire commonwealth. Many Asian American nonprofits are struggling, how do we help them?