Title: Mobilizing Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Communities in Policy Advocacy

Background: Data on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (AANHPIs) is currently combined into one racial/ethnic category despite genetic, cultural, and socioeconomic heterogeneity among these different groups. Such aggregated data results in health, economic and civil rights disparities being hidden from policymakers and researchers. In 2011 California Assembly Member Mike Eng proposed Assembly Bill 1088 (AB1088), which required the a state agency, board, or commission that collects demographic data to include data on specified collection categories and tabulations in every demographic report on ancestry or ethnic origins of each major Asian and Pacific Islander group and to match data collection categories to those used by the United States Census Bureau. This disaggregation is crucial in understanding cancer prevention and control needs and developing and testing culturally tailored intervention programs for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders sub-ethnic groups.

Rationale: AB 1088 provided an opportunity to increase policy awareness and civic engagement in NHPIs.

Goal/Objective: The objective was to mobilize and gather NHPI communities support for AB 1088. To facilitate and encourage support for this groundbreaking bill, Tongan Community Service Center/Special Service for Groups and Empowering Pacific Islander Communities formed a collaborative partnership to outreach to NHPIs in Southern California.

Implementation: In-language factsheets about AB 1088 and a sample of a letter of support were developed and distributed to community members to create awareness and garner support. Culturally specific outreach strategies were used to engage NHPI community members in civic and policy involvement. To mobilize adults, educational activities were verbally communicated at PI-specific social events such as family gatherings, cultural festivals, churches, community organizations and during other face-to-face community meetings. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and emails were used to raise awareness among PI youth and young adults. As part of the awareness campaign, community leaders were also encouraged to provide testimonies at the Assembly and Senate hearings in Sacramento in May 2011.

Results: As a result of the campaign efforts, the NHPI community experienced unprecedented levels of civic engagement regarding AB 1088: about 15,000 community members were outreached, 356 petition signatures were collected, 85 letters of support from community members 26 letters of support NHPI community-based organizations were sent to policy makers at various levels, and 4 community leaders testified at the state hearings. AB1088 was successfully signed into law on October 9, 2011. Feedback from debriefings with community leaders showed that community members felt a stronger sense of community cohesiveness and empowerment through their participation in supporting the assembly bill.

Lessons Learned: Community mobilization is an effective tool for empowering community and facilitate a process of social change. Effective community mobilizing strategies should be culturally relevant and grounded in participatory principles.

Acknowledgements: Support for this work came from the National Cancer Institute (NCI), Center to Reduce Cancer Health Disparities (CRCHD) Grant Number 5U54CA153458, Guam Communications Network, Pacific Islander Health Partnership, Samoan National Nurses Association, Tongan Community Service Center/Special Services for Groups, Union of Pan Asian Communities, Orange County Asian Pacific Islander Community Alliance, Orange County Health Care Agency, California State University, Fullerton, St. Joseph Hospital of Orange, University of Southern California, Claremont Graduate University and Empowering Pacific Islander Communities. The contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the NCI CRCHD.

Contact Information: Jonathan Lepule, California State University Fullerton, Department of Health Science, 800 N. State College Blvd. KHS-115, Fullerton, CA 92831. Tel: (657) 278-7053 Fax: (657) 278-5317. Visit WINCART online at http://wincart.fullerton.edu/.