



25 Years of Leadership and Advocacy Training



A Special Alumni Report

Since 1999, nearly 1,500 Southeast Asian Americans and allies have learned how to share their personal experiences with elected officials through Southeast Asia Resource Action Center's Leadership and Advocacy Training program.

In their words

In honor of 25 years, we checked in with 25 graduates who have walked the halls of Congress and statehouses with us and asked them: **What memories, lessons, and/or learnings from your time at LAT do you still carry with you either personally or professionally?** Here's what they said:

Cheryl Yin, LAT '17
Assistant Professor (Northfield, MN)



I learned how important it is to listen and validate each other's stories and experiences. Before LAT, I did not think my voice mattered in politics and I did not know I could arrange a meeting with my representative. I felt so empowered talking to my House of Representative's staff and leaving

behind documents and information for them. I now know that I can email and call any of my representatives' office at any time to share my thoughts: to encourage policies that uplift our communities or to discourage discriminatory policies that hinder our livelihoods.

Varaxy Yi, LAT '11
Associate professor (Madera, CA)



LAT was a significant turning point in my personal, educational, and professional trajectory.

It was my first time in a space where other Khmer/Cambodian and SEAA folks were having essential conversations about community and civic engagement surrounding important topics impacting our community. LAT activated my civic and political consciousness, and I began to see myself even more as a connected and intertwined community member who could contribute to collective power building. Seeing other SEAs in various roles helped me to understand that I could follow in their footsteps. I started my doctoral program a year later, in 2012, and am now a tenured faculty member. LAT helped me understand that I have an important voice and story to share, and this space has been integral to my development as SEAA. I am thrilled to return to support SEARAC as a board member 13 years after participating in LAT 2011.

Thiên Nguyễn, LAT '23

Rising college junior, incoming chief of staff (Seattle, WA)



I never knew the power of a shared, collective memory until I participated in LAT. Surrounded by people from all kinds of diverse communities across the country, we were tied together by a common Southeast Asian/Asian American experience. From meeting and learning from SEA refugees to SEAA youth, I felt empowered and supported to initiate change in my own community by using the lessons and advice I gained from the program. I learned how to initiate conversations with my elected legislators and how to perform meaningful storytelling. Our lived experiences are what make us who we are today, and we can share them with the world as a means to enact positive change for the betterment of our SEA/AA communities.

julie vue, LAT '13

Senior program officer (Fresno, CA)



The emphasis and importance of being civically and politically engaged. It was great to be around a delegation of Southeast Asian leaders who shared about their experiences and passion for engaging in politics and advocacy.

Seng So, LAT '09

Organizing director (Long Beach, CA)



I learned a lot about building political power and how to implement advocacy strategies within the context of base-building and campaign-building. I used a lot of the skills from LAT in my current work today.

May Gnia Her, LAT '11

Executive director (Fresno, CA)



The ability to cultivate a meaningful message to prepare to speak to my elected officials.



Monica Thammarath, LAT '07

Human rights manager (San Francisco, CA)



Attending LAT was a transformative experience for me. A couple key highlights were meeting Many Uch and hearing his story.

Va Her, LAT '12

Research compliance officer (Fresno, CA)



The one-page fact sheet training provided tremendous help in talking points and preparing us to speak to our US representative. Today, I still use that fact sheet to train others for my work.

Ashley Yang, LAT '10

Senior human services representative and program manager (Circle Pines, MN)



My favorite memory was having a networking hour on the rooftop of

some fancy building with the Washington Monument in the distance. It was such a beautiful moment to celebrate the week's work and to see everyone in one space celebrating. I learned how to lobby effectively with my time at LAT and 'til this day have used that knowledge in many occasions, bill hearings, and in the work that I do.

Boosaba Tantisunthorn, LAT '10
Associate director of development
(Silver Spring, MD)



Fourteen years later, and I am still in touch with one person from my cohort. She and I actually ended up working together at an AAPI-serving scholarship organization. While we no longer work together, it's neat to see that we are both still involved with our communities!

Andres Pacificar, LAT '12
Director of youth programs (Seattle, WA)



My LAT experience changed my life and helped me find my calling. I have maintained relationships since my LAT experience and have also had the privilege to return to facilitate the immigration track on two occasions. I also returned for the second level of LAT. SEARAC

has been family to me and I have stayed in the Movement ever since.

Brandon Wong, LAT '12
Digital navigator (Seattle, WA)



I learned how to advocate for community members that are affected. I learned the process and how to effectively advocate. Memories I have is folks from all different backgrounds being together in one space and how powerful the feeling I had.

Many Uch, LAT '06
Delivery driver (Seattle, WA)



Along with making new friends, our Southeast Asian community faces similar struggles. We need to join forces to get our voices heard.

Sokho Eath, LAT '14
Director (Portland, OR)



SEARAC LAT has left a lasting impression on me. I remember,

beyond the advocacy trainings, the sense of belonging to a group of individuals who understand my background and my story — reflected through theirs and others joining. Personally, it taught me lessons on community unity of our Southeast Asian communities across the United States. Professionally, it highlighted gaps between our communities and the majority narrative. Ten years later, I believe that perspective still holds true.

See Lee, LAT '15
Chief executive officer (Merced, CA)



Disaggregated data for Southeast Asian Americans. Importantly, a network of SEA advocates doing amazing work across the nation.

Chingcha Vang, LAT '19
Program manager (Milwaukee, WI)



I remember being on the Hill on the final day of LAT, and everyone was dressed in blue. The visual of seeing people that look like me in most of the government buildings we were navigating, walking around the Hill in small pods, and exchanging stories with one another was such a powerful moment for me. I realized that there is so much power that our

Southeast Asian community holds, and if we're able to come together in solidarity and are equipped with the right tools, we can make a difference in advocating for policies that better align with and serve our community's unique needs.

Sou Saechao, LAT '23
Project coordinator (Oakland, CA)



The first time the health track group gathered together, there was an activity where we listed issues within the health care system that our community faces. One health track facilitator was taking notes of the issues that we shared on a large poster paper. Eventually, all the concerns filled up the entirety of the poster paper, and there were still more yet to be mentioned. This made me realize that the number of issues facing our SEAA community is abundant in the health care system, and there's a need for us to gather and voice these disparities to our elected officials.

Chau Bao Nguyen, LAT '18
Nonprofit board member (Ontario, CA)



I carry the light from the candles we lit when we stood together in a circle to honor our ancestors. Taking my ancestors to this present moment reminds me I take each step with them.

Lasamee Kettavong, LAT '23
Program manager, founder, and owner (Denton, TX)



I had never been in a room with so many fellow Southeast Asian Americans gathering to learn how to become advocates who could represent and improve the lives of their community members, and I was incredibly moved by this realization on the very first day of LAT. One of the most impactful learnings while at LAT was the developing, sharing, and true acknowledging that our individual stories have the ability to spark change, not only within our close circles but also further outward, even having the power to affect national policy. I continue to reiterate to myself that what we have to say as refugees and children of refugees matters immensely (having felt otherwise for most of my life), and we are the ones who must tell our stories if we are ever to be counted, seen, and heard as we should be.

Loan Dao, LAT '03
Professor and director of ethnic studies (Garden Grove, CA)



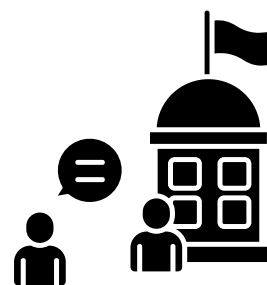
I attended LAT originally with a sister of someone who was facing deportation. It was a very emotional time for her and her family. LAT

gave her the sense of empowerment and tangible skills she felt she to advocate for her sibling and other Khmer refugees facing removal from the US, the only home many have known. To witness her sense of confidence and righteousness in meeting with elected officials and their staff gave me strength and motivated me to continue. The sense of community and mutual support from other SEAA community members gave us renewed determination in our fight for justice. LAT helped build community beyond our immediate geographies, coalesced a united voice and agenda for SEAA's, and demystified the democratic process of advocacy to elected officials. This sister went on to work in DC, and I have continued to encourage and support newer generations of leaders to experience the uniqueness that is the LAT program.

Jannette Diep, LAT '18
Executive director (Houston, TX)



Meeting people from all over the US doing similar work for the Asian community, hearing their stories, and sharing experiences and challenges were most memorable — and also the training provided on how to prepare for legislative visits. I still use what I learned to do legislative visits at our local capitol with our partners.



Nghiep Lam, LAT '18 & '19
Program and facility manager
(Oakland, CA)



The Immigration March to the White House, the workshops, the lobbying visits, and —most of all — the incredible people I met.

Cat Bao Le, LAT '06
Board member (Charlotte, NC)



The purity of being solely an attendee at SEARAC LAT in 2006 is something that would impact me for years to come. Although in Sacramento I grew up with Southeast Asians, LAT introduced SEAA spaces in a very different way. LAT felt very different than pan-Asian spaces I had been a part of in the Bay. For me, it felt like home. For a start there was a deeper recognition and kinship of our shared life experiences in the US — something that at that time I felt was often buried even within Asian American organizations and even Asian American studies.

Jennifer Tran, LAT '05
Director (Seattle, WA)



I participated in SEARAC's Leadership and Advocacy Training very early in my professional career right before I started my graduate studies. Prior to the LAT, I felt intimidated and unclear about how I could personally influence policymaking. The LAT helped to demystify the process, and I walked away from the training feeling equipped and prepared to advocate for the policies and issues in a way that felt authentic and connected to my personal experiences and my community. My takeaway from my time at LAT was how our stories are embedded in the larger context of policies and systems that shape our everyday lives, and that there is power in drawing those experiences to better those systems and institutions.

Chendamonee Hing, LAT '23
Digital organizer (Saint Paul, MN)



The logistical piece of meeting with legislators was really helpful; it

really grounded me to understand what to expect and the regular routine of meeting with Representatives. I also remember the teamwork and creation of our meeting content, specifically being someone who shared my story piece and unpacking my stake in the anti-detention and anti-deportation work. It was also amazing to work in a movement that is so intergenerational. There's so much wisdom, heartache, and power in each person there, it made me feel more safe to be vulnerable. I had an amazing time connecting with everyone and getting to know their stories and what's ahead for them.



WORDS OF WISDOM

Advice from LAT
alumni to future
generations of
Southeast Asian
American leaders
and advocates

“LAT is a powerful experience, where you are surrounded by incredible people who can share so many similarities in background and journey with you. This is the time to connect and establish meaningful relationships with other participants because there is so much strength in unity and a shared vision for the world. Please share your story with everyone around you because they will always want to listen.”

THIÊN NGUYỄN, LAT '23

“Go, listen, make friends, learn, and act on needs. Don't go and do nothing.”

MAY GNIA HER, LAT '11

Our future depends on our ability to engage and shape decisions. People power is vital for democracy.

**JULIE VUE,
LAT '13**

“Your voice matters! Call, write, and visit your politicians and let them know what issues you care most about.”

CHERYL YIN, LAT '17

You are the only one holding your self back. What are you waiting for?" This took a while to truly believe but thankful to finally be my own biggest advocate.

“There are many pathways to creating change. The advocacy, political arena is one approach. In combination with a multitude of other strategies, it can build into larger systemic change for the communities most impacted by the issues we are working on.”

SENG SO, LAT '09

**ASHLEY
YANG,
LAT '10**

“LAT is a collective, community, and space to feel seen, heard, and represented as a Southeast Asian American. Your journey can begin but won't end here. Your participation and contribution to the collective will be seen, felt, and heard beyond here and now.”

**VARAXY YI,
LAT '11**





The AAPI community is small, and relationships matter so much. Take the time to get to know your peers and don't be afraid to introduce yourself to folks who could be your mentor or cheerleader. LAT participants and program staff are here because they want to see the best for the community; take advantage of this time together.”

BOOSABA TANTISUNTHORN, LAT '10

“LAT unites SEA changemakers from across the country around pertinent issues affecting our communities.”

SEE LEE, LAT '15

“You may be overwhelmed moments before speaking with your elected official at Capitol Hill, but just remember that they are there to support you.”

SOU SAECHAO, LAT '23

BRANDON WONG, LAT '12

“1. Embrace the moment and the opportunity to advocate together. 2. Take lessons away from the little things and the big things. 3. Have fun.”

SOKHO EATH, LAT '14

What you do now could lead to a better future for someone tomorrow. Don't hold back when speaking to representatives; they need to hear what is going on and how it is affecting the community.

“It's an experience of a lifetime if you're young and new to advocacy work.”

MANY UCH, LAT '06

“Always remember that you are equal to the legislators, and they owe their jobs to you. Speak with authority to them.”

ANDRES PACIFICAR, LAT '12

To future LAT participants, lean into this advocacy work by centering who it truly is that you're doing this advocacy for. For me, I thought about my parents who are refugees for Laos, I do this for the youth that I taught as a high school teacher, I do this everyday because if not us, then who will stand up for our community.

CHINGCHA VANG, LAT '19

“I am a daughter of Vietnamese refugees born in America. I asked and listened to my parents and their friends about how they navigated life conditions to do the best they could in America. Be a bridge and seek your community's lived experiences because it provides rich local wisdom and draws on the deep roots of their homeland and community; take this approach to inform policy makers of what is culturally relevant and can meet the needs of the constituency they are elected to serve.”

CHAU BAO NGUYEN, LAT '18





Our voices in government are critical to creating social change and representing our communities, who are often viewed as uninterested or monoliths in American politics. Our privilege and responsibility to speak truth to power is critical to a functioning democracy, and it's what many of our community members sacrificed their lives for.”

LOAN DAO, LAT '03

“Future LAT participants, this is a experience to create a lifelong difference in your life and your community of advocacy.”

NGHIEP LAM, LAT '18 & '19

“Your leadership is important because your voices and perspectives will help us build the policies, systems, and institutions that reflect our collective values and will ultimately uplift our communities.”

JENNIFER TRAN, LAT '05

There is enough space for many different formations in movement (so much has not been created), so keep creating and doing new things even if it does not follow the current movement establishments!

**CAT BAO LE,
LAT '06**

“Go in with an open mind, be open with your vulnerability, and be fearless! ”

CHENDAMONEE HING, LAT '23

LAT is well worth the time; you will gain the knowledge and learn so much—and build long lasting relationships!

JANNETTE DIEP, LAT '18

“It's ok to not mimic what you think is professionalism (which is often based in white supremacy and capitalistic forms of communication and competition anyways)-- so be you!”

CAT BAO LE, LAT '06

“...we are the ones who must tell our stories if we are ever to be counted, seen, and heard as we should be.”

**LASAMEE
KETTAVONG,
LAT '23**

Serving as an advocate often means that you have experienced the grittiness that is having to survive in harsh conditions, and when you do the inner work, the reflection and healing can be a complex, difficult process. When you are called upon to represent yourself and your community members, it may be uncomfortable, but it is important to speak, even when your voice shakes. You can find strength in knowing that you are not alone; your ancestors and your loved ones are with you in those moments.

LASAMEE KETTAVONG, LAT '23

