



Kavi Vu is a Vietnamese American videographer and spoken word artist from Atlanta, GA. Her career philosophy is simple: She wants to tell stories that bring people closer and make the world feel a little smaller. In a society driven by statistics and analytics, she believes in the importance of telling the personal stories that contribute to a more empathic and thriving community.

What was your initial understanding of civic engagement? (i.e. definition, responsibilities, impact)

All I knew about civic engagement was probably that it was important to vote.

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Did your understanding change? If so, when and how did it change?

My understanding definitely has changed since I first got involved. Civic engagement is beyond an action of voting, but a commitment to caring and understanding what's going on in our community. I've ultimately come to the conclusion that my goal is not just to convince someone to vote in this particular election cycle, but to plant a small seed in their minds to care about their community in a way that it's never an option to not vote.

Something I've really taken away from my journey these past few years is that being civically engaged can take many forms: it can look like a rally of hundreds of people, it can look like three volunteers knocking on doors, it can look like a petition you sign online, or it can look like a simple group chat you start with your friends.

It's hard to ask people to go from 0% to 100%, so if we're trying to make cultural and habitual changes across generations, then we need to take note of and celebrate every baby step. What I tend to forget is that we're playing the long game here, and all of my actions today may not look like they're making ground-breaking changes, but they're adding to a small movement in the right direction for Asian Americans and that's enough for me.

What does it mean to be civically engaged within the Southeast Asian community in North America? (i.e. are there specific issues we need to address or specific battles we must confront as a member of this marginalized community?)

I think being civically engaged within our Southeast Asian communities means actively speaking out against legislation that disproportionately hurts our people, and this can range from a local to national to international level.

People tend to look at the big ones like immigration and healthcare, which of course are very important issues to tackle, but on a local level, I care about whether the most diverse county in my state has ballot translations for our communities, are the elections made known to our communities, and do our representatives take the time to understand our biggest pains?



[Phi Nguyen \(left\) and Kavi Vu \(right\) break down the Census on "Wake Up, Atlanta"](#)

What challenges did you face during your civic engagement journey? How did you overcome it?

The biggest challenge I face--and I like to think that many people in this field face as well but I mean if I'm the only one, please don't let me know:

"I care so much and you should too" - anyone who cares enough to do this kind of work already cares too much. And they'll tell you that there is no such thing as caring too much when people's lives are at stake. But I'll be the first to admit that we care to a point of sometimes being ineffective to our goal.

When I first started registering voters, I would shove dates and policies and history down their throats and wonder why they leave me on read. When we dedicate our lives to something, it's really hard to take a step back and meet people where they are and come at it in a strategic instead of an emotional way. And since we tend to work from our hearts in this field, it hurts so much more when people aren't receptive to it. That broke me the first year and continues to be a struggle today, though I am more hardened and take a concerted effort to let my brain do its thing and give my heart a break.

It's a challenge, too, to talk about such boring topics like healthcare and public transportation. Is it important? Of course, but why do important things need to be so damn boring??? That's also a really difficult thing to deal with in civic engagement, so when I can, I try to add relatable examples and lingo that normal people use instead of political jargon.

What has been the most important lesson you learned from your civic engagement journey so far?

Meet people where they are.

What would be one take-away message or advice you would give to individuals who want to become more civically engaged?

It's not 0 or 100. We're not asking you to run for office or go to every town hall. I think being civically engaged means to turn towards the tough conversations that arise, to show up when someone or your community is in need, and to believe in the reality that you can make a difference.

What are some resources that sparked or influenced your civic engagement journey and that you would recommend to others? Why are those resources significant? (books, organizations, policies, toolkits, documentaries, etc.)

Check out
*"Asian American
Advancing Justice (AAJC)"*