

Sample Response 1

As a multi-year alumna of the Conference, my primary goal is to use the knowledge and experience gained from previously attending AAC, to give back to the Conference and its attendees - especially given this will be the first post-Covid live conference experience. There will always be something for me to gain from attending the Conference, as I believe AAC is an embodiment of the people and the community. As different individuals come and go each year, the Conference itself changes and new ideas and perspectives are brought forward; therefore, inherently I know I will gain new insights, create new connections, and re-define my relationship with my Afghan-American identity. However, alongside this personal gain, I hope that I can truly give back to the Conference and the community in ways I was not able to before. I have attended the Conference as a participant, cohort leader, and have created a session topic and led it. All of these experiences were incredibly unique in their own way, and allowed for me to utilize different aspects of the Conference to not only grow internally, but also forge new friendships and give back to the community. I hope to continue that growth by attending AAC again, so that I can contribute in ways I had not before. I hope to embody AAC's values and help in creating the safe, welcoming, and engaging space that the Conference was for me in my previous experiences, particularly for individuals who are new to the Conference. I hope to be a helping hand not only to the Conference attendees, but to the committee itself as it needs it. I hope to bring forth new perspectives and engage in challenging conversations with my community in order to bring positive change. I hope to help the Conference overcome the new challenges that it may face in this post-Covid world so that it is bigger and better than before, and will continue to grow in unimaginable ways.

Sample Response 2

I think first, I continue to learn about the issues that impact our community and that helps me not only personally develop but also solution how to work with others to improve and enhance our community. I'm always amazed at how diverse our community is but also how we span across so many different areas, career, and backgrounds. By seeing the many issues (and opportunities) that impact our community and discussing it in a safe space, we're able to grow and further understand our sense of identity.

I also like to meet and encourage especially younger Afghans to focus on their professional development and in their role in preserving our

community. I think I try and focus on meeting not only like minded folks but also on how I can personally give back to the community. I've had the chance to live and work for a Fortune 50 brand in general management and I've been able to use that knowledge to pass it to our community. I've previously facilitated over 5 sessions both virtually and in person on career development, resume tips, how to effectively communicate, and serving on business panels. I'd like to continue to leverage my background/experience and share that information with our community to help them further advance in their overall professional development. I also think I try to listen and discuss and debate topics to help each other heal given the traumas of our community. I focus on empowering others and ensuring people feel heard, people walk away feeling more confident, and hopefully people walking away with a better sense of identity and self (aspects that I felt after participating in AAC). I try and share personal experiences (even if they are sensitive topics) to encourage openness and discussion.

Sample Response 3

I grew up largely isolated from the Afghan community and AAC has very much been a "cultural plunge" of sorts that has brought learning, healing, and a great deal of reflection on my own identity and values. I am always stepping out of my comfort zone when engaging with the larger community and find myself reflecting on the ways our sense of "Afghanness" is influenced by cultural differences, class, gender, age, immigration experiences, familial narratives, etc. All of these and more often come to a head through AAC and I continue to learn and grow with each conference experience. I have developed a more nuanced and mature understanding of our community and have found that as I become more comfortable with my own intersectional identities, I have also come to appreciate the differences I experience with others in the community with wonder, curiosity, kindness, and non-judgment.

One example of this is a conversation where another attendee and I engaged in critical dialogue around the intersection of Islam and Afghan culture. They had recently immigrated to the US from Afghanistan and had experienced a great deal of hardship and trauma around their beliefs and struggled to understand why Afghans in America would hold strongly to Islamic values and identity. We both shared our experiences of feeling persecuted for our beliefs, compared our social and political climates, and took time to reflect and engage in perspective-taking. The result was shared learning, positive dialogue, and fostering a meaningful friendship

that has continued to the present day. I learned that it is critical to take the time to learn about the lived experiences and perspectives of others rather than assuming we should "agree to disagree". There is always a point of connection, learning, and growth in any dialogue and it's important to take the time to find it. I have learned to remove my ego from such experiences and be willing to always learn new things about myself and others.