



# **STRONGER TOGETHER**

CAAL

OCTOBER 2020

## **A survey of Asian Minnesotan nonprofits during COVID-19**

PREPARED BY

**COALITION OF ASIAN AMERICAN LEADERS**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the COVID-19 pandemic reached Minnesota, CAAL brought together Asian Minnesotan nonprofits to coordinate information, needs and support for vulnerable communities navigating health risks, economic instability and anti-Asian racism. To better understand the challenges facing this ecosystem of organizations, CAAL conducted a survey throughout the summer. The data reflects the responses of 18 organizations—about 40% of the Asian Minnesotan organizations in our database—and so should not be taken as a comprehensive analysis, but rather, a window into some of the challenges this community is facing and what opportunities exist to support them through these overlapping health and economic crises.

Key findings include:

- A majority of Asian Minnesotan nonprofits are very small, with almost two thirds having annual budgets under \$499,999 and almost a third with budgets under \$49,999. They rely on volunteers or part-time staff to manage the work they conduct, some depending on outside consultants, illustrating the challenges of scaling up human capacity and infrastructure to meet the growing needs of communities.
- A diverse ecosystem of organizations is needed to reach diverse communities. The organizations that make up the Asian nonprofit ecosystem reach and serve a diverse set of community members and needs, with many focused on specific populations like youth, artists, survivors of gender-based violence or ethnic- or religious-specific communities. With each organization serving a specific role in reaching community members under the Asian Minnesotan umbrella, it is critical to continue cultivating relationships and opportunities for collaboration and investing in the full range of organizations working to reach Asian Minnesotan communities.

- A majority of Asian Minnesotan groups focus on direct service provision. Two out of three Asian organizations indicate that they provide direct services, showcasing both the historical roots of many Asian organizations and the community needs that created them. This means that these organizations have a direct ear to the ground on what emerging needs communities are facing, and that they are best suited to respond. In fact, many reported expanding their services during this time, such as offering services for mental health and well-being, holding virtual community connection spaces, providing immigration services and sharing accurate and fact-based information about the pandemic. Yet their focus on direct service also means many Asian organizations lack access to decision-makers, with less than a third feeling they had access. As a result, coordinating across organizations to ensure small and service-focused organizations have a more direct line to decision-makers continues to be a crucial need.
- Asian Minnesotan organizations play a critical role in language access, which is needed to reach communities. In-language materials and outreach is imperative to reach communities. Collectively, the 18 organizations surveyed offer services in 29 different Asian languages, playing an important role in ensuring that COVID-19 materials and messages can reach communities with limited English. Yet we continue to hear that Asian Minnesotans who do not speak English receive information a week or more behind their English-speaking peers.

Now six months into a global pandemic that has disrupted every facet of our lives and work, Asian Minnesotan nonprofits continue fill the gaps for communities who are most vulnerable. Understanding and responding to the particular challenges they face is critical to ensuring these organizations can continue to exist through and past the effects of the pandemic. The results of this survey showcase three takeaways on what is needed:

- Support for emerging service needs, including language access, advocacy and mental health. Community-led organizations are best positioned to identify emerging and growing needs in their communities. They are adding services to meet needs, and are working to reach communities in culturally appropriate and linguistically accessible ways. Many are currently doing so without financial support or with limited funding. By supporting these organizations that are already trusted community intermediaries, systems can better reach and support communities made most vulnerable at this time.

- Support for a diverse range of organizations and groups. The 40+ Asian MN organizations that exist serve a range of diverse communities and are not interchangeable. Funders and systems looking to reach the Asian community should understand that no one organization or handful of organizations serves as a stand-in for others, and support their coordination and collaboration. With many organizations running on small budgets with limited capacity, organizations like CAAL can serve as an intermediary to access and pass through pools of funding, play a central coordinating role, and facilitate processes that foster shared agendas that individual groups would not have capacity to lead or access on their own.
- Increase general support to build up organizational capacity and infrastructure. While a majority of Asian Minnesotan organizations provide direct service, many have done so without building up their organization's capacities and infrastructures, and that means that regardless of the crisis, many Asian Minnesotan nonprofits are not able to respond to opportunities that would have brought resources to help them meet the needs. Additionally, many organizations face limits in accessing decision-makers, and having organizational capacity would enable working across organizations to leverage collective strengths. While providing services to communities is the most visible need right now, the infrastructure of those organizations and the coordination between them is also a necessary piece of their continued survival.

Particularly because invisibility and exclusion continue to be big factors that impact this community, we hope this glimpse into the challenges and opportunities of Asian Minnesotan nonprofits provides insight and guidance into how external systems of government and philanthropy can better partner and support Asian Minnesotan communities at this time.

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## BACKGROUND

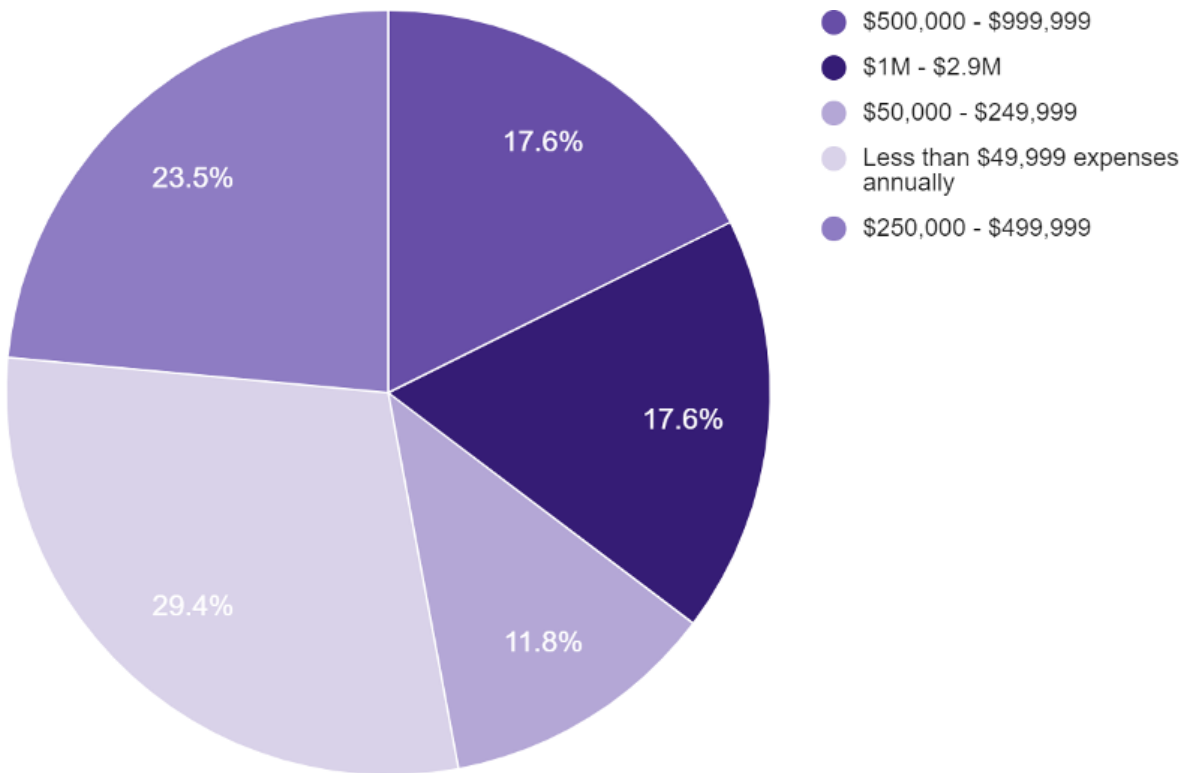
In March 2020, Minnesota declared a state of emergency, and schools, businesses, and public facilities that were non-essential shut down to prevent the spread of COVID-19. During this global pandemic, CAAL brought Asian Minnesotan nonprofits together to coordinate information sharing, identify communities who were being made most vulnerable at this time, and explored mutual support. We heard from the community that the pandemic and quarantine had already heavily impacted Asian Minnesotans in a variety of ways, and believed it would take collective effort to ensure support for communities. It's also a core belief at CAAL that we are stronger together; thus, we were invested in ensuring that our rich diverse set of organizations could continue to exist to support the community through this crisis and beyond. We, therefore, facilitated space for Asian Minnesotan organizations to virtually gather to exchange information and share resources, intending to strengthen our support of the ecosystem of Asian Minnesotan organizations.

In addition to the regular meetings, we surveyed Asian Minnesotan organizations over two months to capture the challenges facing them and the constituents served to better understand how we can support each other during this time. In Minnesota, there are records of over 45+ Asian organizations; however, only 18 organizations were able to complete the survey through the written or phone survey. Therefore, this data represents about 40% of the Asian MN organizations in our database.

As a note on participation, many may not have had the capacity to complete the survey as they were dealing with not only the pandemic, but responding to the uprising after the killing of George Floyd. Therefore, this report should not be taken as a comprehensive analysis of all of the Asian Minnesotan organizations. Rather, we hope it enhances field and community understanding of Asian Minnesotan nonprofits and activates more inclusive practices to continue to reach and support these important institutions serving our most vulnerable community members. Out of this work, CAAL built its Stronger Together Fund that provides funding to support Asian Minnesotan organizations who are serving community members with the greatest challenges, as well as to support organizations to transition to this new work environment.



## ORGANIZATIONAL BUDGET SIZE



About two-thirds (64.7%) of Asian MN organizations have an annual expense budget of under \$499,999. Almost 30% of Asian MN organizations spend less than \$49,999 annually. Only 17.6% have an annual expense of over 1 million. A vast majority of the organizations are small and emerging, and this greatly impacted the way they were able to access and respond to COVID-related funding, even as their communities' needs significantly increased.



## COMMUNITIES SERVED

Asian MN organizations surveyed indicate that they serve a very diverse group of community members and needs. There is a range of ethnic identity, age, income level, immigration status, sector, and gender. Some organizations work on specific issues, such as gender-based violence, health and arts. Thus, the populations they served tended to very specific, such as artists and survivors/victims.

### ETHNIC/RACIAL IDENTITIES

- Asian American/Asian Minnesotan
- Burmese
- Cambodian
- East African
- Filipino
- Hmong
- Karen
- Karenni
- Lao
- Pacific Islander
- Southeast Asian
- South Asian (7 Asian countries Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) and
  - includes members of the Guyanese, Caribbean, Bangladesh, Tibetan and Trinidad diaspora community.
  - The most common languages, other than English, spoken are Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Telugu Nepalis, and Urdu.
  - The majority (75%) of South Asians in the United States are foreign born. Community members practice a wide range of religions including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism.
- Thai
- Vietnamese

### RELIGION (SPECIFIC)

- Muslim

### IMMIGRATION STATUS

- Immigrants
- Refugees
- Undocumented

### AGE GROUPS

- All Ages
- Youth (Teens & Children)
- Working Age / Professional Adults
- Senior / Elders

### INCOME

- Low Income
- Underrepresented
- Working Class
- Middle Class

### GENDER

- Women
- LGBTQ+ Folks
- Men

## OTHER SPECIFIC GROUPS SERVED

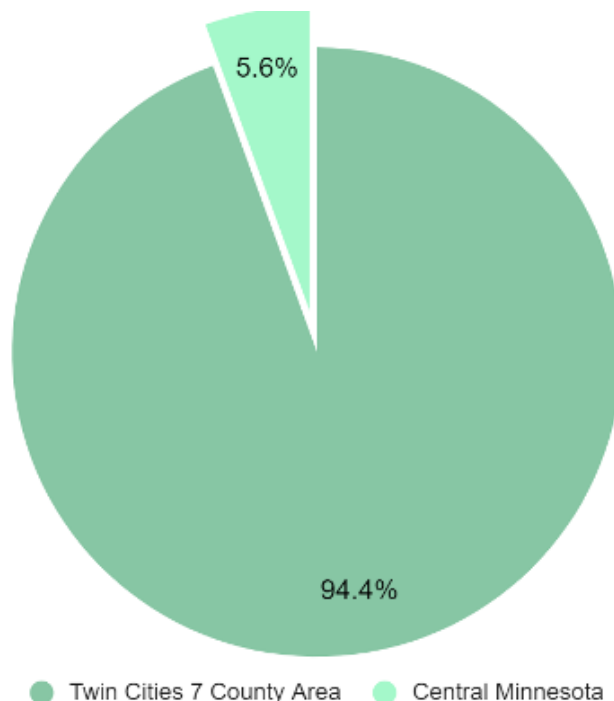
- Artists
- Southeast Asian community impacted by violence (gender-based violence, domestic violence) including victim/survivors, Hmong men's perpetrator program, LGBTQ+ folks, child witness/victim of family violence
- Individuals and families impacted by deportation and immigration laws



## WHERE SERVICES ARE PROVIDED

Almost 95% of the organizations serve communities in the Twin Cities 7-county area, which comprises Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington counties. This is not a surprise as a majority of Asians in the state currently live in this region.

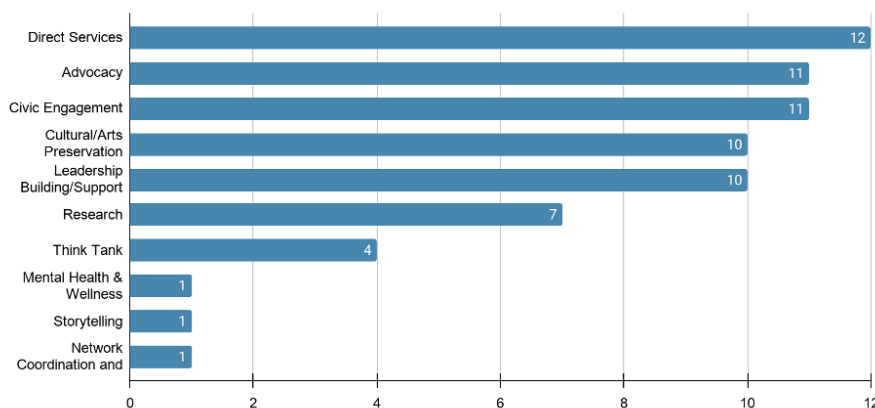
Only 5% of the organizations provide services outside of the Twin Cities 7-county area. There are growing Asian communities in Nobles, Olmsted and Stearns counties just to name a few, so we should all be mindful about these emerging communities and how they are being served during this time. Of particular concern are concentrations of communities who may need language access or technology support.





## SERVICES PROVIDED

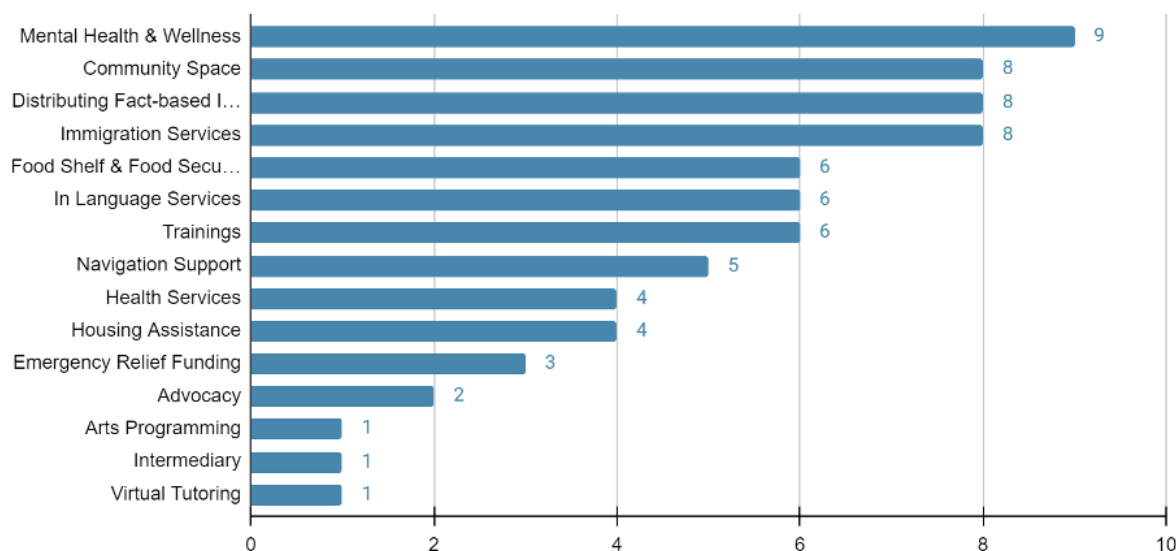
Two out of three Asian MN organizations indicate that they provide direct services, making it the most common service provided to community members. 60% provide advocacy and civic engagement, and over 50% offer leadership building and culture and arts activities. Only 5% provide storytelling, mental health and wellness, and network and coordination services for their communities.



## COVID-19 RELATED SERVICES

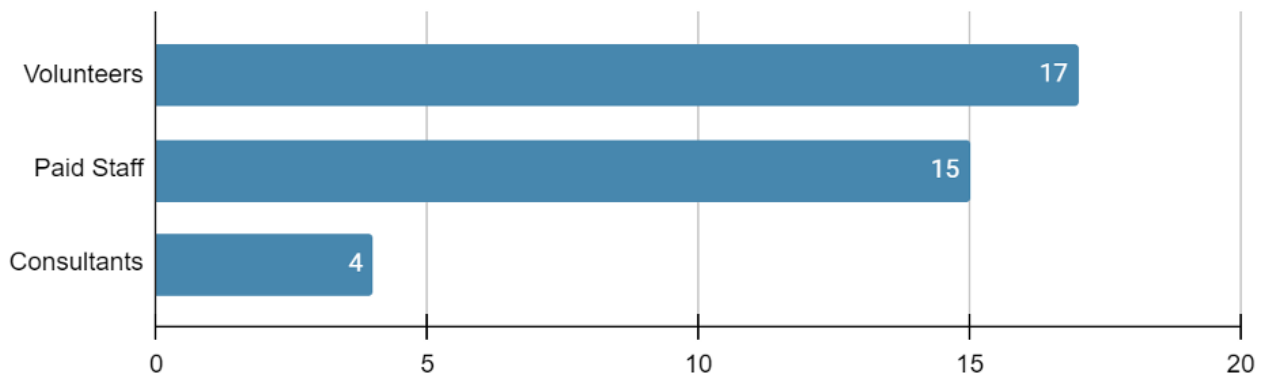
In response to COVID-19, Asian MN organizations indicate they are expanding their services to offer additional resources to support their communities. We found that:

- More than 50% began providing mental health and well-being services, making it the most commonly added service.
- Over 40% are hosting virtual community spaces to facilitate community connections.
- Over 40% are providing immigration services.
- Over 40% are helping their communities get accurate and fact-based information about the pandemic.

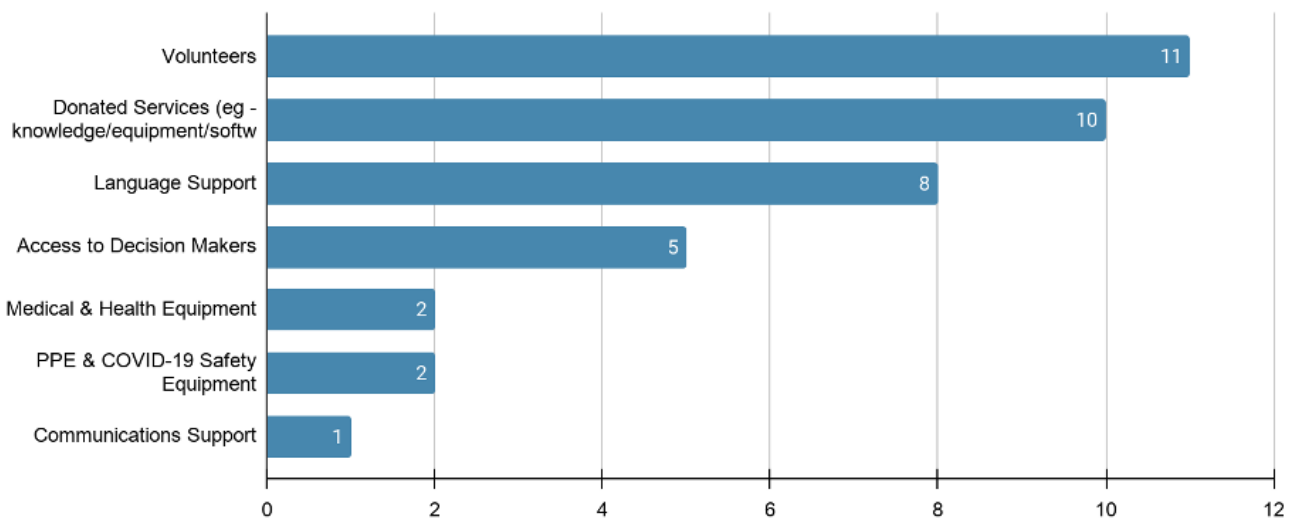


## HUMAN CAPACITY TO DELIVER SERVICES

A majority of groups rely on volunteers to carry out programming, and 22% depend on outside consultants. Though 15 out of the 18 indicate they have staff, we know few have full-time staff. Because these organizations are serving as critical through-lines for their communities, their limited human capacity is concerning to us as the needs of communities continue to grow. For a population that nears 300,000 and includes over 40+ ethnic groups, continuing to support program and organizational capacity needs of these organizations will be critical and essential to their survival.



## BESIDES FUNDING, WHAT OTHER RESOURCES ARE NEEDED?



Over 50% indicate that they are looking for more volunteers and donated services to deliver COVID-19 related services. This again enforces what we anticipated – that the needs are growing, but the capacity of the ecosystem of Asian organizations may be insufficient to meet the needs.

Nearly half of the groups are also seeking language support. After English and Spanish, Asian languages are the most widely spoken languages in Minnesota. For example, in Ramsey County, almost 30,000 people speak Hmong, the most spoken language besides English in the county. Other widely spoken Asian languages include Vietnamese, Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese), Lao, Hindi, Korean, Khmer, Tagalog, and Karen. At a time when having accurate and fact-based information is critical to saving lives, we must do more to provide language access, and these organizations must be supported to do this work.



## **LANGUAGES PROVIDED BY ORGANIZATIONS FOR COVID-RELATED SERVICES**

The 18 organizations offer services in 29 different Asian languages. They play an important role in ensuring that COVID-19 related materials and services are accurate and accessible to community members who are limited in English. These organizations have been able to quickly translate and disperse COVID-19 related materials into various ethnic communities, even without financial support. This has saved government resources and helped ensure communities have the knowledge and can access help, but it is not nearly enough. We continue to hear that Asian Minnesotans who are limited in English are receiving information a week or more behind their English-speaking peers.

- |              |                |
|--------------|----------------|
| 1. Arabic    | 16. Kutchi     |
| 2. Bangla    | 17. Lao        |
| 3. Bengali   | 18. Mandarin   |
| 4. Burmese   | 19. Marathi    |
| 5. Cantonese | 20. Pashto     |
| 6. Dari      | 21. Punjabi    |
| 7. English   | 22. Rohingya   |
| 8. Gujarati  | 23. Sgaw Karen |
| 9. Hindi     | 24. Tagalog    |
| 10. Hmong    | 25. Tamil      |
| 11. Kannada  | 26. Telugu     |
| 12. Karen    | 27. Thai       |
| 13. Karenni  | 28. Urdu       |
| 14. Khmer    | 29. Vietnamese |
| 15. Korean   |                |

Having access to decision-makers is an important factor at this time. Unfortunately, less than a third of the groups felt that they had access to decision-makers. Anecdotally, community members share that government is not doing nearly enough to reach or support Asian Minnesotans, so more needs to be done by government and elected officials to listen to and include this community.



## **WHAT ORGANIZATIONS ARE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT DURING COVID-19**

### 1. Financial Stability of Organization

- Sustainability and survival of organization
- Capacity
- Resources

### 2. Community Members

- Seniors
- Victims/Survivors
- Youth
- Undocumented Immigrants
- Mental Health & Depression

### 3. Impact of COVID-19 on Asian MN Communities

- Economy
- Housing
- Education
- Employment

### 4. Community Building & Engagement

- Hosting community events virtually that will engage the community in taking social action
- The effect of social distancing on current members and how we connect
- Ability to get back to our mission, which is focused on producing theater
- Difficulty with in-person programming due to social distancing

### 5. Services & Meeting Needs

- Access to services and uncertainty in providing in-person services

During this pandemic, many of the Asian MN organizations are worried about their organization's long-term existence. Many have shared stories of funding opportunities being scarce, redirected, or significantly decreased. Though this has had a tremendous impact on staff and organizational capacity, organizations' workloads have exponentially increased during this time. Therefore, staff and volunteers are working more hours with little new investments.

Many organizations are worried about the safety of specific communities within the Asian Minnesotan population, including elders, young people, undocumented immigrants, and survivors/victims. Organizations have also raised concerns about mental health and well-being of the community, and many organizations have increased their advocacy efforts.

Lastly, though CAAL has increased our intermediary role to support some of these groups during the transition to this new virtual work reality. Many Asian Minnesotan organizations indicate that they still need to provide direct service or face-to-face services because constituents are often not technology fluent, and organizations are not well equipped to support their staff and volunteers to work from home. In addition to ensuring more resources are dispersed to support these groups, we must also build up the infrastructure of these groups to operate safely and virtually.



## **CONCLUSION**

We recognize that these findings only provide a glimpse into the community, and it's important to note that Asian Minnesotans are a nuanced population. At 273,000 strong, this picture of the ecosystem of Asian nonprofits demonstrates that there are not nearly enough community-led, community-centered organizations. The organizations that exist do their best to respond to their communities' needs, but because invisibility and exclusion continue to be big factors that impact this community, we strongly encourage government and philanthropy to do more.

In particular, the findings of this survey highlight the need for ongoing support through this pandemic in the following areas:

- Support for emerging service needs, including language access. Direct service organizations are best positioned to identify emerging and growing needs in communities, and are adding services to meet those needs. For example, they are providing mental health and COVID-19 information, and working to reach communities in language. Many are currently doing so without financial support or with limited funding.
- Support for a diverse range of organizations and groups. The 40+ Asian MN organizations that exist serve a range of diverse communities and are not interchangeable. As Asian MN organizations we work to support and supplement each other, believing we each have a unique role to play in reaching community. External partners can understand and support this by recognizing the diversity within community organizations and not driving competition between them. Moreover, with many organizations running on small budgets with limited capacity, organizations like CAAL can serve as an intermediary to access and pass through pools of funding that other groups would not have capacity or budget size to apply for.
- Support for infrastructure and coordination, as well as direct service. While a majority of Asian MN organizations provide service, they face limits in accessing decision-makers, showcasing the power of working across organizations to leverage our collective strengths. While providing services to communities is the most visible need right now, the infrastructure of those organizations and the coordination between them is also a necessary piece of their continued survival.

## APPENDIX

The organizations that completed this survey include:

1. Asian Media Access, Inc.
2. Coalition of Asian American Leaders
3. Cultural Society of Filipino Americans
4. Hawj United of MN
5. Hmong 18 Council of MN
6. Hmong American Farmers Association
7. Karen Organization of Minnesota
8. Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota
9. National Association of Asian American Professionals MN
10. National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum - St Cloud Chapter
11. Release MN8
12. Reviving the Islamic Sisterhood for Empowerment
13. SEWA-AIFW (Asian Indian Family Wellness)
14. Siengkane Lao MN
15. Theater Mu
16. Transforming Generations
17. United Cambodian Association of Minnesota
18. Vietnamese Social Services of Minnesota



CAAL

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