



Restoring & Ensuring Economic Vitality

For the

Asian American Community

*Voices of those impacted
by the economic downturn
And Recommendations for
economic recovery for the
Asian American Worker*

October 2009



A Report from the Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans

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The Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans is a state agency and was created by the Minnesota state legislature in 1985 pursuant to Minnesota Statute 3.9336, subdivision 1, to fulfill three primary objectives: to advise the governor and members of the legislature on issues pertaining to Asian Pacific Minnesotans; to advocate on issues of importance to the Asian Pacific community; and to act as a broker between the Asian Pacific community and non-Asian Pacific community.

Executive Summary

This report offers a picture of the challenges facing Asian refugees and immigrants in today's bleak job market. Their stories put a face on the crisis. A vast majority of Asian Americans with refugees experience enter the workforce as low-skilled and low-waged workers. (When they enter the workforce at all.) The report describes challenges and barriers community members encounter when they seek work via employment programs and workforce trainings or their own efforts. These challenges are often confounded many folds by cultural differences, lack of formal education, and having Limited English Proficiency. Due to these additional barriers more often times than not, community members will go to community based non-profits for service only to find that the community nonprofits do not have such programs. This report emphasizes the crucial role played by the Volags and Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs) and documents the many tasks that comprise effective comprehensive employment counseling and employment advocacy that are needed to serve the Asian American job seeker. These agencies are besieged with demands for services but need more adequate funding to provide solutions. There is a limit to what they can do and provide for the community without funds or compensation.

There is a clear gap of services to this population and more needs to be done. There is insufficient programming and lack of targeted funding to assist this population in state, local government, and mainstream agencies. Help there is minimal and they themselves are working beyond their capacity to offer the kind of intensive employment services these job seekers need. There is a need for more bilingual employment advocates to help Asian Americans job seekers cope with the chaos and confusion, and job coaches to help them over the barriers and through all the hoops that they confront when looking for employment. The community needs dedicated and targeted sources of funding to help develop and support intensive employment service programs particularly for the worker that has Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

1. Dedicate and target resources for Intensive Employment Services to better serve a culturally diverse and LEP population

- **Intensive Case Management** –to create innovative and responsive services for the Asian American job seeker that includes employment counseling, job search, hiring process and retention. This program will allow for the creation of employment “advocates” who will zealously work with and promote their clients for jobs, job development, and trainings.
- **Employer Development & Coordination** – to help MAAs build relationships and maintain networks with employers so they can create a “jobs” inventory for placement.
- **Job Development & Training** –to support partnerships to create language and job specific trainings for the community to build for the future workforce.

2. Dedicate and target a portion of all state workforce training resources for employment services for culturally diverse and LEP populations

- The state needs to work collaboratively with the community to target resources, trainings, and employment services to reach culturally diverse and LEP populations.
- Broaden the eligible program activities for all state training programs to include basic skills and literacy education for new and incumbent workers.

3. Create Collaborative Models for Community Nonprofits and Mainstream Agencies: invest in engaging the community in the design and distribution of resources.

4. System Change: track and measure the outcomes of all training expenditures and report on how workers benefit from these investments.

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Putting faces to those affected by the economic downturn

Client #1 lives in North Minneapolis. He worked at a construction materials company in St Louis Park as a machine operator until the company closed and he was laid off. He draws about \$890 through unemployment insurance. He has been unsuccessful in his efforts to look for work. He is one of the many Lao seeking help from the bilingual staff at the Lao Assistance Center in Minneapolis.

Client #2 was born in Laos. He came to the United States as a refugee from Laos in 1980. He was worked as a machine operator in a microwave popcorn company in Golden Valley until the plant closed. Then he worked for Fabcom. He has been unemployed since he was laid off in 2008. He lives with his family in Bloomington. He seeks help from the Lao Assistance Center.

Client #3 is 52 years old and lives with her sister's family in Eagan. She came to the US for political asylum in 1989 and became a permanent resident four years ago. She was laid off after working fifteen years as a machine operator at SEAGATE in Edina. She is a client at the Lao Women's Association in Minneapolis.

Client #4 came to Minnesota as a refugee from Laos. He has four dependent children and no health care coverage. He worked seven years as a machine operator at Action Mailing located in Plymouth. He was laid off May 15, 2008. He has been job searching for over a year. He is worried that if he cannot get a job his unemployment benefits will run out. His hope is that the benefits will be extended. At the time of the interview he had no health benefits and could not afford COBRA. LAC staff is helping him apply for Medicare. He is interested in retraining and would like to find out if he is eligible for the computer numerical certification (CNC) training. He lives in North Minneapolis.

Client #5, age 60, came to Minnesota as a refugee from Laos in 1979. He went to technical school for two years to study how to be a machinist. Graduated from MCTC with an associate degree. Was with Eden Company for twenty years, and then worked in medical assembly for a company in Blaine. Laid off by his last employer, GreyCo. Does not expect to be rehired. Anticipated that if he gets rehired it will be at lower wages. Married, with one child, he lives in Golden Valley.

Client #6 came as a refugee from Laos in 1980 He took ESL classes. His first job was as a dishwasher for one year. Then he found work in medical assembly. "I worked twenty one years, four months, thirteen days for Minnesota Wire in St Paul on Energy Park Drive". He has worked there since 1987 as a machine operator but was laid off May 14, 2009. He anticipates no chance of rehire there.

Client #7 has worked as a machine operator for MacKay Mitchell Envelope Company near the University of Minnesota. He was laid off in April 2009. "They said it was a temporary layoff" but he does not know if he will be rehired.

Client #8, age 56, lives with her husband and two full grown children in Eagan. She came to Minnesota from Laos in 1980. She worked for a wire cable company in Shakopee for six years,

and then worked four years for Micro Parts on pacemaker assembly. She has been laid off and unable to find reemployment since 2008. With Limited English skills, she is seeking job search help through the Lao Women's Association.

Client #9 is sixty years old and lives in South Minneapolis. He worked nine years for Hanson Pipe and Precast in Apple Valley for nine years but was laid off in November of 2008. He draws unemployment. He wants to get back into general construction. He sees some possibility of the company eventually rehiring.

Client #10 came to Minnesota from Laos in 1980. Now lives in South Minneapolis. He has three grown children. He worked for Fabcom from 2005-2008. Fabcom is a company located in Savage, Minnesota that makes concrete cement walls for building construction. He was laid off in November of 2008 and recently was able to start back part time. He works twenty four hours a week but 'this is not enough work.' He previously worked for a manufacturer of spray painting equipment.

Client #11 came as a refugee from Laos in 1981. He is married, with three grown up children and lives in St. Paul. He worked for a company called Temroc for two and a half years. The company was a manufacturer of aluminum building materials. His job was cutting metal. This company completely shut down its Twin Cities plant. Previously he was with Clariant as a forklift truck driver. He still carries a card showing his position as an industrial forklift truck driver.

Client #12, age fifty, lives in Brooklyn Park. She was laid off after working over ten years for Honeywell. She is currently seeking work through the bilingual staff at the Lao Women's Association.

Client #13 lives in Brooklyn Park. He is 32. He rents an apartment. He was laid off from Fabcom on November 26, 2008. He would do any kind of job and is looking for work.

**Names have been withheld to protect the identity of the clients. These stories were collected through interpreters at the Lao Assistance Center and Lao Women's Association. The stories are representative of the Lao men & women who come regularly each week to the Lao agencies in North Minneapolis. The Lao staff assists the Lao who come to them for help but they have no funding to cover the staff time spent helping their community. The staff response is, "But we try to help them anyway."*

Part One: Introduction

There are no good stories to tell. Jobs in almost all sectors have gone down; manufacturing, packaging, electronics, electronic assembly. Medical assembly seems ok with the job skills, language skills people have. Health care sector is the one sector that remains ok. But employers want clients with high school diplomas and clients have to pass tests. (Joe Vang, employment counselor, CAPI North)

The economy is very bad. Our older Hmong laid off workers face many barriers to finding reemployment. Companies now require GED or diplomas as well as experience. (Mr. Houa Moua, employment specialist, Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association)

This report prepared by the Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans is focused on telling the stories of those hit hardest by the current economic downturn and high unemployment rates. The report describes the situation from the perspective of job seekers and agency staff attempting to help them. There are two distinctly different groups of job seekers in crisis, the new refugees arriving in Minnesota (from Burma and Bhutan via refugee camps in Thailand and Nepal) and an older group of Southeast Asian workers (Lao, Hmong, Cambodian and Vietnamese) who have been employed and working for several decades but now find themselves among the laid off and unemployed and must reenter a workforce that has changed drastically since they got their first job. Most of the unemployed workers are from low skilled jobs such as in industrial and medical assembly work.

The situation in the Asian American communities around the current economic downturn has reached a crisis level. The report first presents a picture of the current needs, challenges, and barriers refugees and immigrants are facing. ***Part Two*** identifies the two main sources of assistance for refugees and members of the Southeast Asian communities: Voluntary Agencies and Mutual Assistance Associations. ***Part Three*** examines the problems uncovered. It reveals both the challenges facing the agencies working to help clients with little or no support for what they do, and analyses the root causes as to why they are struggling so hard to provide help to laid off workers and newcomers. After listing the main problems, ***Part Four*** presents the community suggestions on what needs to be done to get Asian Americans hired and laid off workers back into the workforce. ***Part Five*** presents a summary of the major findings and conclusions.

Demographics: High Refugee Population

According to the latest American Community Survey the official numbers for the Asian American population in Minnesota is at least 172,000, but our current estimates put this number closer to 220,000. Of these the largest groups are Hmong, Asian Indian, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese. Minnesota has a reputation for refugee resettlement. Today, it is home to the largest Tibetan, Burmese, Bhutanese and Somali communities. More than 50% of Minnesota's Asian American and Pacific Islander community are refugees mainly from Southeast Asia. (Census 2000).

Our estimates now include US born children, those who have adjusted to permanent residency or citizenship status and secondary migrants from other states. (John Borden, International Institute of Minnesota)

The latest estimates from the Minnesota Refugee Programs Office at the Minnesota Department of Health show:

- *Hmong 67,000*
- *Vietnamese 25,100*
- *Lao (Laotian) 13,100*
- *Cambodian 7,100*

Statistics on refugees now include two new groups, refugees from Burma and Bhutan.

- *1,450 Burmese, mostly KaRen*
- *130 Bhutanese*

Low Educational Attainment Rates
(see graph on page 19)

There are stark differences in educational attainment for the APA community in Hennepin County. Whereas, 89% of Hennepin County residents have a high school degree or equivalent, less than half of all Hmong residents 18 and over have a high school education. 25% of all Hennepin County residents have a college degree. Pakistani and Asian Indians have significantly higher percentages than this at 41% and 36% respectively. Census data reveals that while 15% of Hmong residents have some college experience, only 5% have a college degree. The disparity in educational attainment is most apparent at this level. Looking at APAs as a whole, their performance at this level is 15% while the median for Hennepin County is 11%. However, upon closer inspection of the data, glaring disparities exist. Asian Indians have the highest rate at 38%, but Lao and Hmong have the lowest at 1%. The female rate for these two groups is statistically 0.

Hennepin County		1,116,200
Asians		61,923
Asian Indian	9,226	15%
Bangladeshi	109	0%
Cambodian	1,819	3%
Chinese, except Taiwanese	7,625	12%
Filipino	2,903	5%
Hmong	13,727	22%
Indonesian	173	0%
Japanese	2,387	4%
Korean	5,330	9%
Laotian	5,599	9%
Malaysian	124	
Pakistani	496	1%
Sri Lankan	243	0%
Taiwanese	224	0%
Thai	549	1%
Vietnamese	8,694	14%
Pacific Islanders		531

Source: Census 2000

Workforce Distribution (see graph on page 19)

There is a wide diversity and gap within the Asian Pacific American population with regard to the kinds of occupation that the ethnic groups hold. 59% of Lao and 48% of Hmong are employed in manufacturing as compared to only 14% of Hennepin County residents. (Census 2000). These jobs often pay low wages and provide limited opportunities for advancement.

High rates of limited English proficiency (LEP) exist among AAPIs in the Twin Cities

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) describes persons who do not speak English as their primary language and who have limited to ability to read, speak, write or understand English. Under federal law, these individuals may be entitled to language assistance with respect to a particular type of service, benefit or encounter. According to Census 2000, more than one out of three (33%) Asian American children age 17 years and younger is Limited English Proficiency (LEP). More than half (68%) of Asian American seniors age 65 years and older is LEP. More than one

out of three Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao, and Hmong households are linguistically isolated, while more than a quarter of Korean, Thai, and Chinese households are.

Legal Authority for LEP Assistance

Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act

“No person in the United States of America shall on the ground of race, color or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.
42 U.S.C. section 2000d.

Lau v. Nichols (1974)

In this case, the United States Supreme Court ruled that one type of national origin discrimination is discrimination based on a person’s inability to speak, read, write, or understand English.

Unemployment Crisis in the Southeast Asian American Community

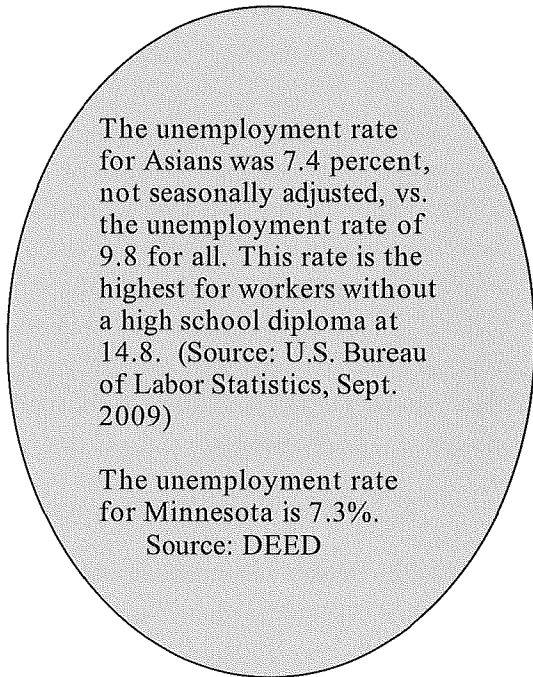
Jillian Middlebrooks, an expert on unemployment benefits, says her office in Hennepin County is experiencing significant increases from minorities seeking help:

‘We help about 2,200 people a month. Clients come back. They might need different referrals the second visit. The Office of Multicultural Services (OMS) made 62,000 referrals to services & programs in 2008. This is an increase up from about 40,000 in 2007. The referrals are for health care, WIC, and court services.

Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association (HAMAA) is a non-profit based in Minneapolis and it has an employment program. Sunny Yang is an employment counselor with a caseload of about eighty clients and her co-worker Xia Vue Jennings has a similar size caseload. Together they serve about 170 individuals looking for employment.

The numbers of Hmong unemployed are pretty big. People lost their assembly worker jobs, We are now seeing people moving back into North Minneapolis after losing their big houses in the suburbs. (Mr. Doua Vang, Director of Family & Employment programs, Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association, HAMAA)

Sunny Chanthanouvong, director of the Lao Assistance Center, is keeping a tally of the increase in services through his agency. His staff has been engaged in an average of 1,400 telephone calls a month helping clients, and they see an average of fifteen people per day as walk-ins.



Part Two: Helping Refugees & Immigrants

A. The Volags and New Refugee Arrivals

The Volags are responsible for making sure there is a plan in place prior to each new arrival. Each refugee needs to be met at the airport on arrival. They are taken to their housing. Then they are scheduled to meet with Volag staff. This includes meeting with staff to assist them with the refugee cash assistance program. (Parmananda Khatiwoda, World Relief)

The Voluntary Organizations, known collectively as the ‘Volags’, are structured to offer resources primarily for new arrivals during their first months and years of arrival. The responsibilities for initial resettlement are assigned to one of five main agencies in the Twin Cities known as ‘Volags’. These are funded through the Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and administered and overseen by staff within the Department of Human Services. The voluntary agencies are Catholic Charities, the International Institute, Lutheran Social Services, the Minnesota Council of Churches and World Relief.

The task of the Voluntary Agencies is to assist newly arriving refugees in the first phases of resettlement. Volags cover the details of arrivals, making sure every refugee from single adults to families is met at the airport; arranging for their housing (this ranges from taking new arrivals to relatives in the community, or housing provided by sponsoring organizations such as churches, or to rented apartments). The next step is helping new arrivals access their eligibility for benefits and access cash assistance. When a new refugee comes to the Volag, the staff determines their eligibility for public assistance. Staff assists them with applications for benefits, and assesses their eligibility for programs such as child care, ELL classes, and MFIP. After these immediate needs are met, the next step is employment counseling. This starts with an assessment of their employment prospects, development of an employment plan, help with soft skills training, and job search and placement.

1. Meeting Basic Needs of Refugees

The process of accessing services starts with the intake interview. At the intake interview, the Volag staff is responsible for helping the new arrivals process applications for the refugee cash assistance process. This is a very minimum amount of money to help the refugee get started.

When a new refugee comes to our office, we determine their eligibility for public assistance. I do intake interviews, look at them, their documents, I work with the refugees age 18 to 55, even as old as 65. The ones 18-21, if they are not enrolled in school, see if they have some other form of assistance. For the older people, see if they are eligible for SSI benefits. I send information to Hennepin County, help clients access food, food stamps, health care, medical assistance. We handle that interview. Then the clients can get their checks. We distribute the checks to them. I make calls to clients. Tell them their checks have arrived. Call them if they have not submitted their social security numbers. We also issue them with bus cards if they are eligible. (Parmananda Khatiwoda, Cash Assistance Program Officer, World Relief)

The cash assistance checks are administered through the Department of Human Services and intended as a short-term assistance covering eight months. Single adults get \$250 a month and couples get \$437.

2. The process of employment counseling for refugees

Depending on their age on arrival, the Volags help new arrivals access either education or work. Volags such as the International Institute, Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services (LSS), the Minnesota Council of Churches and World Relief have employment counselors to provide employment services to new arrivals. LSS has twelve employment counselors. Counselors provide assessments of job skills, review of job applications, and placement in appropriate positions. Each client at World Relief is required to have an employment plan detailing their job search strategy and their efforts are monitored at job placement.

People have four to five months with counselors. We find out what the problems are in finding work. Is the problem not finding work due to language barriers? (Parmananda Khatiwoda, World Relief)

The employment counselor makes an assessment of the client, a check list, assess their English skills, previous work experience, and ask clients questions like ‘what did you do for work back in your home country?’ They assess their communication skills, and computer skills. If their English skills are low then the counselors advise them that they need to work on developing them.

The role of the employment counselor can often be quite complex. They are called upon to tackle complex problems. Counselors at World Relief shared how they try to help Karen and Bhutanese refugees adjust to difficult realities regarding the current job availability in Minnesota. They talked about motivational and psychological problems when the only jobs a refugee can find are at lower levels than what the refugee feels qualified for.

They don't want to start at entry level positions if they held higher level jobs before in their home country. But I tell them; you have to take the job. Take whatever you can get. I suggest to them long term goals and short term. Take what you can to get started. See yourself as a lawyer again in five years. I tell job seekers, it may be easier to get a job if you are willing to do anything. (Parmananda Khatiwoda, World Relief)

But the counselors do not recommend that clients settle for dead end jobs. Their job planning sessions involve talking about career planning:

I tell them the job gives you resources. You can take training weekends. Get an American degree. (Parmananda Khatiwoda, World Relief)

There are also role models and support at community events organized by the leaders in the community. One of the new Bhutanese refugees is already enrolled in the school of dentistry. He was a dentist before fleeing his homeland. His goal is to be able to resume working at his full professional level. But he is fortunate to be supported by family members who are working so he can complete his studies.

B. Mutual Assistance Associations – Providing employment counseling after the initial period of resettlement

*Although the mainstream American voluntary agencies had prior experience with resettlement and many ordinary Americans and local churches worked hard to welcome the newcomers, it quickly became clear that the refugees needed local agencies that could provide linguistically and culturally sensitive support services. The government therefore began promoting the development of Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs). (Irene Bloemraad, *Becoming a Citizen: Incorporating Immigrants and Refugees in the United States and Canada*, page 129).*

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) defines a Mutual Assistance Association as an organization with the following qualifications:

- a. The organization is legally incorporated as a nonprofit organization; and
- b. Not less than 51% of the composition of the board of directors or governing board of the MAA is comprised of refugees or former refugees, including both refugee men & women.

In 1978, the newly established Refugee Task Force in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare claimed that they were providing technical assistance to 138 Indochinese MAAs and that by 1980, 500 Southeast Asian MAAs were created across the country, of these, 340 associations catered to the Vietnamese refugees. (Bloemraad, p. 130). And in 1980, after ORR was established, it began a formal policy of funding MAAs using competitive grants under a new \$1.2 million dollars MAA Incentive Grant Initiative.

Being organized as an MAA provided organizations an added advantage when seeking federal or state resettlement funding. ORR has consistently encouraged states and counties to give strong consideration to the special strengths of mutual assistant associations. (Bloemraad, p. 131). Thus, it is not surprising that the first non-profits in the Asian American community, in the Twin Cities, were organized as MAAs:

- Lao Family Community of Minnesota, St. Paul – Hmong
- Lao Assistance Center, Minneapolis - Lao
- Hmong American Partnership (HAP), St. Paul – Hmong
- Hmong American Mutual Assistance Center (HAMAA), Minneapolis - Hmong
- CAPI – USA, Minneapolis – Hmong, Lao, Vietnamese, Cambodians

Refugee Act of 1980

With the fall of Vietnam in April 1975, the U.S. faced the challenges of resettling hundreds of thousands of Indochinese using an ad hoc Indochina Refugee Taskforce, and temporary funding. Congress realized it needed to create procedures to deal with the on-going resettlement of refugees. Consequently, in 1980, the U.S. Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, which standardized the resettlement services for all refugees admitted to the U.S. This Act incorporates the definition of “refugee” used in the U.N. Protocol, and makes provision for regular flow as well as emergency admission of refugees, and authorizes federal assistance for the resettlement of refugees. The Refugee Act provides the legal basis for The Office of Refugee Resettlement.
(www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/about/history.htm)

Vietnamese Social Services (VSS), St. Paul - Vietnamese
United Cambodian Association of Minnesota (UCAM), St. Paul - Cambodians

Initially created to meet the resettlement and adjustment needs of their communities, MAAs have evolved and or matured as non-profits and branched into other areas of service and service population. HAMAA is becoming a base for Oromo as well as Hmong. HAP, VSS and Lao Family serve Karen. CAPI, an agency headquartered on Lake Street in South Minneapolis, with two smaller satellites, one in North Minneapolis and one in Eden Prairie, serves a large number of Somali as well as Vietnamese. UCAM is trying to develop the capacity to serve Bhutanese.

We make it easier for clients to come to us. We go where the clients are. For example CAPI North and South are on bus lines. (CAPI employment counselors)

The role and daily work of the MAA employment counselors

Employment counselors in both the Volags and the MAAs face similar challenge, however, the MAAs are not limited to new arrivals and work with multi-generational clients with various needs. Although the clients coming to the MAAs have been here for decades, they still need help with application forms and help accessing unemployment benefits. Under the current economic crisis, the MAAs are seeing the older laid off workers in the community turn to them in increasing numbers for help while at the same time they are struggling to find a fair share of dwindling resources to assist these clients find jobs.

This last year it's been hard to find them jobs. Our clients are mostly not successful because they don't have education, they face language barriers, and companies are tougher on requirements. (Sunny Yang, Employment Counselor, HAMAA)

Due to low English reading and writing and computer skills, the older immigrants experience the process of applying for unemployment benefits, searching for job vacancies, fraught with difficulties. Employers in today's job market expect them to be able to complete job applications forms on line. They need coaching on how to take tests on line.

1. Employment Programs

Almost all of the MAAs have a "self-sufficiency" or employment program which provides direct services to people who are seeking employment. These services include: employment assessment; education, help addressing challenges and barriers to self-sufficiency, along with job search and job placement assistance which includes resume and application assistance, direct placement, and job coaching and follow-up and retention services. The funding sources for these employment programs come from a mix of federal, state and private/foundation dollars. Mostly, MAAs get their funds from the MFIP Program for participants on public assistance or through the refugee employment program which provides job training, placement and retention services to refugees. It is a challenge for MAAs to find funding for employment programs for the "working poor" or for newly unemployed workers. This is a new niche for the MAAs and they are struggling to find a stable funding source for them to meet this new demand.

2. Functional Work English

Some of the MAAs have Functional Work English which focuses on language needed for the workplace to help students prepare for work - learning English, 'normalizing' the workplace, helping students explore and apply for possible jobs, and understanding workplace culture, etc.

3. Soft Skills Training

We teach hard skills and soft skills. It is the soft skills that get you in the door and keep you there. Soft skills include learning how to schedule your day, balance home and life, deal with housing, child care and transportation. (David Peebles, TC Rise)

Soft skills lessons include teaching clients the rules of the workplace, the nuts and bolts of how to be an employee in America. Much of these skills are new to refugees who have never worked in a modern workplace. There are often basic cultural differences that have to be covered. For example, employment counselors explain to a Hmong client, 'You can't just send a relative to do the job for you when you are sick.' Clients are taught other skills such as how to read a pay stub, and basic skills such as punctuality, punching in with time cards, when to take breaks and lunch.

The focus last week was on helping clients prepare for testing for jobs in medical assembly. The testing is done on line. We train the clients on how to take the tests here at HAMAA. Then we take them to the company for the drug testing. HAMAA has placed two clients already. We are hoping they will hire more. (Sunny Yang, HAMAA)

4. Job Development & Job Specific Training

Work with employers to create job specific training; develop relationships and create a network of employers so that the MAAs can stay informed about job vacancies.

In our community, we do not find jobs by looking in the newspaper or doing well in the job interviews. We get jobs by word of mouth and the good work of other employees, who are family members or friends. Human resource finds out that we are hard workers and so they want to hire more of us. (Lao Assistance Staff)

Over the last decades immigrants have found their way into certain categories of jobs or niches in the economy that for a variety of reasons were open to them. These were often the least wanted jobs. Refugees found work in jobs no one else wanted. These included assembly line work and often-dangerous work in the meat packaging industries. A few other niches opened up. For example, the Lao found jobs at Marvin Windows in Warroad, The Tibetans have created a niche in health care. Over two hundred Tibetans work as dietary aides in hospitals putting the food trays together for patients in hospitals. This work has not needed a high level of English skills. Other immigrant groups have found work as taxi drivers and parking lot attendants, janitors and restaurant workers.

Part of the recovery process for Asians will consist of finding and creating new employment niches for refugees and immigrants. Hospitals are a potential source of employment: many jobs in hospitals require English and employees who are able to read and write, but there are a couple of niches open. The Tibetans have been successful in developing a niche in hospitals such as Abbott Northwestern and Mercy Hospital. One of the niches is in housekeeping another is working in food service as dietary aides, employees need on all shifts, seven days a week, including all major holidays to assemble the food trays.

5. Accessing Unemployment Benefits

Asian American workers, like other laid off workers by companies in this economy, are entitled to unemployment benefits. Yet often they don't know that they are entitled or where to access them. And even if they do know there are misconceptions about qualification and eligibility. A

county official shared that a planner laid off from Hennepin County Medical Center did not know she was entitled to the benefits. She thought she had to be a citizen to qualify.

Laid off workers shared concerns about their inability to find jobs and thus, having their unemployment benefits run out. Initially, the length of unemployment benefits is initially for 26 months, and then those still unemployed can apply for a twenty week extension. After that, if still unemployed, there is a 13 week extension, making a total of 59 week (a year and seven weeks). At the time of writing this report, in the fall of 2009, the number of weeks had again been extended making a total of 79 weeks of coverage.

Others shared with us their difficulty in meeting reporting requirements, which require a weekly report – either written or electronic. For those that can not read or write, they must rely on other family members or their employment counselors to help them file the report. Failure to report is cause for termination of benefits.

C. Assistance to New Immigrants

Research shows that low-skill, low-wage workers can gain from additional education and training. In a policy brief, *Strengthening State Policies for America's Working Poor* (2007), the Working Poor Family Project found that too few states, however, target their resources to benefit this population. Minnesota has such a program, but it only funds educational institutions. Other programs are often limited to cities, counties, townships, businesses, thus shouting out MAAs that research shows the community goes to for services.

- Dislocated Workers
- ReEntry Works (recently released from prison)
- Work Adjustment Training (transition to a work setting or environment)
- Work Experience Training (program to build experience in the work world)

If states and local governments are to continue this funding path, then they must ensure that the community will indeed benefit. Greater outreach, bilingual staff and resources will help in addition to real partnership with the affected community and employers.

Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claims

During September [2009], there were 28,259 initial claims filed in Minnesota, 576 fewer than in August. Over the year, initial claims rose by 9,351 or 49.5 percent. Manufacturing had the most substantial over-the-year increase, up 106.8 percent (2526 claims), followed by Health Care and Social Assistance, which was up by 66.8 percent (920 claims). Construction claims remained very high, 5961 claims, but was only up 18.7 percent. Source: Unemployment Insurance Statistics (DEED)

----- **WORKING POOR FAMILIES PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS: *State groups can consider promoting the following:***

- 1) Dedicate and target a significant portion of all state workforce training resources to the needs of low-skill, low-wage adults.
- 2) Redirect significant state economic development resources away from traditional business incentives (loans and grants, capital purchases, and general tax credits) to workforce training that is directly focused on low-skill, low-wage workers.
- 3) Involve employers in the design of training programs so that the training is linked to specific employer workforce needs.
- 4) Focus training on industry sectors with high demand and workforce career ladder opportunities.
- 5) Broaden the eligible program activities for all state training programs to include basic skills and literacy education for new and incumbent workers.
- 6) Track and measure the outcomes of all training expenditures and report on how workers benefit from these investments.

These data should include:

- 1) completion of skills training programs,
- 2) whether participants obtained a credential, and
- 3) income of participating workers before and after training.

<http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org>

Part Three: Barriers to Employment

The situation today is that many of our Lao clients who arrived here as refugees after the Vietnam war and who spent decades working in low skilled jobs that have now disappeared in this economic downturn now find themselves with few marketable skills. (Sunny Chanthanouvong, Director, Lao Assistance Center)

There are no jobs here. No jobs for newcomers. No jobs for refugees like us. It's a crisis. The US sends manual jobs overseas. We were not trained in high tech. We lost our jobs. We cannot find replacement work for the jobs we had. Good employers in the past were Control Data, Honeywell, Unisys, now these jobs are all gone. (Xa Vang, Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association)

A. Barriers as Faced by Those Seeking Employment Services

1. Need for more intensive help than that provided at the workforce centers

For most unemployed Americans, the place to turn to for help in accessing unemployment benefits and finding jobs is the workforce centers, which are operated by the state government. Unfortunately they do not work well for refugees and immigrants with low levels of English speaking, reading and computer skills. Asians do not find the level of culturally competent services and help they need from the workforce centers. For example, orientation sessions are in English. People seeking help complain that they are just given forms and directed to computers. This level of assistance is inadequate and does not meet the need of the unemployed search for work.

The workforce centers themselves are overloaded and do not have the capacity to offer intensive help or case management. They need more bilingual staff. There are currently efforts in the Minneapolis workforce center to improve on the lack of diversity by hiring one Lao speaking staff person but it will need that staff person to be out in the community agencies to effectively reach the underserved Lao.

In the past, back when there were jobs, Asian job seekers sought and found help in community organizations. The Hmong, Lao, Vietnamese and Cambodian workers, who have been laid off, often after decades of working in low skilled jobs, turn to their community agencies for help. But in today's job market even mainstream computer literate workers are finding it difficult to locate jobs. The situation is compounded for Asians without these skills. The problem of not getting adequate intensive help from either mainstream or community services has reached crisis proportions. County services such as the Hennepin County Office of Multicultural Services are working at capacity.

Workforce Centers Defined

Workforce Centers are a collaboration of partners, including the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and local community agencies. People seeking work, businesses seeking employees, students, and those looking for a first job or returning to the workforce, will find services to meet their needs, offered at no cost. Each WFC houses a Resource Area that operates similarly to a public library.

Source: www.mnwfc.org

We have made 62,000 referrals to services and programs in 2008. The Hennepin County office of Multicultural Services has seen an increase up from about 40,000 in 2007. Referrals to health care, WIC, court services. We help 2,200 people per month. The clients come back. They might need different services the second visit, different needs. (Jillian Middlebrooks, manager HC OMS.)

2. Refugees lack work experience, laid off workers lack formal education

Asian refugees are facing barriers to finding employment due to lack of previous work experience. Volag counselors told us employers are increasingly requiring one year of previous work experience. Asian laid off workers are facing similar barriers to getting reemployed – barriers caused by their low levels of formal education or English language skills and stiffer competition now from other laid off workers

3. It is difficult to get rehired

In the current economic downturn, many Southeast Asians have lost their jobs and are having a tough time finding new employment. But there are no easy solutions.

The last year it's been very hard to find jobs. Most of our clients are not successful because they don't have education and they face language barriers. The companies are tougher on requirements. They require GED or High School Graduation and our clients don't have that. Sometimes even the young adults don't have high school. (Sunny Yang, employment counselor Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association)

The same story is repeated in the Volags serving new refugees. One Volag counselor observed that at recent job fairs, he sees more booths from social service agencies than from employers seeking to hire.

Lutheran Social Service has links to employers, but all our employers, all the factories laid people off - Electrolux, Jennie O Turkey Processing. The only chance of a job is out of state placement for a couple of years. (Robinson Cook, Employment Relations, LSS)

The Volag and MAA employment counselors report that they are not finding job opportunities for new arrivals and older laid off workers. They are also not seeing jobs posted for more than a day. If a company leaves a job vacancy posted the human resources personnel are deluged with too a client at our agency (CAPI) for some time. many applications. This creates difficulties for refugees. Their applications sink to the bottom of a pile. Robinson Cook described the frustrating situation for employers and employment counselors.

Challenges and Barriers to Employment

First generation immigrants play a crucial role in the U.S. economy, comprising almost one in eight workers and one in four low-wage worker. [Yet] many immigrant workers confront enormous challenges in the labor force: language and cultural barriers, exploitative working conditions, immigration-status vulnerabilities, restrictions on access to public services and benefits, and workforce development and education systems that do not respond to their needs.

Source: Newcomers in the American Workplace: Improving Employment Outcomes for Low-Wage Immigrants and Refugees, Tyler Moran & Daranee Petsod

Not only are there few jobs posted, but the jobs are not getting posted very long. It's a shrinking time to match clients up with jobs briefly posted and to help a client get an application in. For example, hotels with housekeeping positions are only posting the opening for two to three days. Not a lot of job inventory but a lot of applicants. (Robinson Cook, Lutheran Social Services)

4. Placement issues - problems finding replacement jobs

We have seen a 25% increase in people seeking our assistance accessing benefits. We have a small employment program but the jobs aren't there. We only found one job for every hundred clients. There are tough placement issues. (Jillian Middlebrooks, Hennepin County Office of Multicultural Services)

Placement issues in the current economy are tough. Employment counselors are not finding jobs. The labor market is down. All the employment counselors complained about the tough placement issues. There are not a lot of manufacturing jobs right now. The only job vacancies mentioned were data entry positions, cleaning services and retail services.

The biggest challenge for new refugees is that they lack previous employment experience. It used to be you only needed six months employment experience, but now employers have moved up the employment requirement from six months to a year. It's a death knell for our clients. (Robinson Cook, LSS)

5. Increased competition

Employers are deluged with qualified candidates. To add to the problems, refugees, newcomers with limited English, are now competing with mainstream job seekers. For example LSS posted a training coordinator position, a basic entry position, and had two hundred applicants. It is the same story throughout the state.

With such a large number of applicants there is little time spent scanning resumes. The more qualified candidates leap to the top. A person who can hardly communicate in English is competing with more qualified candidates. (Robinson Cook, LSS)

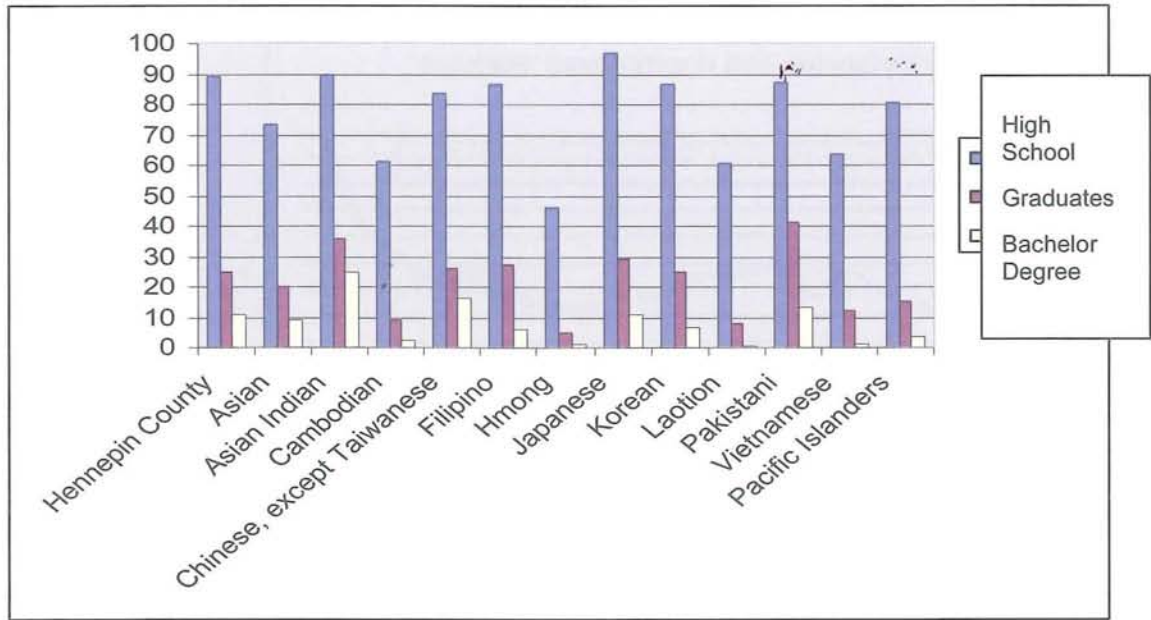
Counselors complain that 'if you are applying for financial worker positions you are pushed out by the applicants with higher educational qualifications. Human resource people sort out the best qualified, the qualified, and the not qualified.'

An analysis of the problems encountered by the Asian refugees and the agencies trying to serve them shows that clients need intensive services to help them face these problems.

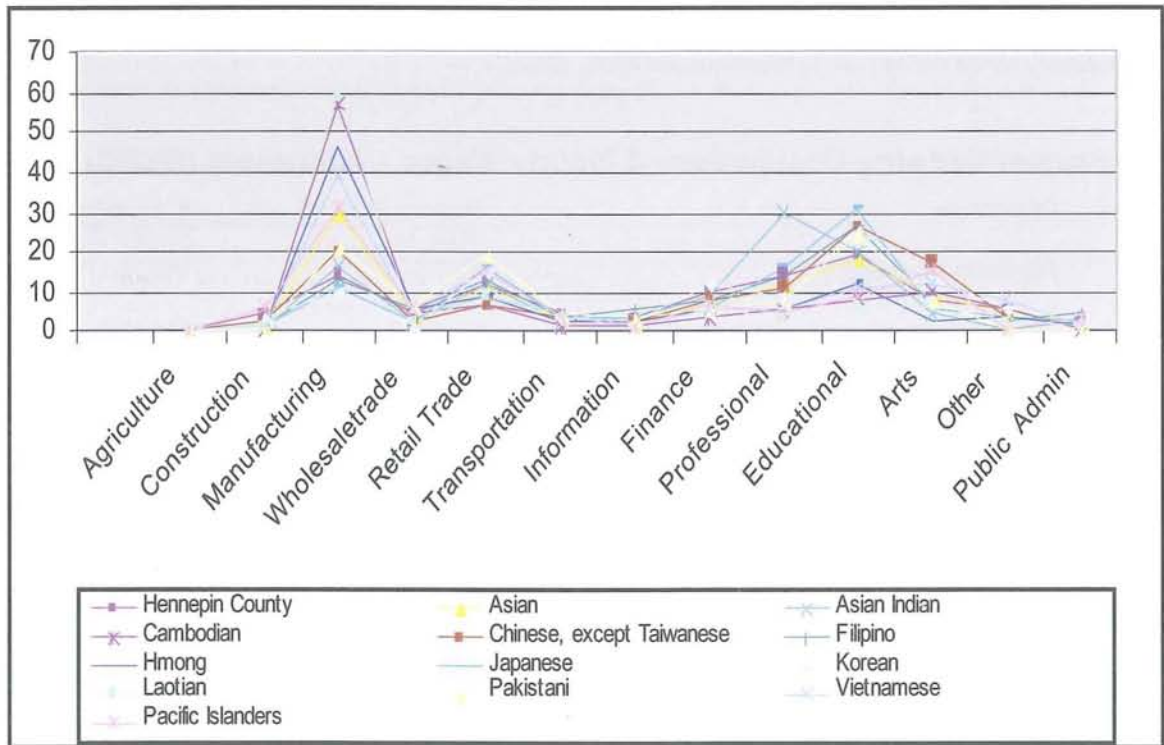
6. Clients just need more intensive help that goes beyond the offered services

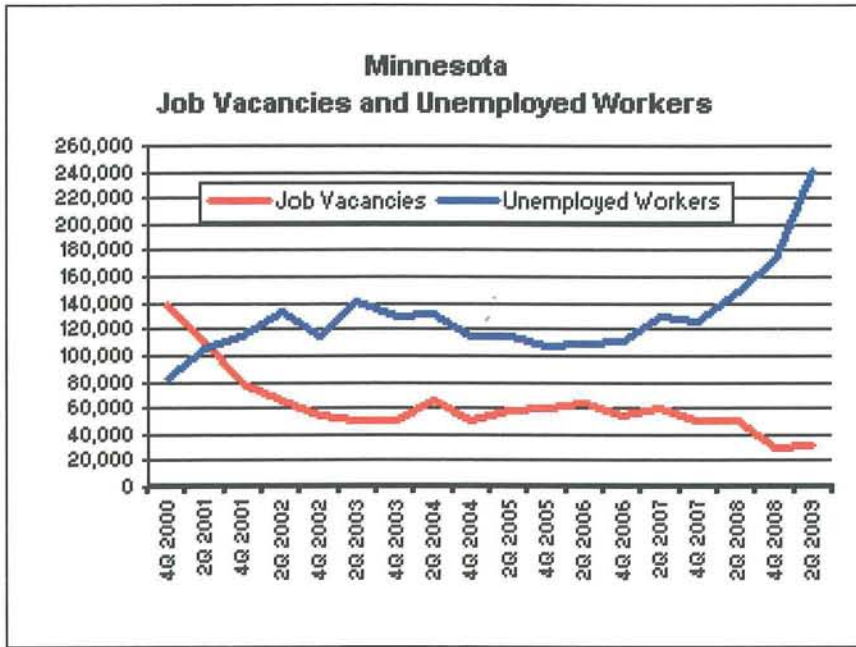
I took three and a half hours with a client today. A female 20-30 years old. She has been I spent some of the time finding out why she was not able to get a job. I needed to first help her solve problems of housing, and child care needs. I enter the facts into our electronic database. Usually I only need to spend thirty minutes to an hour with a client, but these special cases take longer. (Joe Vang, MFIP employment counselor, CAPI)

Educational Attainment Rates (Census 2000)



Workforce Distribution by Asian Ethnic Groups (Census 2000)





Source: *Minnesota Employment Review*, Department of Employment and Economic Development

MN Job Vacancies

The number of job vacancies fell 39.4 percent from one year ago, to 31,400, during the second quarter. Two occupational groups, Construction and Personal Care & Services, showed growth in the number of vacancies while all others showed a decline compared to one year ago. About 17,400 job vacancies, or 55 percent, were located in the Twin Cities seven-county area. The remaining 14,000 were in Greater Minnesota. Overall, there were 7.7 unemployed workers for each job vacancy statewide. This ratio indicates that the second quarter 2009 labor market was the least favorable for job seekers during the history of the job vacancy series dating back to fourth quarter 2000. (DEED)

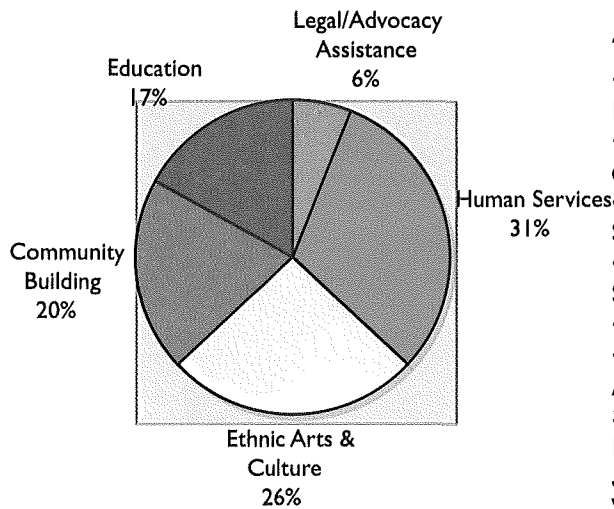
10 Fastest-Growing Occupations & Hourly Wages – Minnesota (DEED)

Rank	Occupation	Projected Growth 2004-14	4 th Quarter 2007 Hourly Wage
1	Physician Assistants	53.7%	\$40.22
2	Network Systems and Data Communications	52.8%	\$36.13
3	Home Health Aides	51.7%	\$11.18
4	Computer Software Engineers, Applications	47.4%	\$39.26
5	Biomedical Engineers	45.3%	\$38.00
6	Medical Assistants	42.3%	\$14.95
7	Personal and Home Care Aides	42.1%	\$11.12
8	Medical Scientists, Except Epidemiologists	42.0%	\$27.82
9	Athletic Trainers	41.0%	\$38,654
10	Dental Hygienists	38.1%	\$33.18



September 2009 - Hennepin County Commissioner Mark Stenglein meets with staff from the Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans and Lao Assistance Center (a nonprofit) to talk about creative ways in which the county can help address the employment service needs of the Lao American community.

Asian Pacific Islander Nonprofits in Minnesota: Revenue and Area of Service



API Nonprofit Economy at a Glance

- Number of financially active Minnesota API Nonprofits: 75
- Oldest API organization: Japan American Society of Minnesota incorporated in 1972
- Average revenues of API organizations (FY2004): \$355,714
- Average expenses of API organizations (FY2004): \$329,015
- Average years in operation: 11.6 years
- Number of languages used in services provided by API nonprofits: 14 languages including American Sign Language, Burmese, Cambodian, Chinese, English, Filipino Dialects, Hmong, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Khmer, Thai, and Vietnamese

Source: Asian Pacific Islander Nonprofit Economy Report: A Minnesota Study 2006, Minnesota Council of Nonprofits & Asian American Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (Minnesota Chapter)

Table 1. Employment by major occupational group, 2006 and projected 2016							
[Numbers in thousands]							
2006 National Employment Matrix code and title		Employment number		Percent distribution		Change, 2006-16	
		2006	2016	2006	2016	Number	Percent
00-0000	Total, all occupations.....	150,620	166,220	100.0	100.0	15,600	10.4
11-1300	Management, business, and financial occupations....	15,397	16,993	10.2	10.2	1,596	10.4
15-2900	Professional and related occupations.....	29,819	34,790	19.8	20.9	4,970	16.7
31-3900	Service occupations.....	28,950	33,780	19.2	20.3	4,830	16.7
41-0000	Sales and related occupations.....	15,985	17,203	10.6	10.3	1,218	7.6
43-0000	Office and administrative support occupations.....	24,344	26,089	16.2	15.7	1,745	7.2
45-0000	Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations.....	1,039	1,010	.7	.6	-29	-2.8
47-0000	Construction and extraction occupations.....	8,295	9,079	5.5	5.5	785	9.5
49-0000	Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations....	5,883	6,433	3.9	3.9	550	9.3
51-0000	Production occupations.....	10,675	10,147	7.1	6.1	-528	-4.9
53-0000	Transportation and material moving occupations.....	10,233	10,695	6.8	6.4	462	4.5

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics



Members from the Hennepin County Asian American Pacific Islander Leadership Council meet with the community to brainstorm and find solutions.

This frustration was a common thread among many employment counselors. They do more because the clients are often times from the same cultural or ethnic group as them. One executive director shared his concern for the need of his employees to have a good work/life balance so they do not burn out and leaves their work.

7. Other problems associated with unemployment

People are losing jobs, losing homes, families are falling apart. (Xa Vang, Executive Director, Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association)

The mainstream and community agencies report that more people come seeking help accessing healthcare, food stamps information on food shelves, and help accessing unemployment benefits. In addition, agencies are seeing clients with new problems – home foreclosures, domestic violence, obesity, mental health issues including depression, poor communication between parents and children and substance abuse addiction ranging from alcohol and tobacco to meth.

- **Problems accessing unemployment benefits**

Clients experience a lot of confusion over benefits, confusion over eligibility for benefits. For example, an employed county worker from Pakistan, laid off from her position as a planner at HCMC, did not know she was eligible for unemployment. She thought she had to be a citizen and so had not applied. Staff at the Office of Multicultural Services at Hennepin County helped her apply. She had had no income from June 2008 to April 2009. Now she is drawing unemployment.

- **Home foreclosures**

Several of the MAA employment counselors commented on the problem of home foreclosures affecting Southeast Asians. The problems affect the employed as well as laid off workers. One employment counselor talked about Hmong who have had to let go their homes because they could not pay the escalating mortgages. They had purchased their homes in 2001 – 2003 with adjustable rate mortgages. The rates started changing but they could not get refinanced. They are letting the homes go rather than face the debts.

In the past 10 years the trend has been to move outward into the suburbs, but now the trend is to move back into the inner cities. One agency director counseled them to consider moving back and purchasing the more affordable empty houses on the North side in Minneapolis.

- **Mental health and substance abuse**

Along with the stress and depression resulting from unemployment, unemployment is causing an increase in substance abuse issues in the Lao community. The Lao Center currently has three of their staff funded specifically to educate and reduce substance abuse.

B. Barriers Faced by Service Providers in Their Service Delivery

It is disappointing to report that the agencies in the best position to help the unemployed in their communities are so scantily under funded, and that state and county agencies are reluctant to share existing resources. The MAAs with the most potential to tackle the unemployment

problems are without adequate levels of financial report. Given even a minimum amount of financial support, their staff could begin to develop relations with employers with leads to potential jobs, develop pilot programs with new companies, help get young people into the trades, recruit for green jobs and not only prepare workers to reenter the workforce, but prepare them to enter the workforce of the future.

1. Agencies struggling with funding cuts

Our funding has been cut from \$112,000 to \$25,000. We had an 80% reduction in funding. We serve everyone. Every year our number of job placements doubled. But we get no credit for this from the city. (Doua Vang, Director of Family and Employment Programs, HAMAA)

Even with funding cuts, agencies are seeing more and more clients looking for employment services. The need is greater than what currently exist. Agencies have reported staff who are overworked and underpaid.

It's hard for us to say no we can not help you find a job because we only have a grant for chemical dependency. The community does not care where agencies get their funding from. They just ask, aren't you Lao Assistance Center? Aren't you here to help us? How can we say no? So staff just help and do something new. (Sunny Chanthanouvong, Director, Lao Assistance Center)

Agencies face staff turnovers, retention issues. In the past they have lost staff to better paying and more secure positions working for the counties or other bigger non-profits. Junior staff means lower salaries. Agencies are taking a hit. There might be salary savings when senior staff leave, but younger inexperienced staff needs training and a learning curve.

2. Limitations under MFIP funding

Some support to agencies serving refugee families comes through the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP). The MFIP funding originated in the federal and state policies of welfare reform in 1996. The issues around MFIP and how refugees are caught up in the mainstream 'welfare to work' policies are complex and beyond the scope of this brief report to fully and adequately address. However a few brief points need to be stated. The severe restrictions on client eligibility for MFIP, such as low income and limited assets, leave many Asians ineligible for MFIP. The support MAAs receive as MFIP service providers only covers them for the work they do for clients who are on MFIP. For example the work of two bilingual employment counselors interviewed at CAPI was funded through MFIP contracts. This contract only reimburses work they do with MFIP clients. The MFIP funding does not fund work with the unemployed laid off workers not on public assistance.

There are an increased number of clients across the board. People are running out of employment benefits. Unemployment insurance runs out. Families go to apply for MFIP. We are seeing more come through the doors. They are not getting hired quickly. We always had people on MFIP who were working part time jobs. But now they are not able to find part time jobs. There is a direct relationship (between MFIP clients finding part

time work) to the lack of jobs. For example in past years it usually spiked in December. But last December it was lower. (Linda DeHaven, MCED)

The challenges of finding work seem particularly acute for the clients on MFIP. Like everyone else, the MFIP clients are finding it more and more difficult to find employment, plus they have difficulty meeting the requirements to be on MFIP. It is resulting in apathy. One counselor said 'Our clients receive very little money but they are required to do a lot to qualify for the money.' On the one hand, the client's apathy reflects a frustration with bureaucracy. Counselors experience frustrations with the quota system that they say places restrictions on the number of clients they can get into retraining,

The state says we will only let you have ten percent go through. (Dao Ngo, CAPI)

MAAs would like the MFIP system be redesigned. Clients referred to CAPI under MFIP are facing increased difficulty under the economic downturn. It has become more and more difficult for the counselors to help them find employment. Plus there are difficulties with the requirements.

They receive very little money but are required to do a lot to get it. For example document eighty hours spent on a core activity. MFIP only gives them six weeks of job search. Even we as professional, educated, English speakers would have a hard time right now finding employment. (Julie Honebrink, CAPI)

The clients face many barriers – family, child care, transportation, mental health. MFIP requires that they show a certain percentage of their time every month is spent job searching. Several counselors said that their clients have reached high levels of frustration trying to comply with the 'red tape,' the rules and regulations.

We are struggling to get our clients to comply. Some of our clients have given up. They say, OK. Go ahead, sanction me. (Dao Ngo, CAPI)

3. Refugee Employment Services

There is a small amount of federal support coming from Refugee Employment Services (RES) contracts that is administered via the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Refugee Resettlement Office. For example the funding assisted a new Karen Support Project in downtown St. Paul, with five staff working with the Karen refugees from Burma. RES also helped HAMAA serve the last wave of Hmong refugees, especially those who were 'homeless' and staying in the nearby North Minneapolis St Mary's shelter. The goal at HAMAA is to provide job placement and job development to as many needy clients as possible. They receive \$2,400 per client. This includes counselor time for placement and follows up. The time per client varies from 280 days and 360 days.

At the current time federal guidelines are changing again. The Volags are now expected to accomplish their work in even shorter periods of time. An agency manager said they are currently expected to get 50% of clients into employment but the new contract starting in Federal fiscal year October 1, 2009 to September 30, 2010, imposes unrealistic expectations. They will be expected to get 80% of clients employed or in training.

4. The need for affordable retraining programs

Refugees from the Vietnam War era, who spent decades working in low skill jobs that disappeared in the downturn, now find themselves with few marketable skills. There needs to be greater efforts to help them into short training courses focused on skill development. For many the costs of retraining are prohibitive. A greater effort is required to make training more affordable for the older workers willing to retrain. For the older workers, the costs of retraining are a barrier. Counselors told us that even the short training courses offered at Goodwill are too costly for the Southeast Asian clients.

5. The problem of employment through temporary agencies

Our Lao temporary workers, they are like slaves. No rights, no benefits. It's a policy issue. How are we going to work on that? (Sunny Chanthanouvong, Executive Director, Lao Assistance Center)

At first glance, employment through a temporary agency might seem a positive step. Starting as a 'temp' and proving yourself able to do the work is often touted as a route to permanent jobs. There are success stories of CEOs who started this way. But the Asian directors tell a different story. Many Asian workers are laid off and rehired as temps and never transition into a permanent position. In one of the agencies there was a flyer on the front desk with an announcement of a job fair. On closer inspection, the flyer was not from the company needing machine operators, but a hiring agency. Workers are being exploited through these 'temp' agencies. The company regularly holds such 'a job fair' at the agency. Staff helps clients complete applications for these openings on line. The flyer said the pay was \$11 an hour for weekend shifts.

Two agency directors are critical of the reliance of companies on temporary agencies to hire clients. Although these jobs do provide clients with work experience the companies do not transition workers from temporary status to permanent status. The director of a leading Hmong agency complains that many of his Hmong clients get stuck in a cycle of being hired, laid off, hired, laid off and never progressing to a secure full time permanent position with benefits. From the company's perspective the temps are cheap labor. The problem seems that we have turned a blind eye on how this process exploits a workforce and denies them benefits. The whole situation of rights for temporary worker needs legislative attention. A six month period as a temporary worker should be viewed as probationary. On satisfactory completion of this probationary period the workers should transition into permanent jobs. If there are openings, the company should not be allowed to terminate the latest batch of temporary workers and start the whole cycle again with the same or a different batch. Little seems to exist in Minnesota Statutes to address this problem.

6. The clash between mainstream and MAA worldviews and how this affects modus operandi

The county does not see what we are doing to help our clients. (Xa Vang, executive director of the Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association in North Mpls)

There is a clash of worldviews between the mainstream way of doing things, rational, organized, outcome based, and tightly focused and the Asian nonprofit way which tends to be more flexible, responsive, and focused the comprehensive needs of their clients. For the mainstream, a non-profit is a business model. For the Asian community, a non-profit is a model for community development and convening. Grant administrators are focused on the outcomes – did the grantee place x amount of workers? Community non-profits are outcome driven, but the journey, the how to get there is just as important. For example, a client may need a job, but she may be in a family violence situation or her children may need help at school. A community non-profit will seek to meet all the needs of the client as they arise knowing that dealing with these issues will ultimately make the client a more marketable and stable employee. This intensive service is not a model that is compensated under the current funding models, but is something that must be considered when working with this population.

The mainstream perspective and concerns can be summed up in two phrases officials used in interviews – ‘No more bricks or mortar’ and ‘Low cost or no cost.’ Their advice is work with established agencies already providing employment services, i.e. workforce center, HIRE, PPL. The community response is these agencies do not provide services to our community, if they did, we would not be in this discussion. There would be no gap. Over the summer, the MAAs held meetings with the director and staff of the Minneapolis workforce center to try to improve on Asian clients’ access and the delivery of services. There have been a series of meetings between the two groups. Staff from the workforce centers have come out and met with agencies. There is an ongoing dialogue to improve on resource allocation and hire a community liaison to work closely with the Lao agencies and Lao community.

7. Last to the Table Means Little or Nothing Left to Give

In this economy, funding cuts are being made all over. Policy makers and administrators from the governor down to county and city officials are opposed to giving “new” funding to the community, even though new situations have arisen and thus new solutions must be looked at and explored. Additionally, Asian American non-profits are young and new. They are responding to the needs of their community and constituents in a way that mainstream organizations cannot.

This past legislative session, the governor defended his line item veto of a small amount of money that would have supported culturally and linguistically appropriate employment services to the community via the MAAs. The governor stated he had put enough money in the displaced worker programs and thus, did not want a duplication of services. To date, the displaced workers programs do not have culturally or linguistically appropriate services targeted towards the Asian American community.

Part Four: Areas on Which To Improve Upon

We need to meet the problems of our unemployed community members through intensive one to one counseling and mentoring from bilingual employment advocates in the agencies that they use and trust. (Sunny Chanthanouvong, Executive Director, Lao Assistance Center)

1. Employment Counselors do much more than case management. Clients rely on them for holistic service and in fact, need them to be more than counselors, but active partners in their search for employment.

I spent hours with a client today. These special cases take longer. Clients would not get this level of intensive service through the state workforce centers and yet this is what these clients need to sort out their problems so they can get employed or reemployed. (Joe Vang, CAPI)

I cannot tell my client to call the employer, submit a resume. They do not have good English or writing skills. In this environment, employers need higher skills. So I help them write their resumes and I call the employers. Help to make a good impression. I know my client is a good worker, will be a good worker. So I do all this extra work with them. I help make the case for them. This is why they come to us and not to the workforce centers. (Pany, Lao Assistance Center)

As might be expected, API nonprofits serve a high proportion of API persons. Thirteen organizations reported 100 percent of the people served are API persons. The average percentage of API persons served by the 28 nonprofits who answered this question was 87 percent. Twenty-four organizations reported serving API children and youth, age 18 and under, with the percentage total number of person served ranging from 2 percent to 100 percent of all persons served.

Source: Asian Pacific Islander Nonprofit Economy Report: A Minnesota Study 2006, Minnesota Council of Nonprofits & Asian American Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (Minnesota Chapter)

The nonprofit MAAs have the capacity to work with foreign born job seekers whose oral English is good but who need help with finding jobs. i.e., resume writing, job searching, test taking, interviewing & following up with employers. With sufficient funding they can help more clients over these barriers.

2. Dislocated Workers Programs need to be expanded and placed within the community

MAAs have contracts through MFIP and the Refugee Employment Service grants, but the community is bigger and larger than “public assistance” clients and refugees. Most MAAs do not have programs that target and serve this demographic group. MAAs need help and support to access funds to create programs to serve this underserved population. Non-profits that do have programs for this population do not have culturally and linguistically appropriate programs.

3. Job Training Should Be Job Focused, Short-term & Affordable

The agencies are best positioned to develop and deliver training programs that will match employees to employers within the market. Much of this could be covered if the clients had better access to the displaced worker programs or if these programs were more accessible to the

community. For example, it may not be cost effective for the Minneapolis Workforce Center to staff some of these programs with bilingual staff and trainers, but if it contracted or outsourced to a community non-profit that the community already goes through, it could create a win-win situation for everyone involved.

The Asian community needs hands on training. They started in the workforce when they were young and newly arrived. But laid off, they need skills training and the training needs to be affordable. (Dao Ngo, Vietnamese employment counselor/MFIP programs)

They need retraining, but first upgrade their English skills, find out what grants and financial aid they are eligible for. (Saengmany Ratsabout, North West Hennepin Human Services Council)

The clients know they need training and re-training. But they need to work, they have bills to pay, children in school. They do not want to go through a 2 years training program. They want a short, intensive, course that will get them ready for their new job. (Sunny Chanthanouvong, Executive Director, Lao Assistance Center)

There is a need for short-term training lasting from three to six months. Counselors said that certificates from such training increase the job chances of their clients. But putting refugees through training is proving to be a costly process. Some employment counselors complain that for refugees the eligibility requirements are set too high. Even applicants with good English skills are finding testing a major barrier. Some training is offered through agencies such as Goodwill, Accessibility, Twin City Rise and Opportunity Partners, but laid off workers need financial help in order to participate.

We need waivers for those who don't have GED so these clients can access retraining and we need scholarships for the low income job seekers. (Houa Moua, HAMAA)

4. Retraining more laid-off workers through MNSCU

The Minnesota Jobs Skills Partnership (MJSP) Program strategically helps Minnesota businesses and schools competitively train the workforce. This program address the employers need for trained employees via the schools, but rarely if ever does this program utilize and partner with MAAs to develop and implement targeted training to the community. It is the MAAs that have assess and credibility with the community in need of training and can work with them on achievement and follow-up. The MAAs can help mentor the students and get them through the training. The collaboration between the Asian agencies, Asian clubs, community colleges and technical colleges is in its infancy and should be invested in.

Of the programs in place, employment counselors spoke about strict eligibility requirements that prohibit refugees from courses within the Minnesota State Colleges and University system. Eligibility requirements are set too high for refugees. We have found in the past, that there are ways around these requirements. Hennepin Technical College (HTC) is a positive example of a college that successfully recruited and retained more refugees. HTC hired bilingual instructional assistants to assist mainstream instructors communicate with ELL students in the classroom. As well as solving the immediate needs of unemployed Asians in the present economic crisis, the Asian collaborative has the potential to build on these best practices and programs to create long range solutions for the next generation of young Asian adults and youth.

5. Wage subsidies and paid work experiences

Wage subsidy programs (also known as supported work programs) are part of the solution. Wage subsidies are a tool for helping Asian workers overcome limitations due to lack of training and work experience. Wage subsidies provide an extra incentive to employers to accept workers with low work experience, no GED and limited English. They give employers extra financial incentive to hire immigrants. But it needs employee advocates who can make this connection with employers. Otherwise there are no benefits to the employers for taking on employees with lower education skills and low language skills. The paid work experiences are seen as positive tools.

Wage subsidies give employers cash incentives to hire immigrants and refugees and assists the participants get work experience. Available funding does not seem to be the problem. There was \$40,000 not used up by the end of fiscal year in June. Some of the agencies working with wage subsidies are the employment action center and tree trust. The members of the Southeast Asian collaborative need access to this funding. Examples of wage subsidies are found in the MFIP program. The MFIP program pays MFIP clients the minimum wage. For example, the employer pays the basic minimum wage and the agency pays five dollars.

For example a program where the employer pays five dollars and our agency pays five dollars. The client gets ten dollars an hour. (Sunny Yang, HAMAA)

It costs the employer nothing to hire them unless the employer pays them above the minimum wage. (Jill Middlebrooks, Hennepin County, Office of Multicultural Services)

6. Functional Work English & English Language Classes

The unemployment report indicates that for those without a high school diploma, the unemployment rate in November stands at 14.8%, as opposed to high school grads who face unemployment rates of 9.3%. Staying in school and toughing it out reduces chances of unemployment by 5.5%! (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Sept. 2009).

Counselors told us that refugees, who arrive with little basic education, need more time for English language instruction to obtain high school diploma and or a GED. One counselor told us she is concerned about the older teenagers:

They need GED in order to be successful. But for refugees who on arrival are age 18-21, time is too short for them. They cannot finish school in such short times. They need time to catch up, complete high school graduation and finish their studies. They want to graduate but they don't have time to complete their education. (Sunny Yang, HAMAA)

It would be difficult to find a solution to this problem. For example the Hmong Charter School Long Tieng in north Minneapolis would like to help the newcomers from refugee groups stay in school until they complete twelfth grade. But state law only funds students to stay in school until they are 21. After that they are considered adult learners and must go to adult learning centers, where they are often times too young to fit in.

Clients need English language classes. ELL classes need to be held in the agencies but they do not have the funding as over time the state has eroded funding for Adult Basic Education

programs and training, and in particular functional work English. Twin Cities Rise has found it useful to offer job seekers medical terminology classes.

7. Train Employment Service Providers to Understand Future Workforce

In today's economy, with high unemployment rates, and high ratios of applicants for every job, employment counselors need more pro-active ways to help their clients.

There needs to be help with job searching. As an employment counselor I am struggling to place workers. (Eh Gay, employment counselor, World Relief.)

The above quote shows the distress of a young Volag employment counselor trying to place new arrivals. Part of the solution is to fund the collaborative so they have staff who can work full time on developing new relations with employers. The counselors need training places, places for refugees and immigrants to gain the required work experience. With a more equitable and adequate share of resources from the federal stimulus money, the agencies in the collaborative would be able to develop links to employers, create new employment niches and get job seekers ready for the economic recovery, including green jobs.

Green jobs? There is a lot of talk about it. But it's not a cookie cutter. A green job is not well defined but talked about incessantly. But until we get employers rehiring we will not see much happening. Green jobs will be stimulated as the economy is re-stimulated. (Linda De Haven, Minneapolis Department of Economic and Community Development.)

For the last year or more there has been hopes generated at all levels of government, from federal and state down to local about how green jobs can play a key role in the recovery of the economy. The question is how engaged will the community be in realizing these opportunities.

8. Increase Political Advocacy & Skills of Community and MAAs

Do you want me to bring four five hundred people to protest? Where shall we go? City hall? The Governor's mansion? Tell me and I will organize them. (Sunny Chanthanouvong, Lao Leader)

Asian Americans in Hennepin County see themselves as slow to organize effectively. There are no local Asian American worker unions. With the collapse of organizations such as the Urban Coalition and the MAA Directors Forum there is a gap in advocacy and policy development. In the past, the Asian American community has sporadically come together to voice their concerns to mayors, school superintendents, commissioners and legislators. There have been Asian summits held at Harrison, town hall meetings at the Lao Cultural Center, meetings of parents at HAMAA, listening sessions and conferences but these efforts have not produced tangible results. Resulting in a sense of mounting anger within the community. The Asian community feels that policy makers ignore them. In contrast to other minorities such as African Americans, the Asians have had a much weaker voice or little to show for their input and efforts to collaborate, partner and share the responsibilities with government to deliver much needed service to the community.

Part Five: Recommendations & Conclusions

'No matter who you are, no matter where you go in your life, no matter what you do, at some point in your life you're gonna need somebody to stand by you.' (Roger Ridley, LA street musician, *Playing for Change Foundation*)

Minnesota will need a skilled and more diverse workforce

State economists and demographers predict that the Minnesotan workforce of the future will need more skilled workers and that as the mainstream workforce ages companies, unions and construction trades will rely increasingly on minorities as workers. Employers will look for a skilled workforce. Policy makers cannot afford to leave Asian American workers languishing outside of the systems change. They are a part of the solution. There is a need for a new collaborative model to bridge the cultural gap between hard working, productive Asian American workers and the needs of Minnesota's employers. Our research has alerted us to several successful models primarily serving Asian Americans such as, Twin City Rise Empowerment Institute, Summit OIC and Project Pride in Living.

The goal shared by all the leaders in the Asian American community is to draw upon the full potential of the community. Even with all the tweaking of the current systems, to reach the full potential in the community, we will still need strong fiscal support for a new collaborative initiative based in the front line Asian American non-profit agencies. The above sections outlined the major solutions and also raised the issue of legislative action needed to help and support workers. All through the research there was evidence of a tremendous commitment in the Asian communities to help each other. It has been a slow process of cultural integration but in every immigrant group there are leaders dedicated to helping their communities move forward. From SEWA: Asian Indian Wellness to Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association to Lao Assistance Center we met leaders, staff, board members and volunteers committed to serve and better the lives of their community members.

This report offers a picture of the challenges facing Asian refugees and immigrants in today's bleak job market. Their stories put a face on the crisis. The report describes challenges community members seeking jobs face and the handicaps for those with low English skills and formal education in an economy where hiring has become more competitive. There is insufficient help in the mainstream agencies. Help there is minimal and they themselves are working beyond their capacity to offer the kind of intensive employment services these job seekers need. There is a need for more bilingual employment advocates to help Asian job seekers cope with the chaos and confusion, and job coaches to help them over the barriers and through all the hoops that they confront in America.

This report emphasizes the crucial role played by the Volags and Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs) and documents the many tasks that comprise effective comprehensive employment counseling and employment advocacy that are needed to serve the Asian American job seeker. These agencies are besieged with demands for services but need more adequate funding to provide solutions. There is a limit to what they can do and provide for the community without

funds or compensation. The report uncovers the problems and shows the steps needed to build and strengthen the capacity of agencies and bi-lingual staff to solve the problems.

1. Dedicate and target resources for Intensive Employment Services to better serve a culturally diverse and LEP population

Currently the Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs) serving residents in Hennepin County need a dedicated and targeted source of funding to help develop and support an intensive employment service programs particularly for the worker that has Limited English Proficiency (LEP). There is a clear gap of services to this population and more needs to be done.

Activities should be focused on delivering holistic and culturally competent and appropriate programming targeted to LEP persons seeking employment.

- **Intensive Case Management** – provide funding for MAAs to create innovative and responsive services for the Asian American job seeker that includes employment counseling, job search, hiring process and retention. This program will allow for the creation of employment “advocates” who will zealously work with and promote their clients for jobs, job development, and trainings.
- **Employer Development & Coordination** – to help MAAs build relationships and maintain networks with employers so they can create a “jobs” inventory for placement.
- **Job Development & Training** –Funding will be provided for MAAs to partner with others to create language and job specific trainings for the community as well as to provide resources and training opportunities for case managers on how to understand and develop workers for jobs of the future.

Refugees and immigrant workers are not helpless. They have ambition, drive, and are dedicated to re-building their lives here in America. But being new to this country and not knowing the norms and language of this country, refugees are indeed helpless when it comes to navigating the complex bureaucracy and solving job search problems. Funding the collaboration of agencies to develop and implement this program would help resolve so many of the barriers they face. CAPI, HAMAA and LAC already have staff working at full capacity as advocates. There is a need for these and other agencies to have funding for advocates to help clients. Taking a holistic approach to serving client needs, the collaborative can build in other components that are part of the solution such as health advocacy, recruiting volunteers, and developing entrepreneurial programs.

2. Dedicate and target a significant portion of all state workforce training resources for employment services for culturally diverse and LEP populations

Despite a growing demand for skilled labor, low-skill, low-wage workers often find few opportunities either within or outside of their workplace to access much-needed skills training. (Working Poor Family Project)



Our research has documented that the vast majority of Asian Americans with refugees experience are low-skilled and low-waged workers. The challenges to finding employment and obtaining much-needed training are often confounded many folds by cultural differences and having Limited English Proficiency. Additionally, due to these barriers more often times than not,

community members will go to community based non-profits for services. It is unfortunate when the programs they need are not connected to the places they trust and turn to for help.

The state needs to be creative and work collaboratively with the community to target resources, trainings, and employment services to reach culturally diverse and LEP populations. Community nonprofit MAAs are an asset to the state and state agencies must find better ways to incorporate them in the development of policies and programs.

It would seem that partnering and sub-contracting with the MAAs would be a more cost-effective model for the state than to create and staff their own programs to serve this population. The MAAs already have the language and cultural capacity to work with the community. MAAs also are drawing in the clientele so outreach and marketing cost could be limited.



Broaden the eligible program activities for all state training programs to include basic skills and literacy education for new and incumbent workers.

My goal is to help refugees with these challenges, but employers want qualified applicants. (Eh Gay, World Relief)

The report illustrates how job seeking for a refugee or immigrant is a complicated process, like entering a maze without a map. The process requires clients to either have adequate levels of English and education or to seek help from their community agencies in order to be able to complete application forms and follow procedures. The process is fraught by bureaucratic rules and regulations that determine a client's eligibility. At times it is a Kafkaesque nightmare.

'Have you been down to Century Plaza (the site of Hennepin County services)? It's a mad house!' (Employment manager, name withheld, nonprofit agency)

The level of intensive help clients need is not provided by the mainstream workforce centers. During the summer of 2009, the Minneapolis Workforce Centers only had two Hmong staff, one working on MFIP and one working on unemployment benefits. They already had full caseloads. As a result of our advocacy the Minneapolis Workforce Center hired a Lao-speaking liaison. There is however still a need for more employment advocates helping job seekers. The community agencies are the place where the unemployed Asians first turn to find bilingual professional job coaches to help them through the hoops and over the barriers that bureaucracies and employers place in their way. New refugees and laid off workers need a lot of intensive help from bilingual professionals to assist them navigate their way through the paperwork.

3. Support & Strengthen Collaborative Models for Community Nonprofits and Mainstream Agencies

What do they need to be successful? We have speakers who can come out. Our staff could come out once a week, talk about eligibility, and help access benefits.

Currently the MAAs have little or no funding to act as employment advocates and cultural brokers with the workforce centers, libraries and technical colleges. But despite that the Asian agencies have been working to building collaboration among themselves and with the mainstream

agencies. The staff is seeking to improve on communication and collaboration with the director and staff of Minnesota's workforce centers: There are currently ongoing efforts to strengthen the collaborative of Asian agencies, staff and clients with the Minneapolis workforce center staff and the collaborative is also helping clients access services through the Hennepin County Office of Multicultural services. The agencies in the community provide more accessible and culturally trusted sites where OMS staff can help them access benefits: educate clients on what is out there, help access WIC, and Assured Access.

4. System Change: Track and measure the outcomes of all training expenditures and report on how workers benefit from these investments

Minnesota's diverse populations create challenges for the existing structure of services. Sadly, the governmental agencies have not demonstrated that they are capable of getting out of their silos and doing things in new ways. There are barriers that exclude Asian workers from opportunities for retraining. Government agencies are slow to adapt to the changing diversity in Minnesota's workforce. There needs to be new twists on old perspectives. What is needed is policy that can get minority as well as mainstream workers ready for new jobs as the economy recovers. The procedures in too many of the mainstream state agencies and organizations receiving funds are set in an unyielding pattern of one shoe fits all. There is little attempt made to design programs to meet the needs of special populations such as refugees with language needs. We would exempt the Minnesota Department of Health from much of this criticism. The community agencies offer the needed antidote for government agencies that are slow to develop new ways of doing things.

The solution for our clients is that they have got to get the six to twelve month training opportunities needed to show that they have previous employment experience. They lack employment experience and need help getting the twelve month work experiences that employers are now requiring. (Robinson Cook, LSS)

With proper tracking and reporting, programs and institutions would be more amenable to changes or reform when things are working. Or to put bigger investment in the programs that are working.

***Helping Unemployed Asian American & Pacific Islanders in Hennepin County:
An intensive employment and retraining program***

Purpose: To provide intensive one on one employment and retraining opportunities to Asian and Southeast Asians seeking reemployment and retraining.

Background: In 2007, the Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans, a state agency, received a planning grant from Hennepin County to coordinate an Asian American and Pacific Islanders leadership council to do planning around addressing community needs. The Asian American and Pacific Islander Hennepin County Leadership Council (HCLC) was created with over 30 members comprising of individuals and organizations. In 2007 the top three areas of concern were education, health, and economic vitality. Over the last twelve months, rising unemployment and layoffs have devastated Asian communities (Asian Indian, Bhutanese, and Karen) and Southeast Asian communities (Lao, Hmong, Cambodian and Vietnamese). Workers with low English skills have faced enormous challenges and barriers accessing reemployment. Helping them overcome these challenges and find new jobs quickly emerged as a top priority in the leading Asian and SE Asian agencies (the mutual assistance associations). Intensive one on one help and mentoring with all aspects of the job seeking process is needed. The MAA's are best positioned to help connect job seekers to employers. The HCLC has held groups, community forums, and undertaken research to determine the best way to address these issues. The recommendation is for an intensive employment and retraining program.

Activities: The activities being proposed are focused on delivering holistic and culturally competent and appropriate manner to persons seeking employment.

- **Intensive Case Management** – provide funding for MAAs to create innovative and responsive services for the Asian American job seeker that includes employment counseling, job search, hiring process and retention. This program will allow for the creation of employment “advocates” who will zealously work with and promote their clients for jobs, job development, and trainings.
- **Employer Development & Coordination** – allocate resources to help MAAs build relationships and networks with employers so they can create an inventory of open jobs
- **Job Development & Training** –Funding will be provided for MAAs to partner with others to create language and job specific trainings for the community as well as to provide resources and training opportunities for case managers on how to understand and develop workers for jobs of the future

Community Partners

Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association (HAMAA): assessment, job counseling & training, case management, employer development

Lao Assistance Center (LAC) – assessment, job counseling & training, case management, employer development

CAPUSA – assessment, job counseling & training, case management, employer development

Korean Social Services – assessment & screening, referral services and resources

SEWA: Asian Indian Family Wellness – assessment & screening, referral services and resources

Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans – policy development, facilitation & advocacy

Intensive Reemployment & Retraining Program

<i>Context</i>	<i>Inputs</i>	<i>Outputs</i>		<i>Outcomes</i>		
<p><i>Asian & SE Asian unemployed & laid off workers</i></p> <p><i>Asian & SE Asian Non Profit Partner Agencies serving unemployed and laid off workers</i></p> <p><i>Need for Intensive One to one Bilingual Employment and Retraining services across the life span</i></p> <p><i>Older laid off workers Age 40 55 plus</i></p> <p><i>Age 24-40</i></p> <p><i>Age 18-24</i></p> <p><i>Need to Address the current Lack of good career education and career ladder planning for the Asian communities</i></p>	<p><i>Staff time</i></p> <p><i>From Asian & SE Asian Professional case workers</i></p> <p><i>Facilities</i></p> <p><i>Office space in partner agencies</i></p> <p><i>Technology</i></p>	<p>What we do</p> <p>Assessment Screening & Intensive One on one job counseling, mentoring & case management</p> <p>Development of work plans with clients</p> <p>Teach job seeking soft skills</p> <p>Help job seekers fill out job applications</p> <p>Develop relations with employers</p> <p>Help clients access other resources</p> <p>e.g. libraries, workforce centers</p>	<p>Who we reach</p> <p>1st & 2nd generation Lao, Hmong, Cambodian, Vietnamese Karen Bhutanese</p> <p>Immigrants & refugees</p> <p>Other minorities using these partner agencies</p> <p>e.g. Oromo, Somali</p> <p>Long term residents and New Arrivals</p>	<p>Short Term</p> <p>200 – 450 Lao clients assisted with job seeking skills</p> <p>200 Hmong clients assisted with job seeking skills</p> <p>Sources of jobs identified</p> <p>Green jobs explored</p> <p>Identify current sources of livable wage jobs</p>	<p>Medium Term</p> <p>Relationships established with employers</p> <p>Increase client ELL skills</p> <p>Increase number of work force English Program curriculum</p> <p>Ensure Asians job readiness for new green industry skills</p> <p>Ensure Asians job ready for economic recovery</p>	<p>Long Term</p> <p>On going links with employers</p> <p>Increase in number of Asians employed in Construction and trades</p> <p>Increase number of Asian members in Trade Unions</p> <p>Increase number of Asians workers in transportation</p> <p>Advocacy to help clients transition from temporary to permanent positions</p>
	<p align="center"><i>Indicators</i></p> <p>Job placement</p> <p>Job retention</p> <p>Numbers placed in retraining programs (e.g. welding ,CNA & green jobs)</p>	<p align="center"><i>Data Source</i></p> <p>Collaborative partners</p> <p>case managers</p> <p>evaluations</p>	<p align="center"><i>Methods</i></p> <p>Data collected from partner organizations client data base</p> <p>Data collected in Evaluation of programs</p>			

Appendix: Methodology used in the report

Help bring the story to the county, so they know what the nonprofits do. Tell the story of these agencies. Get them recognition. (Employment counselors, Center for Asian Pacific Islanders)

The methodology stems from the goals of the report which are to show the needs in the Asian American community and the barriers that the unemployed are facing. The report is based on qualitative face to face interviews with over twenty staff in non profits serving Asians. The interviews were designed around open ended questions such as ‘tell me about a typical day in your work as an employment counselor’ and ‘what changes have happened under this economic downturn.’ We also asked interviewees for their solutions to the problems. The main goal was to get the perspectives of the staff in the agencies closest to the incoming refugees and laid off workers. When we asked interviewees what they would want the report to answer they were very consistent in their answers. They wanted a report that would provide a picture of the current scene, a comprehensive look at what refugees are facing, and a description of the state of the current job market. They said, ‘put a face on it. Those contributing to the report include staff working in agencies that help in refugee resettlement such as World Relief and Lutheran Social Service (known as Volags or Voluntary organizations) and executive directors and staff of the nonprofit agencies assisting later in the process (known as the Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Associations).

This report is the final one of three reports in a series prepared for the Hennepin County Asian Leadership Council. Each one is based on qualitative fieldwork. Data was gathered through interviews, focus groups and forums. Of the three topics, education, health, and economic vitality, the research on unemployment proved to be the most emotionally **“I need a job. Please help find me a job.”** Despite our efforts to maintain a detached and dispassionate role, and to carefully explain our study, and not make unrealistic promises, we were entering a crisis situation. The needs were great. We sensed there was an expectation from the clients that this research would quickly help them solve their problems. For the clients it was short term needs over long term planning. They wanted to quickly find jobs and get back to work. On visits to the Lao Assistance Center in North Minneapolis, an agency serving the Lao described in section two, the lobby and space around the work cubicles was crowded with Lao laid off men and women, most in their late fifties. Sunny Chanthanouvong, the Lao director, would often say, “These men need work.” The descriptive data from employment counselors was gathered through open-ended questions such as ‘tell me about your work during a typical day.’

Last week the focus was on client testing. We were working with a temp agency hiring for medical assembly positions. The testing was ‘on line.’ We train the clients on how to do the test on line here on the computers in our agency. Then I take them to the company for the drug test. Two were hired. I am hoping for eight more. (Sunny Yang, HAMAA)

A list of persons interviewed and/or contributed to the data gathering included for this report

Gus Avenido	State of Minnesota Refugee Services Coordinator
Joseph Burniece	Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association
Sunny Chanthanouvong	Executive Director, Lao Assistance Center (LAC)
Robinson Cook	Employment Services, Lutheran Social Services
Bruce Corrie	Dean, Department of Economics, Concordia University, St. Paul
Linda DeHaven	City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development (CPED)
Eh Gay	Employment Counselor, World Relief of Minnesota
Wilhelmina Holder	Executive Director, WISE
Julie Honebrinck	Employment Services, CAPI
Xia Vue Jennings	Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association, HAMAA
Parmananda Khatiwoda	Refugee Cash Assistance Program, World Relief of Minnesota
Louis King	Director, Summit Academy OIC
Jillian Middlebrooks	Manager, Hennepin County Multicultural Services Center
Hajua Houa Moua	Employment Specialist, HAMAA
Ernie Neven	Hennepin County
Dao Ngo	Employment Services Supervisor, CAPI
Yoon Ju Park	Executive Director, Korean Services Center (KSC)
David Peebles	Twin City Rise
Kinnary Pimpadubsee	Caseworker, Lao Assistance Center (LAC)
Saengmany Ratsabout	Northwest Hennepin Human Services Council (NWHHSC)
Kalpana Rizei	AIFW-SEWA, Bhutanese Resettlement Coordinator
Deborah Schlick	Executive Director, Affirmative Options Coalition
Mangala Sharma	Employment Services, Goodwill Easter Seals (now at CAPI)
Pany Siharath	Caseworker, Lao Assistance Center (LAC)
Phuoc Tran	Vietnamese Community member
Julie Ha Truong	Capacity Building Coordinator, Northwest Hennepin Human Services Council (NWHHSC)
Doua Vang	Director of Family and Employment Programs, Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association (HAMAA)
Joe Vang	Employment Counselor, CAPI-North
Kouthong Vixavong	Hennepin County
Phouninh Vixavong	Executive Director, Lao Women's Association
Cindy Widman	Employment Training, Goodwill Easter Seals
Bryan Thao Worra	Lao Assistance Center
Xa Xang	Executive Director, Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association (HAMAA)
Sunny Yang	Employment Counselor, Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association (HAMAA)
Yi Li You	Executive Director, Chinese Social Services Center