
Community Letters

by Elena Schrónex
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Nhi Nguyễn, National Urban Fellow,
Class of 2023



We are proud to celebrate the powerful leadership and unwavering commitment of Nhi Nguyen, a National Urban Fellow of the class of 2023 whose story embodies the intersection of heritage, purpose, and justice.

Nhi Nguyen is the daughter of Vietnamese refugees who rebuilt their lives in the United States with courage and sacrifice. These values planted the seeds of a lifelong commitment to creating a society in where everyone can thrive.

That search led her to the National Urban Fellows.

With encouragement from her mentor and NUF alum Norma Lopez ('14), Nhi applied and was accepted, choosing the fellowship over several law school offers because it provided hands-on policy experience, rigorous academic training, and mentorship from public service leaders.



Class of 2023 at their mid-year retreat in Miami

"As a Vietnamese-American and child of refugees, I saw my family in the working-class immigrant communities I served, advocated for, and worked alongside," Nhi shares. "My family's experience escaping political persecution and a war-torn country influenced the way I experienced the world. My identity and my family's experiences instilled in me a commitment to shaping policies, practices, and systems that center the needs of all communities—especially those facing similar systemic struggles." At NUF, she could match her values with real-world leadership, leveraging and honing the strength needed to make intended change despite obstacles.

A panel featuring Gordon Goodwin, Norma Lopez, and Cathy Albisa focused on Acknowledging Racial History and Apologizing for the Harm and was moderated by Nhi Nguyen (left) as a NUF Fellow.



During her time at NUF, Nhi completed her residency at the National League of Cities (NLC), where she partnered with elected officials nationwide to close racial disparities at the local level. From leading the organization’s first National Day of Racial Healing to guiding city managers through equity budget trainings, she saw firsthand the power of local leadership to drive systemic change. Her mentors at NLC, Seantae Byers ('15) and Shawna Davie ('15), helped her deepen her understanding of how structural inequities show up in communities—and how to build tools to address them.

Equally important to her NUF journey was the support of her cohort. “Each person brought a wealth of lived and professional experience. Learning from my peers challenged and inspired me,” she reflects.

Today, Nhi serves as the Community Safety and Justice Policy Manager at Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA) in San Francisco, where she leads local policy efforts and supports the national Stop AAPI Hate coalition. At CAA, she works to redefine what safety means for communities—not just the absence of harm, but the presence of opportunity: economic mobility, housing access, quality education, and more. She also serves on the Board of Directors to Asian Pacific Islanders Domestic Violence Resource Project.

Her work is grounded in the belief that equity is a daily practice—and that leadership rooted in community is essential to transforming systems.

“I believe we each have the opportunity to impact the lives of others,” she says. “My hope is to play even a small role in ensuring our communities receive the support, resources, and opportunities to thrive and live in abundance.”

Nhi Nguyen is the kind of leader National Urban Fellows is proud to cultivate—one who brings strength, care, and a clear commitment to building a society where everyone can thrive. Her story is not just a personal journey—it’s part of a collective movement for justice and transformation.



At the 2023 NUF Homecoming with NUF staff (From Left to Right) Jonathan Vallejo ('11), Cynthia Wong ('11), Nhi Nguyen ('23), Elena Schronez, Lisa Rawlings, PhD. ('12)