

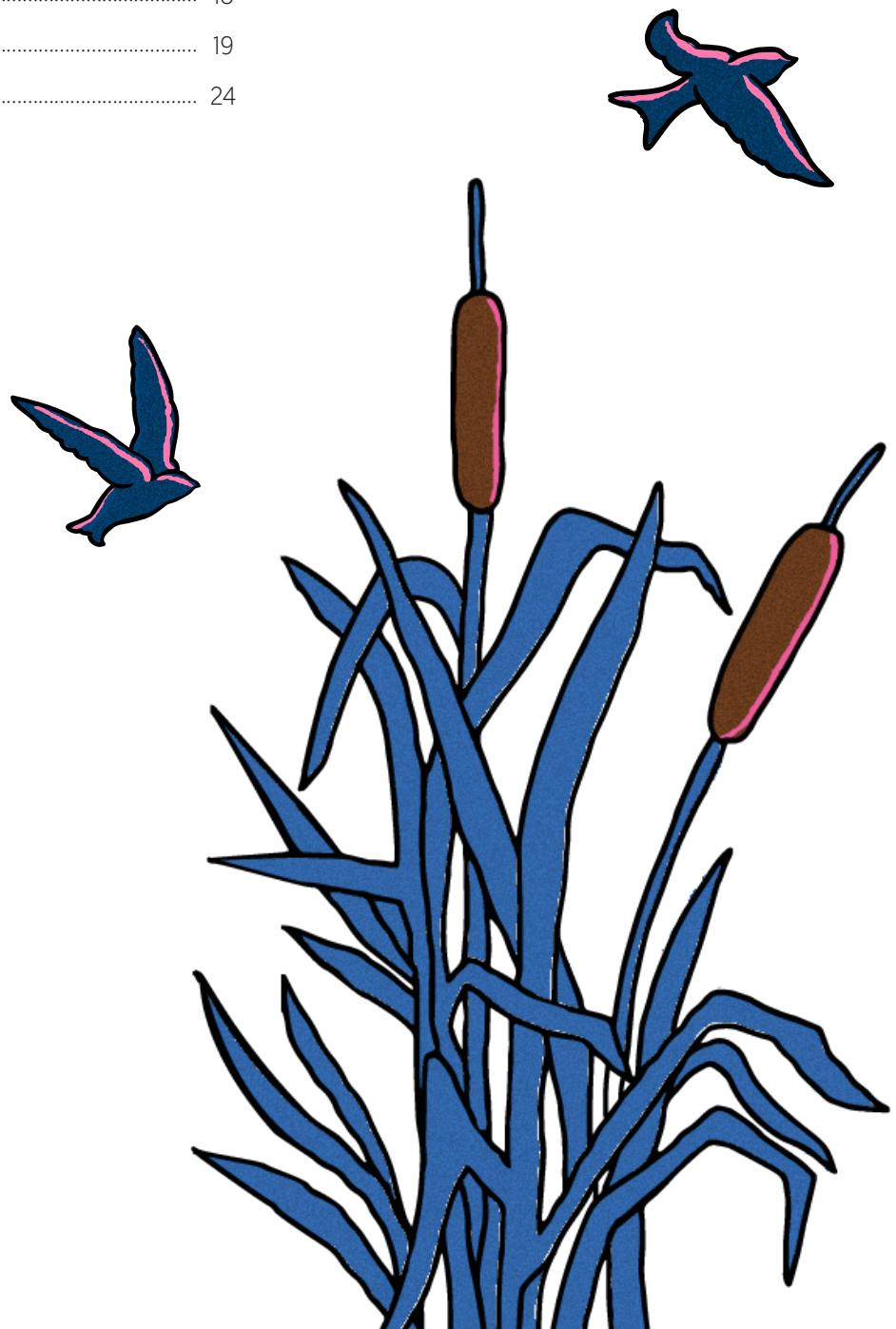
# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT





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Cover art by [Kat Eng](#)

# A WORD FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In many ways, **2021 was a year of rebuilding**, of bolstering the foundation that those who came before us set with their determined resilience. The SEARAC team expanded, and with that growth, we amplified our communities' voices.

We demanded immediate and long-term investment into our Southeast Asian American communities across all sectors. We called for culturally sensitive, linguistically accessible interventions that will allow generations to age with dignity. We mobilized against policies that separate our families. We said enough is enough.

It was a **year of recovery**, not just from atrocities of the previous presidential administration but from the loss and hardship we endured during the most severe public health crisis of our time.

And it was a **year of healing**, of responding to hate with love for our communities. Community has and always will be our North Star.

These unprecedented times affirmed what has always been the heart of SEARAC's work: that the voices of all ages, genders, and sexual orientations should be valued, and that those most impacted by the issues are the ones leading the movement for change.

**We invite you to read this annual report to learn more about the ways that SEARAC fights for our community's right to be seen, our right to heal, and our right to family.**

In partnership,



**Quyên Đinh**  
Executive Director, SEARAC



# ABOUT SEARAC

## Our Mission

In 1979, a group of American volunteers founded the “Indochina Refugee Action Center” in response to the genocide in Cambodia and large number of refugees fleeing Southeast Asia. After the war and bombings of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia claimed millions of lives between 1955 and 1975, IRAC’s founders advocated for the passage of the 1980 Refugee Resettlement Act, which created the United States’ first comprehensive and unified system of refugee resettlement and support. IRAC would eventually become the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC). SEARAC’s mission as a national civil rights organization is to empower Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese American communities to create a socially just and equitable society. As representatives of the largest refugee community ever resettled in the United States, SEARAC stands together with other refugee communities, communities of color, and social justice movements in pursuit of social equity.

## Our Communities

For SEARAC, **Southeast Asian American (SEAA)** is a political identity that comes from the shared experience of people who came to this country as refugees from the US occupation of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Southeast Asian Americans now number more than three million, and most of them arrived in the United States as refugees, are the children of refugees, were sponsored by refugee families, or arrived as immigrants. Southeast Asian Americans include people from dozens of diverse ethnic and language groups, including but not limited to:

- Cham, a Muslim minority group
- Khmer
- Khmer Loeu, or Highland Khmer
- Hmong
- Iu Mien or Mien
- Khmu
- Lao, otherwise referred to as Lao Loum or Lowland Lao
- Taidam
- Khmer Kampuchea Krom, or ethnic Khmer
- Montagnards, or Highlanders of several different ethnic groups
- Vietnamese
- Certain ethnic Chinese also have heritage in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

Learn more about [SEARAC](#).



## **IN 2021, WE WORKED ON:**

Aging with Dignity  
Boys and Men of Color  
Education Equity  
Immigrant Justice  
Healthcare Access  
Mental Health

### **Through the following strategies:**

1. Building powerful community leaders and advocates
2. Community engagement and mobilization
3. National and state policy advocacy
4. Internal infrastructure building

# 2021 BY THE NUMBERS

80+

events held to educate SEAA communities about COVID-19, COVID-19 vaccines, and boosters

14.5K+

COVID-19 informational resources distributed for SEAA audiences

200K+

community members given COVID-19 educational materials

\$432K

in direct financial support to partners to build community power

16

videos made by SEARAC to help educate the public and garner support for a more humane system of immigration

50+

articles raising awareness of SEARAC's work in support of SEAA communities



## Crossracial coalition-building

**1,100+ volunteers mobilized, 700+ family sponsors secured, 5,350 Afghan refugees supported, and \$450,000+ raised in funds** as part of our partnership with the **Project ANAR** coalition to support Afghan refugees in the humanitarian parole process.

SEARAC proudly joined more than 120 organizations calling for transparency and action from the Biden Administration on Humanitarian Parole applications from Afghans. The letter, led by Project ANAR and also endorsed by several Southeast Asian American community organizations, demands accountability and clarity on thousands of applications filed by the group.

To learn more about Project ANAR, visit <https://www.projectanar.org>.



# LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS | NATIONAL

Nationally, we focused on advancing equity through COVID-19 relief and undoing the immediate harm from the previous presidential Administration. To this end, SEARAC joined the call to release as many detained immigrants as possible and advocated for inclusion of all immigrants for COVID-19 financial relief. Additionally, SEARAC uplifted the impact of the pandemic on our communities' education, health, and wellbeing, pushing for inclusion of Southeast Asian Americans in the rollout of the American Rescue Plan. You can view SEARAC's [Presidential Transition Priorities](#) and [117th Congressional Platform](#) for a full list of what SEARAC prioritized in 2021.

Through different coalition partnerships, SEARAC submitted multiple sets of administrative policy recommendations to the Biden Administration pushing for reform and immediate changes to the unilateral executive policies from the previous administration.

SEARAC met with various agencies, including the Department of Education, Justice, Homeland Security, and State to educate and move forward SEARAC's administrative priorities, including the efforts to disaggregate student data and support the AAPI Data Disaggregation Initiative, end the removal of Southeast Asian refugees, and lift visa sanctions on African and Southeast Asian countries.

Additionally, SEARAC also joined the efforts to pass the Build Back Better [BBB] Act in Congress, prioritizing funding support for education and caregiving for older adults and workforce training for family caregivers. As part of the Diverse Elders Coalition, SEARAC advocated for language specifically supporting elders and the entities that serve them in BBB.

SEARAC also worked with our coalition partners to try and remove language criminalizing immigrants in the United States Citizenship Act and the American Dream and Promise Act.



### Key national legislation that SEARAC supported in 2021:

- **Black Maternal Momnibus Act:** Directs federal agencies to improve maternal health, particularly among racial and ethnic minorities and other vulnerable populations.
- **COVID-19 Language Access Act:** Requires federal agencies to translate written English materials into multiple languages, including Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese.
- **Debt-Free College Act:** Covers the unmet financial needs of students through multiple funding pathways and allows certain undocumented students access to federal financial aid.
- **Dignity for Detained Immigrants Act:** Overhauls the immigration detention system by ending mandatory detention, phasing out private detention facilities, and increasing federal oversight of remaining detention facilities.
- **New Way Forward Act:** Restores due process protections back to the immigration system by ending mandatory detention, limiting crimes that make someone removable, creating a statute of limitation, and restoring judicial discretion back to immigration judges.

### Teaching Asian Pacific American History Act:

Requires colleges, libraries, museums, and other institutions to teach Asian Pacific American history as part of civics and US history.

### Major wins for the national team included:

- **Meeting with President Biden and Vice President Harris** together with the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, with whom we discussed Southeast Asian American deportation and the need for the Administration to take executive action to prevent our community members' removals.
- Securing over **150+ organizational signatures** onto a letter urging the Biden Administration to end the detentions and deportations of Southeast Asian refugees and another **90+ signatures** on a letter to Secretary Mayorkas.
- Supporting reintroduction of the New Way Forward Act in the House, with over 40 cosponsors.
- Highlighting Homeland Security deportation-related visa sanctions on African and Southeast Asian community members to the Administration, including a Change.org petition that garnered more than 2600 signatures and supporting Rep. Omar's letter to the Administration urging the lifting of these sanctions.





# LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS | CALIFORNIA

In California, we focused on advancing equity through supporting major campaigns in health and education. Through coalition partnerships, we provided community education and uplifted individual stories on the need for universal health care coverage regardless of immigration status, submitted multiple rounds of recommendations and pushed for the adoption of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, shared best practices with the Office of Minority Health on COVID-19 response for AANHPIs, and met with Governor Newsom's office to highlight the adverse impact of deportation on our communities and families.

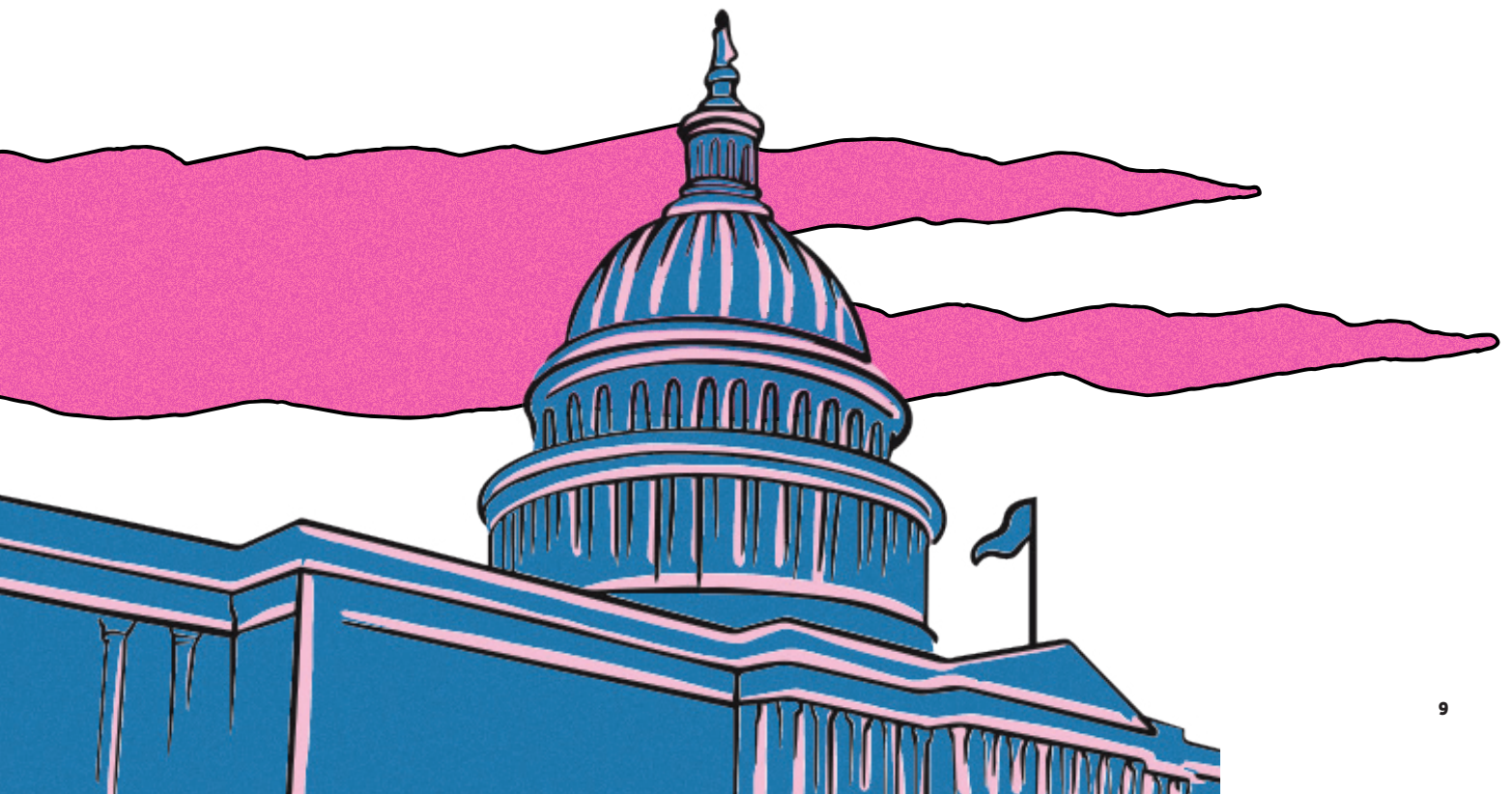
## Key state legislation that SEARAC supported in 2021:

*AB = Assembly Bill SB = Senate Bill.*

- **SB 56** [Durazo], to expand Medi-Cal to seniors ages 65 and older regardless of immigration status
- **AB 4** [Arambula] to expand Medi-Cal to all those who are income-eligible but currently excluded due to their immigration status
- **AB 101** [Medina], to make ethnic studies as a high school graduation requirement
- **AB937** [Carillo], the VISION Act, to protect community members who have already been deemed eligible for release from being transferred by jail/prison systems to immigration detention
- **API Equity Budget**, to make historic investments to address longstanding racial inequities among CA's API communities

## Major wins for the state team included:

- Successful adoption of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum by the State Board of Education, including incorporation of Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, Lu-Mien, and Vietnamese history, providing a historic resource for local education agencies to teach diverse histories and experiences more representative of the student population
- Meeting with Gov. Newsom's office to uplift the stories of individuals at risk of deportation as well as the challenges of community members who have been deported and separated from their families
- Passage of the API Equity Budget and specific allocations toward data equity and disaggregation, culturally and linguistically appropriate media outreach, and youth peer-to-peer support networks



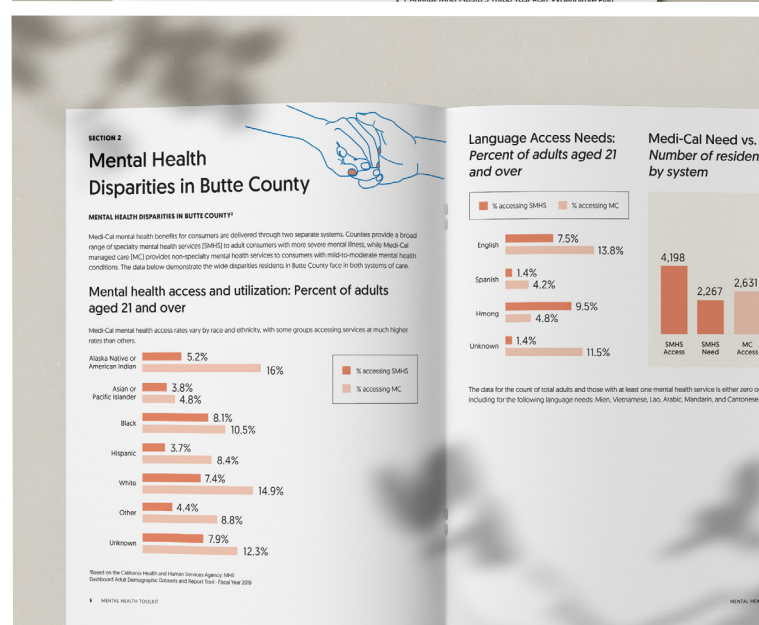




In 2021, SEARAC started a three-year project through the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission to bring awareness to the mental health challenges and issues facing diverse communities through advocacy, training and education, and outreach and engagement at local levels.

SEARAC co-published *A Right to Heal: Mental Health in Diverse Communities*, which presents findings from a series of in-person and virtual listening sessions hosted by local and statewide organizations with over 600 community members in Alameda, Kern, Butte, and Los Angeles to learn how Black, Indigenous, people of color engage with mental health and mental health systems. In partnership with the Hmong Cultural Center of Butte County, our events have strengthened engagement with the local behavioral health department, mobilized youth to share their mental health experiences and needs, and created safe spaces for communities to learn about linguistically and culturally appropriate mental health support.

- [Read](#) the report here.
- Explore our local advocacy toolkit [here](#) featuring Butte County and highlights from the Hmong community



# TELLING OUR STORIES



Storytelling is a critical component of SEARAC's mission. We share stories that are untold in the media, that are unheard in congressional offices, that often go unsaid beyond our own circles.





## #StopSEAADeportation

- On the 25th anniversary of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRAIRA), we launched a **series of deportation-focused public service announcement (PSA) videos** featuring the stories of five impacted Southeast Asian American community members and their families. This video series is designed not only to educate the broader Southeast Asian community on the impact of deportations on our families and communities but also to build public support for the need to end deportations.
- Through this new series of **PSA videos**, SEARAC honors the individuals and communities who have been devastated by the heightened deportations of Southeast Asian Americans, a practice that began with the passage of IIRAIRA and continues today.
- As part of the series launch, we invited community members to contact their members of Congress to co-sponsor the New Way Forward Act (H.R. 536), which provides a bold vision of what our immigration system should look like, one that does not rely on mass criminalization, detention, or deportation. New Way Forward repeals some of the worst provisions of the 1996 immigration laws that are directly responsible for expanding the incarceration of immigrants, creating a fast track for deportations without due process, setting the foundation for local police and ICE collaboration, and cementing the pipeline from arrest to deportation.

To learn more about the New Way Forward Act, [click here](#).

# PSA STORIES



## Somdeng (Danny) Thongsy

Somdeng (Danny) Thongsy, a Laotian refugee who grew up in an overpoliced neighborhood with few opportunities. Since his release from prison in 2016, he has turned his life around and was even granted a pardon by California Governor Gavin Newsom. ICE is now trying to deport him. Read Danny's story [here](#).



## Chanthon Bun

Chanthon Bun, a refugee from Cambodia, a survivor of the Killing Fields, and the current Yuri Kochiyama fellow at the Asian Law Caucus. He is a thriving community member of system impacted individuals and immigrants of all backgrounds. He also lives under the constant threat of deportation and is doing this project because he wants marginalized communities to be seen. Read their joint story [here](#).



## Tith Ton

Tith Ton, a refugee from Cambodia. He is a new dad looking forward to raising his child and starting a new family. He feels blessed to have the opportunity for freedom and wants to make life meaningful for others. He faces deportation to a country he once fled, where he knows no one. Read their joint story [here](#).



## Nghiep (Ke) Lam

Nghiep (Ke) Lam, a refugee from Vietnam whose family survived the South China Sea and Hong Kong refugee camps to make it to America. He is a member of a resilient and kind community of formerly incarcerated individuals, artists, queer leaders, and members of community organizations. He is doing this project in order to help give voice to the thousands of people fighting for their freedom to be accepted as citizens. He has been honored by every level of the US government [city, county, state, and federal] for his work and yet he can be deported at any moment to a place he barely knows. Read Nghiep's story [here](#).



## Ge Vang

Ge Vang, a Hmong refugee who is a leader in the Hmong culture Vang clan. He is a father of four kids, including Damu who joins him in this PSA. He recently won post-conviction relief but still faces the threat of deportation. He wants people in similar circumstances to understand that they are not alone and that there are communities that want to help. Read Ge's story [here](#).



# STORYCORPS COLLABORATION

In partnership with StoryCorps, we released a series of animations that celebrated the richness and resilience that marks SEAA communities. Listen to SEAA community members [here](#).

*“I think the refugee camp, to the rest of the outside world, was a place of refuge. But for those of us who were living in the camp, what we experienced was starvation and persecution, camp guards’ brutalities and death. ... Coming to America wasn’t something we thought of or had planned. We came here not because the grass feels greener. We came here because fire was burning on our feet.”*

**Jeff Thungc**

*“My grandma and my uncle, they really contributed to us being able to escape the genocide. My grandma left Thailand to come to Cambodia while we were in the labor camps, and just wanted to make sure that we were still alive, and ended up stepping on a landmine. Thank God she survived.”*

**Savong Lam**

Learn more about  
StoryCorps [here](#)

Story  
Corps®



# BUILDING COMMUNITY LEADERS & ADVOCATES

SEARAC's Digital Advocacy Training brought together emerging advocates from across the country to expand their knowledge of the issues that most impact the Southeast Asian American community. Program participants came from a variety of backgrounds, including college students, staff of community-based organizations, and community elders. The curriculum included a mix of federal policy learning workshops, guest speaker spotlights featuring experienced advocates, and interactive small group breakout rooms. Participants learned about key legislation and core advocacy skills, and were able to put those learnings into practice with their peers.

**SEARAC HELD 6 LEGISLATIVE VISITS DURING DAT 2021 AND TRAINED 37 RISING COMMUNITY LEADERS, REPRESENTING 22 STATES AND 33 CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS**





# SUSTAINING A CULTURE OF COMMUNITY CARE

*“On my first Zoom staff meeting back in the office, I was super-excited to see my team again and to thank them for their leadership. What greeted me was shocking. The lifeless faces looking back at me told me that the team was beyond exhausted. In my check-ins with other leaders, I heard the same story: that the field was hurt and burnt-out, that the rapid response of COVID had taken a toll on its community caretakers, that we were in crisis.”*

[Read Quyên's blog post](#)

With the hope to reimagine a truly healthy balance between work and home life, and after much careful thought and preparation, SEARAC implemented a permanent four-day, 32-hour workweek across the entire staff. We are passionate about this change, a shift that we see as necessary to support community leaders for the long fight for equity ahead. SEARAC's offices are now open Monday through Thursday.



# 2021 FINANCES

REVENUE	2021	2020	2019
Grants-Foundation/Nonprofits	1,507,421	1,222,221	1,432,698
Grants-Corporate/Business	17,500	103	247,645
Individual Contribution	80,211	32,149	45,228
Fundraising Income	-	-	-
Other Income	72,944	356,298	9,377
Total Revenue	1,678,076	1,610,771	1,734,948
EXPENDITURES		2020	2019
Program Expenses	1,076,602	1,349,684	1,545,739
Administrative Expenses	342,259	121,593	168,489
Fundraising Expenses	38,475	35,939	47,915
Total Expenses	1,457,336	1,507,216	1,762,143
NET ASSETS		2020	2019
Net Assets at the Beginning of the Year	1,485,209	-	1,394,679
Release from Restriction	1,405,421	1,395,707	224,135
Total Net Assets	2,540,146	1,459,924	1,618,814

# 2021 FUNDERS

## Foundations

- Annenberg Foundation
- The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- The California Endowment
- California Small Business COVID-19 Relief Grant Program
- The California Wellness Foundation
- Chan Zuckerberg Initiative
- Coulter Foundation
- Group Health Foundation
- Kresge Foundation
- NEO Philanthropy
- Open Society Foundation
- Philanthropic Venture Fund - Hate is a Virus
- Sierra Health Foundation
- Unbound Philanthropy

## Businesses and Corporations

- Career Unicorns
- Comcast
- State Farm

## Organizations

- Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum
- Banteay Srei
- California Pan-Ethnic Health Network
- Diverse Elders Coalition
- Hmong Student Association at Berkeley
- Immigrant Legal Resource Center
- National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum
- National Council of Asian Pacific Americans
- Southeast Asian Students for Organizing Conference



## 2021 DONORS



*“As a donor to SEARAC, my contribution honors family. It is in recognition of the struggles and progress made by my family members and elders, and it also supports the larger family of Southeast Asian American communities and future generations of leaders in advancing civil rights and social justice for all.”*

**Ana Phakhin**



*“I give to SEARAC because SEARAC feels like home. This organization gives my SEasters and brothers a space to connect, be vulnerable, and honor our ancestors as we help elevate one another.”*

**Linh Dang**



*“What I most love about SEARAC is your vision for the kind of America I want to call home: communities where all families have what they need to thrive; a democracy where everyone’s voice is at the table; schools that support all children to achieve their dreams. SEARAC staff channel this vision into powerful national advocacy, while demonstrating that it is possible to balance community care with self- and family-care.”*

**Mari Quenemoen**



*“I’m inspired to support SEARAC because of its long history as a national civil rights and refugee organization dedicated to advocating, empowering, and serving Southeast Asian American communities.”*

**Mike Hoa Nguyen**

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