

Creating Social Justice Awareness and Positive Social Change: An Interview with Wayne Ho, CEO of the Chinese-American Planning Council

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As we recognize Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, I recently sat down with our friend Wayne Ho, CEO of the Chinese-American Planning Council (“CPC”), to learn more about the community issues the nation’s largest Asian American social service organization is working to address. Since 2021, Proskauer has partnered with the CPC to host several educational workshop series with CPC teens, centering on social justice and academic enrichment. Proskauer employees volunteer as mentors on a regular basis, through programs like those sponsored by the CPC, imparting their expertise beyond the law to inform and inspire students to succeed in college, their careers and other aspects of their lives.

Please explain the mission of the Chinese-American Planning Council and a sense for how many people the CPC serves.

Wayne Ho: Founded in 1965 during the Civil Rights Movement and immigration reform, the Chinese-American Planning Council has the mission to promote the social and economic empowerment of Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income New Yorkers. The nation’s largest Asian American social services organization, CPC empowers community members by ensuring they have the resources and opportunities needed to thrive. We serve over 80,000 community members of all ages and backgrounds from all 56 community districts of New York City. Two-thirds of our community members are Asian American, mostly Chinese American, and the other third represents other diverse populations across New York City.

What are your major programs?

Wayne Ho: CPC achieves our mission by welcoming community members to over 50 high-quality programs at nearly 40 sites throughout Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens. Our programs are organized into three pillars:

1. [Education](#) – We believe that education is lifelong, so we provide learning opportunities for all

ages – from preschool programs and after school enrichment to college success workshops and adult English classes.

2. Family Support – We make it easier for families across all generations and backgrounds to access to personalized resources: from parenting classes, public benefits enrollment, and home-delivered meals to services for LGBTQ+ youth, older adults, people with disabilities, and people living with HIV/AIDS.

3. Community and Economic Empowerment – We empower community members to advocate for themselves, their families, and their communities through economic development (affordable housing, job training, and youth and senior employment) and civic engagement (serving learning, citizenship classes, and voter registration).

There has been an uptick in anti-Asian hate crime and xenophobia. How is CPC addressing it?

Wayne Ho: When anti-Asian hate increased during the pandemic, CPC launched our [Community Safety and Belonging Initiative](#) with the goal of ensuring that New York City's Asian American community members feel safe, respected, and included in their neighborhoods and across New York City. We implemented four interconnected strategies to address anti-Asian hate:

- 1. Community Education and Empowerment** – We have been educating Asian American community members about their rights by collaborating with city agencies, partner organizations, and elected officials to co-sponsor workshops and trainings in multiple languages and dialects. We have been hosting virtual know-your-rights workshops on reporting bias incidents. We have been training community members to be upstanders so that they know how to safely intervene, document, and support victims when bias and harassment occurs. We also have been providing workshops on verbal de-escalation and physical self-defense.
- 2. Neighborhood Safety and Inclusiveness** – We have been ensuring that community members feel a strong sense of safety, dignity, and belonging in the neighborhoods where they live, work, study, play, and worship. Because seniors are afraid to leave their homes, we expanded food deliveries, distributed PPE and wellness kits, and provided chaperones for those who want to be vaccinated. We have been working with city agencies and elected officials to provide better lighting on streets and safety improvements on storefronts and buildings. We have been supporting community events, art installations, and other public actions that advance inclusiveness and belonging of all neighborhood residents.
- 3. Multiracial Solidarity** – We have been promoting solidarity with diverse Asian American communities, communities of color, immigrant communities, and LGBTQ communities to advance racial justice and address root causes of violence. We developed joint responses to denounce anti-Asian hate crimes and white supremacy. We have been educating Asian American youth, adults, and seniors to address anti-Blackness in our own community. We have been providing workshops on the history of Asian Americans and solidarity with other communities. We also have expanded our implicit bias and anti-discrimination trainings for youth and adults.
- 4. Policy and Systems Change** – We have been advocating for stronger policies, funding, and

services for the Asian American community. We continue to provide recommendations to the Mayor's Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes, Commission on Human Rights, Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, NYPD, and District Attorney's Offices on how to respond to the rise in anti-Asian violence. We have had discussions with the NYPD and District Attorney's Offices on how to advance community policing, restorative justice, and alternatives to incarceration. We have also been engaging with national organizations and funders to ensure a coordinated response to the rise in anti-Asian violence and hate crimes.

What else is needed for our society to address this serious issue?

Wayne Ho: In addition to our strategies I've just summarized, we believe that hate can be addressed by helping communities understand each other better. We are fortunate to be a grantee partner of [The Asian American Foundation](#), which was founded at the beginning of the pandemic. Along with organizations across the United States and New York City, we have been advocating for [AAPI history](#) to be part of K-12 and higher education. We also have been [elevating authentic stories](#) and reporting that combat stereotypes about the AAPI community. Because AAPI organizations are historically underfunded, we continue to [advocate for increased public and private resources](#) for our community.

We have been working with groups of your high school students across NYC for about three years. Why is it important to introduce your students to social justice, careers and pathways for the future?

Wayne Ho: CPC is a social services organization that creates positive social change, so we believe that New Yorkers should become agents of social justice in their own lives and in their communities. We are grateful for the partnership with Proskauer because public high school students have been exposed not only to new experiences but also to social justice careers. Given the high rates of poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, and underemployment in New York City, it becomes more important than ever for young people to understand community needs and to feel a sense of responsibility in helping to address such needs. We believe that everyone can give back to the community in their careers, regardless of whether they are working in government, nonprofit, or business. Not everyone needs to work in a nonprofit to make a difference. Everyone can volunteer in a homeless shelter, donate to a good cause, speak up in a community board meeting, participate in a rally, or call a legislator's office. By exposing young people to social justice now, they are more likely to contribute to the community in the future.

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