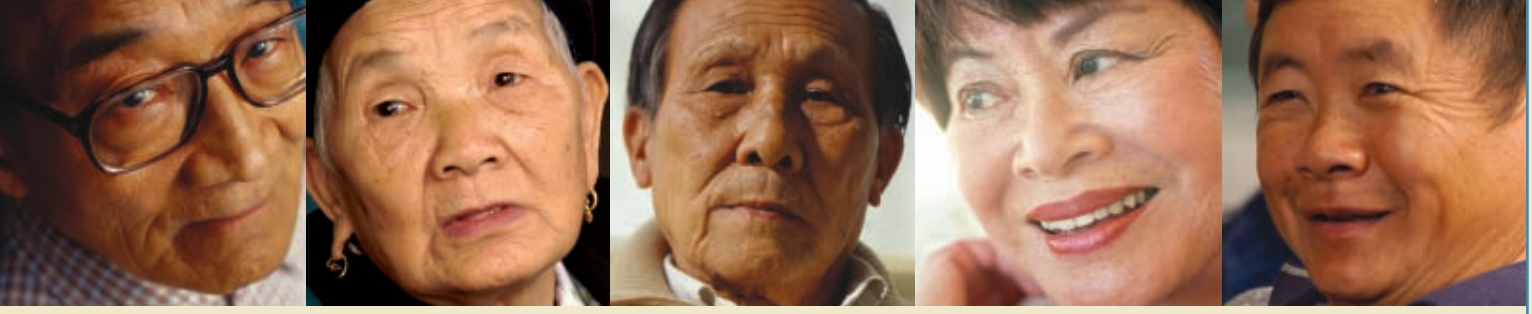

Southeast Asian American Elders in California

Demographics and Service Priorities Revealed by the 2000 Census and a Survey of Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs) and Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs)

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)

Southeast Asian American Elders in California:
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and Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs)

Authors:
Max Niedzwiecki
KaYing Yang
Saroeun Earm

1628 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009-3099
Tel: 202.667.4690
Fax: 202.667.6449
E-mail: **searac@searac.org**
Website: **www.searac.org**

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Executive Summary

Through an analysis of 2000 Census results and the findings from a survey of Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs) and Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) in California, this report provides a baseline for further study as well as guidance for policymakers and grant makers who work with Southeast Asian American elders.

Californians who trace their heritage to the Southeast Asian countries of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam number at least 709,287 and account for approximately 39 percent of all Southeast Asian Americans in the U.S.[1] Elders aged 55 and older in these Californian communities number at least 80,407 in all, and at least 37,300 of them are 65 or older. Nearly all of these elders arrived in the U.S. as adults after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975-1976, more than two-thirds of them as refugees fleeing for their survival.[2]

Because of continuing difficulties with English-language acquisition, learning job skills marketable in the American economy, low levels of formal education, long-term effects of trauma and other factors, a high proportion of Southeast Asian American elders continue to demonstrate urgent service needs. Often they turn to community-specific organizations such as MAAs and FBOs, such as temples and churches, in order to access services.

Even within the broader "Southeast Asian American" category, populations are diverse in terms of culture, language and social characteristics. People from Vietnam include ethnic Vietnamese, Khmer Kampuchea Krom and Montagnards (Highlanders). From Laos come Hmong (or Mong), Lao (Lowland Lao or Lao Loum), Iu Mien, Khmu, Thaidam and others. From Cambodia come Khmer (or Cambodian) and Cham. Full- and part-blooded ethnic Chinese also come from all three countries. People from all three countries share several characteristics. For example, they all have relatively short histories in the United States, and they all have endured terrible hardship and dislocation since at least the 1970s. In addition, a review of their characteristics shows that the "model minority stereotype" does not characterize them.

The lives of Southeast Asian American elders are especially complex. Many are caught between cultures and simultaneously occupy positions of extreme importance and alienation in their families and communities. They are recognized by younger generations as important because they bear and transmit ancestral cultures and languages nearly obliterated by brutal dictators, they suffered so they could create better lives for their children, and simply because they are "elders" culturally defined as worthy of respect. On the other hand, some are tacitly recognized and treated as burdensome by younger people because they are incapable of successfully navigating mainstream American culture, and require time and resources from younger family members who are mostly compelled to work outside of the home either for pay or for education.

1 Total cases of people reporting membership in Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, or Vietnamese ethnic groups (alone or in any combination) to the 2000 Census: 1,806,833. Undercounts in some communities were large.

2 For statistics on Southeast Asian immigration and refugee flight to the United States, as well as other topics, visit http://www.searac.org/resourcectr.html.

Major findings of this report include the following:

Populations: Populations of Southeast Asian Americans from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam are sizeable throughout California, and populations of Vietnamese are particularly large. On a percentage basis, Vietnamese elder populations demonstrate less pervasive needs than do elder populations from Cambodia or Laos. However, Vietnamese American elder populations are large, and large numbers of elders in that community experience pressing needs.

Income: Many Southeast Asian Americans continue to struggle financially. The 2000 Census found that Cambodians, Hmong and Laotians are the only ethnically defined populations in the state to have per capita incomes below $10,000. Southeast Asian American elders in California are slightly less likely than younger community members to be impoverished.

Social Security Income: Compared with members of other groups, Southeast Asian Americans are significantly less likely to receive Social Security Income.

Housing: Over 90 percent of the members of all Southeast Asian American groups in California aged 65 and over live in "family households" rather than institutions such as nursing homes. While this is admirable in many respects, it also raises questions about the availability of appropriate institutional care for elderly community members whose families are not able to care for them.

Disability: Non-institutionalized Southeast Asian Californian elders from all three countries are significantly more likely than Californian elders considered as a whole, or than Asian Californian elders considered as a whole, to be disabled.

English-Language Abilities: Many elderly members of all Southeast Asian communities in California continue to require translation and interpretation services when they interact with mainstream agencies since over three-quarters of them speak English "not well" or "not at all."

MAA and FBO Service Capacity: Southeast Asian American MAAs and FBOs that participated in the survey most commonly have five or fewer full-time staff members, five or fewer part-time staff-members, and five or fewer volunteers.

MAA and FBO Service Coverage and Funding: Southeast Asian American MAAs and FBOs provide a comprehensive array of services to elders, but most of the services provided by surveyed organizations are not specifically supported by funders. Services offered by surveyed organizations to elders include[3]:

1. Interpretation/translation;
2. Citizenship;
3. Advocacy;
4. Health education;
5. Housing;
6. Crisis intervention;
7. Arts/cultural preservation;
8. Health services;
9. Domestic conflicts;
10. English-language training;

3 The following lists all begin with the most common response and end with the least common response.

11. Voter registration; and
12. Welfare benefits.

MAA and FBO Service Priorities: MAAs and FBOs that completed the survey reported that they would most like to continue programs focused on:

1. Interpretation/translation;
2. Meals-on-Wheels/food distribution;
3. Advocacy;
4. Citizenship;
5. Health education;
6. Health services; and
7. Mental health.

In addition, they reported they would most like to begin programs in:

1. Transportation;
2. Housing;
3. Recreation/traveling;
4. Meals-on-wheels/food distribution;
5. Health education; and
6. Outreach/counseling/support groups.

This report has been prepared for the conference entitled "Aging Among Southeast Asian Americans in California: Assessing Strengths and Challenges, Strategizing for the Future," held in Sacramento, California, on Oct. 17, 2003, by the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) with support from The California Endowment. The report provides useful background information for the conference, and the authors hope it will be followed by publications that look more deeply into the issues introduced here, as well as by further study. In addition, the authors hope grant makers, policymakers, and Southeast Asian American community leaders and service providers will use this report to improve social service provision to Southeast Asian American elders in California.

I. Introduction and Methods

Elders in California and other states who are from the Southeast Asian countries of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam often find themselves in difficult circumstances. Most of them arrived in the United States as refugees after the Vietnam War, beginning in 1975, and practically all of them were adults when they came to this country. Few understood English or had job skills marketable in the American economy. Most arrived with practically no capital, and many have relied on a combination of support from younger family members, as well as government, for their basic needs. Many have had a relatively short period of formal employment in the U.S., and therefore have limited access to retirement benefits. Many suffer from long-term disabilities resulting from their traumatic experiences in Southeast Asia. And because of their age many have found it difficult to adjust to life in their new country.

The lives of Southeast Asian American elders are especially complex. Many are caught between cultures and simultaneously occupy positions of extreme importance and alienation in their families and communities. They are recognized by younger generations as important because they bear and transmit ancestral cultures and languages nearly obliterated by brutal dictators, they suffered so they could create better lives for their children, and simply because they are "elders" culturally defined as worthy of respect. On the other hand, some are tacitly recognized and treated as burdensome by younger people because they are incapable of successfully navigating mainstream American culture, and require time and resources from younger family members who are mostly compelled to work outside of the home either for pay or for education.

Challenges involved in creating better lives for Southeast Asian American elders are at least as complex as the difficulties that keep them "caught between cultures." Nevertheless, many mainstream service providers have reached out to these populations, as have most Southeast Asian American-managed social service and faith-based organizations.

This report begins to examine the characteristics, needs and service coverage of Southeast Asian American elders as revealed by the 2000 Census and a survey of Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs) and Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) in California.[4] Although it does not provide either a comprehensive view of the challenges faced by Southeast Asian American elders or a thorough analysis of the data presented, it should provide a baseline for further study, as well as insight for grant makers and policymakers and materials for program planning and fundraising by Southeast Asian American MAAs and FBOs.

Because Southeast Asian Americans are often thought by people outside of their communities to resemble other Asian American groups in terms of their social characteristics, this report includes comparison statistics for the overall California population, and for the entire Asian Californian population. These comparisons help to highlight diversity between Asian American groups, as well as the particularly poor fit between "model minority" stereotypes and the actual characteristics of Southeast Asian American groups.

4 See Section VIII for information about MAAs and FBOs.

Data sources for this report include results from the 2000 Census's Summary File 4 (SF 4) and a survey designed and conducted with California MAAs and FBOs by the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) between June and August of 2003. The survey and accompanying terms of reference were mailed and faxed to all 70 Southeast Asian Americans MAAs and FBOs in California for which SEARAC had contact information. Surveys were completed by 46 organizations throughout the state. Four surveys were completed over the telephone, and the remainder in writing.

Max Niedzwiecki led the project, with guidance from SEARAC Executive Director KaYing Yang. Saroeun Earm, SEARAC's intern during the summer of 2003, conducted the survey and carried out initial analysis of the results. Dr. Brian Ray of the Migration Policy Institute provided valuable guidance and contributions throughout, as did Eloise Needleman, Naomi Steinberg, and Sophy Pich of SEARAC. The report was funded by The California Endowment for use in a conference titled, "Aging Among Southeast Asian Americans in California: Assessing Strengths and Challenges, Strategizing for the Future" staged in Sacramento, California, on October 17, 2003. All of this activity was carried out as part of SEARAC's Values, Empowerment, Resources, and Betterment (VERB) project, which has major funding from the Compassion Capital Fund (within the Office of Community Services and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) — the first national or federally-funded project to specifically focus on strengthening the capacities of refugee or immigrant FBOs, as well as community-based organizations such as MAAs, to provide social services to their communities.

II. Geographical Distribution of Southeast Asian Californians

More Southeast Asian Americans live in California than in any other state. More than half of them (483,676) are Vietnamese. Cambodians are the next most numerous at 83,244, followed by Hmong at 74,185 and Laotians at 65,995.[5] For detailed population figures see Table 1, below.[6]

Many community leaders believe the 2000 Census undercounted their populations, sometimes drastically, and have good evidence for their arguments. For example, Him Chhim, Executive Director of the Cambodian Association of America in Long Beach, California, cites school enrollment data that places the number of Cambodian American students at nearly the same level as the total Cambodian population of Long Beach.[7] Nevertheless, Census results remain the most comprehensive source of data on these populations, and reveal characteristics that are supported by the experience of community leaders.

Most Vietnamese are members of the Vietnamese ethnic group, while others are Khmer Kampuchea Krom who trace their ancestry and traditions to Khmer (Cambodian) people living in regions of southern Vietnam that were once part of Cambodia.[8] In addition, all of the Southeast Asian ethnic/nationality groups in California and throughout the United States include significant populations of people with full or partial Chinese ancestry.[9] According to Census data, 12 California counties — or 21 percent of all counties in the State — include Vietnamese American populations over 3,000:

1. Orange: 141,756
2. Santa Clara: 102,841
3. Los Angeles: 89,078
4. San Diego: 37,290
5. Alameda: 26,035
6. Sacramento: 18,063
7. San Francisco: 12,856
8. San Bernardino: 10,908
9. San Joaquin: 6,700
10. Contra Costa: 6,446
11. Ventura: 3,599
12. San Mateo: 3,254

Most Cambodian Californians are members of the Khmer (or Cambodian) ethnic group. Others are Cham, or members of a Moslem minority. The following eight counties (or 14 percent of California's counties overall) include Cambodian American populations over 3,000:

5 Throughout this report, Census figures for Southeast Asian Americans "alone or in any combination" are used. In this system, people who claimed membership in more than one group were counted more than once.

6 For information on the history and cultural diversity of Southeast Asian Americans, most of whom arrived in the United States as refugees or are the children of refugees, see the following: (1) Niedzwiecki, Max, KaYing Yang, Narin Sihavong, Naomi Steinberg, Rorng Sorn, Silas Cha, Eloise Needleman, TC Duong, Valerie O'Connor Sutter, and Sengthiene Bosavanh. Forthcoming. *Southeast Asian American Self-Portrait.* Washington, DC: Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC). (2) Robinson, Courtland W. 1998. *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response.* New York, NY: Zed Books Ltd.

7 Him Chhim, Executive Director, Cambodian Association of America, Long Beach, CA. Personal communication, August 2003.

8 Montagnards, members of diverse ethnic minority groups from Vietnam's Central Highlands, mostly live in North Carolina.

9 Up to 25 percent of total arrivals from Vietnam and 15 percent of arrivals from Cambodia were ethnic Chinese (Rumbaut 2000: 182–183). (Source: Rumbaut, Rubén G. 2000. Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian Americans. In *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader.* Edited by Min Zhou and James V. Gatewood. New York, NY: New York University Press. Pp. 175–206.)

1. Los Angeles: 35,573
2. San Joaquin: 10,527
3. Santa Clara: 5,443
4. San Diego: 5,373
5. Orange: 5,271
6. Alameda: 4,869
7. Fresno: 4,660
8. Stanislaus: 4,036

Hmong — or Mong[10] — in California are from the highlands of Laos, and six counties (10 percent of the State's counties) include populations over 3,000:

1. Fresno: 25,636
2. Sacramento: 18,845
3. Merced: 7,180
4. San Joaquin: 6,476
5. Butte: 3,047
6. Yuba: 3,012

Laotians include members of several distinct ethnic/linguistic groups from Laos, excluding the Hmong.[11] California has sizeable populations of Lao (Lowland Lao or Lao Loum), Iu Mien (Mien), Khmu and Thaidam. According to the Census, the following eight counties (or 14 percent of California's counties) have Laotian populations exceeding 3,000:

1. Sacramento: 10,865
2. San Diego: 8,256
3. Fresno: 7,180
4. Contra Costa: 4,733
5. Los Angeles: 4,105
6. San Joaquin: 3,714
7. Alameda: 3,615
8. Tulare: 3,429

Eleven California counties — or 19 percent of the counties in the State — have Southeast Asian American populations exceeding 10,000. These include the following:

1. Orange: 151,673
2. Los Angeles: 129,253
3. Santa Clara: 110,615
4. San Diego: 52,373
5. Sacramento: 49,106
6. Fresno: 39,879
7. Alameda: 34,519
8. San Joaquin: 27,417
9. San Francisco: 14,394
10. San Bernardino: 13,928
11. Contra Costa: 11,179

10 This report follows the Census Bureau in using the term "Hmong," instead of "Mong." However, as Paoze Thao (1999: 3–4) reports, community members disagree about appropriate terminology for the group or groups (Source: Thao, Paoze. 1999. *Mong Education at the Crossroads*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.).

11 Since the Census Bureau disaggregates data for Hmong, this publication treats them separately rather than aggregating them with other "Laotian" groups.

TABLE 1:
SOUTHEAST ASIAN AMERICAN POPULATIONS OF CALIFORNIA COUNTIES
2000 CENSUS: PCT 1, SUMMARY FILE 4

County	Cambodian	Hmong	Laotian	Vietnamese	Total
Alameda	4,869	0	3,615	26,035	34,519
Butte	0	3,047	670	0	3,717
Contra Costa	0	0	4,733	6,446	11,179
Fresno	4,660	25,636	7,180	2,403	39,879
Glenn	0	561	0	0	561
Kern	593	0	0	931	1,524
Los Angeles	35,573	497	4,105	89,078	129,253
Marin	0	0	0	1,374	1,374
Merced	0	7,180	1,996	0	9,176
Monterey	0	0	0	2,150	2,150
Orange	5,271	1,117	3,529	141,756	151,673
Placer	0	0	0	450	450
Riverside	821	561	1,819	6,937	10,138
Sacramento	1,333	18,845	10,865	18,063	49,106
San Bernardino	2,353	0	667	10,908	13,928
San Diego	5,373	1,454	8,256	37,290	52,373
San Francisco	926	0	612	12,856	14,394
San Joaquin	10,527	6,476	3,714	6,700	27,417
San Mateo	0	0	0	3,254	3,254
Santa Barbara	0	401	0	1,421	1,822
Santa Clara	5,443	0	2,331	102,841	110,615
Santa Cruz	0	0	0	514	514
Shasta	0	0	1,882	0	1,882
Solano	0	426	818	1,762	3,006
Sonoma	1,028	0	1,395	1,584	4,007
Stanislaus	4,036	976	1,816	1,670	8,498
Tulare	0	1,214	3,429	0	4,643
Ventura	438	0	0	3,599	4,037
Yolo	0	665	535	1,584	2,784
Yuba	0	3,012	0	0	3,012
Total in Table	83,244	72,068	63,967	481,606	700,885
Actual Total	85,431	74,185	65,995	483,676	709,287

III. Median Ages and Elder Populations

When compared to the overall American and Asian American populations, Southeast Asian populations in the state tend to have a low median age. In part, this is because so many elders and adults died as a result of warfare and persecution in Southeast Asia, and in part it is due to continuing traditions of large family size among some ethnic groups.

As Table 2 shows, Hmong American communities in the state are characterized by the lowest median age, 16.4. In fact, their median age is less than half the median age for Californians overall and for Asian Californians overall. Hmong have the lowest median age of any ethnically defined group in California.[12] Cambodian and Laotian populations also have median ages significantly below those of Californians overall, or Asian Californians overall. Of the Southeast Asian groups, Vietnamese most closely resemble Californians considered overall and other Asian Californians considered overall in median age.

The 2000 Census recorded 80,407 Southeast Asian Americans in California aged 55 and over, and 37,300 aged 65 and over. Most of the people in both age groups are women. Approximately 77 percent of Southeast Asian Californians in both age groups are Vietnamese. Several of the tables below show that Vietnamese American elders are less likely than other Southeast Asian American elders to experience great needs. However, because there are so many more elderly Vietnamese than elders in the other Southeast Asian groups, a higher number of Vietnamese Americans elders are experiencing pressing needs.

TABLE 2:
MEDIAN AGE BY SEX (CALIFORNIA)
CENSUS 2000: PCT 4, SUMMARY FILE 4

Population	Female	Male	Total
Total	34.7	32.3	33.5
Asian	34.3	31.4	32.9
Cambodian	24.3	19.7	21.5
Hmong	16.4	15.7	16.0
Laotian	23.9	21.9	22.8
Vietnamese	31.5	30.7	31.1

TABLE 3:
PEOPLE AGED 55 AND OVER AND AGED 65 AND OVER
IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN AMERICAN AND OTHER POPULATIONS (CALIFORNIA)
CENSUS 2000: PCT 142, SUMMARY FILE 4

Population	Females		Males		Females & Males	
	55+	65+	55+	65+	55+	65+
Cambodian	4,467	2,184	3,269	1,444	7,736	3,628
Hmong	2,544	1,261	1,803	807	4,347	2,068
Laotian	3,239	1,652	2,877	1,291	6,116	2,943
Vietnamese	32,064	15,180	30,144	13,481	62,208	28,661
Total SEA	42,314	20,277	38,093	17,023	80,407	37,300

12 This determination does not include records for populations of mixed race, but without a primary ethnic designation: e.g., "White: Black or African American."

IV. Income

Southeast Asian populations in California continue to demonstrate marked economic hardship. The 2000 Census found that in 1999, the only ethnically defined populations in California to have per capita incomes below $10,000 were Hmong, Cambodian and Laotian. On a per capita basis, income for Hmong Americans was $5,286, or approximately one-quarter that of Californians overall or Asian Californians overall. Per capita income for Cambodians and Laotians was less than half that of Californians overall, and that of Asians overall. Vietnamese Californians came closest to approaching the per capita incomes of Californians and Asians overall.

Discrepancies between Southeast Asian American groups can be explained, in part, by the large family sizes among some Southeast Asian groups (especially Hmong), and by characteristics brought to the United States by different populations. Compared to people from the other two countries, Vietnamese are most likely to come from urban backgrounds, to have had formal education, and to have arrived in the U.S. speaking European languages such as French and English. Hmong, Cambodians and Laotians are more likely to come from rural farming backgrounds, to have had little experience with formal education,[13] and to have had no experience with European languages when they arrived in this country. In addition, a high proportion of some populations from those countries arrived suffering from trauma-related illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and clinical depression that prevented them from adjusting quickly to life in the United States.[14]

Statistics recording the percentage of community members living below the poverty level in 1999 are also striking. As Table 5 shows, more than half of all Hmong Californians live in poverty, as do 40 percent of Cambodians, 32.2 percent of Laotians and 17.9 percent of Vietnamese. These figures contrast with records for Californians overall (14.1 percent) and Asians overall (12.7 percent).

Between one-fifth and one-third of Cambodian, Hmong and Laotian elders live in poverty, compared with 11.7 percent of Vietnamese, 11.0 percent of Asians overall and 8.1 percent of Californians overall. In all of the communities, people aged 65 and over are less likely to live in poverty than are younger people.

As Table 6 shows, high poverty levels in all of the communities were matched by relatively high percentages of people in all of the communities receiving public assistance income.

As Table 7 shows, disproportionately low percentages of households in all Southeast Asian groups receive Social Security Income. The authors of this report recommend further study and outreach on the question of why so few Southeast Asian American households in California seem to access Social Security Income.

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13 SEARAC found through an analysis of national 2000 Census data that the following percentages of people aged 25 and over have had "no formal schooling": Americans overall: 1.4 percent (1.3 percent women, 1.4 percent men); Asian Americans overall: 4.2 percent (5.0 percent women, 3.3 percent men); Cambodian Americans: 26.2 percent (31.6 percent women, 19.8 percent men); Hmong Americans: 45.0 percent (56.4 percent women, 33.4 percent men); Laotian Americans: 22.7 percent (27.6 percent women, 18.1 percent men); Vietnamese Americans: 8.0 percent (9.7 percent women, 6.2 percent men).

14 For more information on these topics see: Niedzwiecki, Max, KaYing Yang, Narin Sihavong, Naomi Steinberg, Rorng Sorn, Silas Cha, Eloise Needleman, TC Duong, Valerie O'Connor Sutter, and Sengthiene Bosavanh. Forthcoming, *Southeast Asian American Self-Portrait.* Washington, DC: Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC).

TABLE 4:
PER CAPITA INCOME IN 1999 (CALIFORNIA)
CENSUS 2000: PCT 130, SUMMARY FILE 4

Population	Per Capita Income
Total	$22,711
Asian	$21,195
Cambodian	$8,493
Hmong	$5,286
Laotian	$8,679
Vietnamese	$15,752

TABLE 5:
PEOPLE WHOSE INCOME WAS BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL IN 1999 (CALIFORNIA)
CENSUS 2000: PCT 142, SUMMARY FILE 4

Population	Females Aged All Ages	Males Aged 65 and Over	All People Aged 65 and Over	65 and Over
Total	14.1%	9.4%	6.3%	8.1%
Asian	12.7%	11.7%	10.0%	11.0%
Cambodian	40.0%	26.0%	23.0%	24.8%
Hmong	53.2%	34.7%	31.5%	33.5%
Laotian	32.2%	19.7%	23.9%	21.6%
Vietnamese	17.9%	12.7%	10.5%	11.7%

TABLE 6:
PERCENTAGES OF POPULATIONS LIVING IN POVERTY AND OVERALL WHO RECEIVED PUBLIC ASSISTANCE INCOME IN 1999 (CALIFORNIA)
CENSUS 2000: PCT 146, SUMMARY FILE 4

	Percentages of People in Poverty Receiving Public Assistance Income			Percentages of Overall Group Receiving Public Assistance Income		
Populations	Supplemental Security Income Only	Other Public Assistance Income Only	Both	Supplemental Security Income Only	Other Public Assistance Income Only	Both
Total	3.4%	6.0%	0.3%	2.0%	1.8%	0.1%
Asian	3.9%	6.1%	0.3%	2.7%	1.9%	0.2%
Cambodian	6.1%	13.6%	1.3%	6.7%	8.6%	1.5%
Hmong	4.4%	11.7%	0.8%	5.2%	10.1%	0.8%
Laotian	7.8%	12.7%	0.9%	7.1%	7.5%	0.8%
Vietnamese	4.7%	10.6%	0.2%	4.9%	4.6%	0.2%

TABLE 7:
PERCENTAGES OF HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING SOCIAL SECURITY INCOME (CALIFORNIA)
CENSUS 2000: PCT 98, SUMMARY FILE 4

Population	Households Receiving Social Security Income
Total	22.1%
Asian	13.7%
Cambodian	8.0%
Hmong	9.0%
Laotian	9.7%
Vietnamese	7.4%

V. Housing

Over 90 percent of Southeast Asian Californians aged 65 and over in all ethnic groups live in "family households" rather than institutional settings. This contrasts with the total California average of 66.6 percent, and with the overall Asian average of 82.6 percent.

The low percentage of Southeast Asian Californian elders in institutional housing demonstrates the strong respect many community members have for elders. Nevertheless, it raises questions about the availability of appropriate institutional housing for Southeast Asian elders whose families are unable to include them in their households because of disabilities (which are particularly common among elders in these communities) or other factors. It also raises questions about whether Southeast Asian American families that care for disabled elders have access to appropriate financial support from public sources.

TABLE 8:
SOUTHEAST ASIAN AND OTHER AMERICANS AGED 65 AND OVER LIVING IN "FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS" (CALIFORNIA)
CENSUS 2000: PCT 14, SUMMARY FILE 4

Population	Percent Living in "Family Households"
Total	66.6%
Asian	82.6%
Cambodian	93.4%
Hmong	95.7%
Laotian	96.9%
Vietnamese	90.2%

VI. Disability

Although comparatively few Southeast Asian elders in California live outside of family households, a high percentage of them are disabled. Among the Southeast Asian American groups, elderly Hmong women are most likely to be disabled (72.6 percent), and Vietnamese American elderly men are the least likely (53.6 percent). Elders in all of California's Southeast Asian American populations are significantly more likely to be disabled than are Californians overall (42.2 percent) or Asian Californians overall (43 percent).

Again, these findings raise questions about the availability of institutional care for Southeast Asian elders whose families are not able to care for them appropriately, and about support for families that include disabled elders in their households. These findings also raise questions about the availability of appropriate health care and social services for disabled elders in these communities, a large majority of whom lack fluency in English.

TABLE 9:
PERCENTAGE OF CIVILIANS AGED 65 AND OVER WHO ARE DISABLED, BUT NOT INSTITUTIONALIZED (CALIFORNIA)
CENSUS 2000: PCT 69, SUMMARY FILE 4

Population	Female	Male	Total
Total	43.7%	40.2%	42.2%
Asian	43.9%	41.7%	43.0%
Cambodian	70.5%	64.3%	68.0%
Hmong	72.6%	69.1%	71.2%
Laotian	68.0%	57.5%	63.4%
Vietnamese	61.0%	53.6%	57.5%

VII. English-Language Abilities

One of the prominent findings of the Southeast Asian MAA and FBO survey is that elders in all of the communities urgently need interpretation and translation services in order to access services. This finding is supported by the 2000 Census, which found that between three-quarters and four-fifths of elders in all of the communities report speaking English "not well" or "not at all." By comparison, 41.5 percent of Asian Californians overall, and 11 percent of Californians overall, speak English "not well" or "not at all."

TABLE 10:
PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE AGED 65 AND OVER WHO SPEAK ENGLISH "NOT WELL" OR "NOT AT ALL" (CALIFORNIA)
CENSUS 2000: PCT 38, SUMMARY FILE 4

Population	Percentage
Total	11.0%
Asian	41.5%
Cambodian	82.0%
Hmong	83.3%
Laotian	79.0%
Vietnamese	75.0%

VIII. Southeast Asian American MAAs and FBOs Surveyed for This Report

During the summer of 2003, SEARAC conducted surveys with 46 MAAs and FBOs. For the purposes of this report, MAAs are defined as nonprofit, 501(c)(3) community-based organizations managed primarily by and for members of particular Southeast Asian groups. FBOs are defined as organizations with an explicit religious focus, such as temples and churches. Only FBOs primarily managed by and for Southeast Asian Californians, and providing social as well as religious services, were included in the survey. Contact information for all MAAs and FBOs that completed the survey is included as Appendix A.

Of the 46 organizations surveyed, 31 are in Northern California, four in Central California, and 11 in Southern California. The ethnic group most commonly targeted for service is Vietnamese (15 organizations), followed by Hmong (12 organizations), Cambodian and Laotian (11 organizations each), Iu Mien (nine organizations), and Khmu (five organizations).

As Table 12 shows, most of the organizations surveyed have 10 or fewer full-time staff, part-time staff and volunteers (each). Most commonly, organizations surveyed have five or fewer personnel in each of these categories. Only nine of the organizations have over 15 full-time staff members, only one of them has more than 15 part-time staff members, and only 10 have more than 15 volunteers. In other words, most of the organizations have relatively limited staff and volunteer capacity.

TABLE 11:
SOUTHEAST ASIAN AMERICAN ETHNIC GROUPS TARGETED FOR SERVICES BY CALIFORNIA MAAs AND FBOs, BY REGION
SEARAC CALIFORNIA MAA/FBO ELDERS SURVEY, 2003

Populations Targeted for Service	Northern California (31 orgs)	Central California (4 orgs)	Southern California (11 orgs)	Entire State (46 orgs)
Vietnamese	10	0	5	15
Hmong	8	1	3	12
Cambodians	5	0	6	11
Laotians	9	0	2	11
Iu Mien	8	0	0	8
Southeast Asians	4	1	2	7
Khmu	4	1	0	5
Refugees	5	0	0	5
Asians	2	1	0	3
Thaidam	1	0	0	1
Others	9	0	3	11

TABLE 12:
NUMBER OF MAAs AND FBOs SURVEYED
WITH SPECIFIED NUMBERS OF STAFF MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS
SEARAC CALIFORNIA MAA/FBO ELDERS SURVEY, 2003

Number of Staff Members or Volunteers	Full-Time Staff Members	Part-Time Staff Members	Volunteers
0	8	7	7
1–5	17	32	22
6–10	8	6	6
11–15	4	0	1
16–20	1	1	4
21–25	2	0	2
26–30	2	0	1
31–35	2	0	0
36–40	1	0	1
41+	1	0	2

IX. Services Offered to Elders and Financial Support for Those Services

MAAs and FBOs surveyed report that they provide services[15] in a number of critical areas to elders, but do not receive funding specifically for most of these services. This demonstrates the commitment of MAAs and FBOs to serve elders in their communities, but also reveals sources of organizational strain that funders could help remedy.

Interpretation/Translation: Reflecting Census 2000 findings concerning the English-language abilities of Southeast Asian Americans in California, 85 percent of organizations report providing "interpretation/translation" services to elders, while only 44 percent report receiving funding specifically for that purpose. Many interpretation and translation services for elders take place in medical settings and should be compensated. Title VI of the U.S. Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination by federally funded organizations on the basis of limited English proficiency. Although hospitals and other mainstream institutions in areas with high concentrations of Southeast Asian Americans are legally required to provide interpretation and translation services for their Southeast Asian clients, many of them continue to rely on "volunteer" translators and interpreters including the staff members of MAAs and FBOs, as well as family members. This is undesirable for several reasons, including the fact that few MAA and FBO staff members and volunteers are trained medical interpreters or translators, and when these personnel donate their time to hospitals and other federally funded agencies, they are compromising their own organizations' financial health.

Citizenship: The second most commonly reported type of service provided to Southeast Asian elders by survey respondents is "citizenship." Seventy percent of organizations surveyed report helping elders to become U.S. citizens, but only half of them report receiving funding specifically for this purpose.

Advocacy and Health Education: Services in "advocacy" and "health education" are each offered to and for elders by 67 percent of organizations in the survey. Although only 35 percent of organizations receive financial support specifically for advocacy, 57 percent of them receive financial support specifically for health education. This is the elders directed service most frequently reported to benefit from the direct support of funders.

Housing: "Housing"-related services are offered by 52 percent of surveyed organizations, but only 11 percent of organizations report receiving financial support for work in this field. This finding is particularly interesting in light of the very low percentage of Southeast Asian elders in California found by the 2000 Census to live outside of family settings.

Crisis Intervention: Forty-nine percent of organizations surveyed report offering "crisis intervention" services to elders, and 20 percent report receiving funding specifically for this purpose. Traditionally, Southeast Asian American ethnic organizations have offered strong services in this area, while funders tend to focus on helping people attain self-sufficiency and sometimes under appreciate the importance of crisis response capacity within MAAs and FBOs.

15 Terms of reference used in the survey are included in Appendix B of this report.

Arts/Cultural Preservation: "Arts/cultural preservation" services are provided to elders by 48 percent of organizations surveyed, but specifically funded at only 22 percent of organizations. Many Southeast Asian American community leaders consider that practicing traditional arts offers unparalleled opportunities for helping older and younger community members to appreciate one another and heal the cultural gaps that separate them.

Health Services: "Health services" for elders are reported by 46 percent of organizations surveyed, but financially supported at only 22 percent of organizations.

Domestic Conflicts: Forty-four percent of organizations report providing services focused on "domestic conflicts" to elders, but only 15 percent report being supported for this work.

English Language Training: "English language training" is directed towards elders at 43 percent of surveyed organizations, but only financially supported at 28 percent of organizations.

Voter Registration and Welfare Benefits: Forty-one percent of surveyed organizations report offering services to elders in "voter registration" and "welfare benefits," although only 15 percent report direct financial support for the first service category, and only 17 percent report financial support for helping elders with welfare benefits.

TABLE 13:
SERVICES OFFERED TO SOUTHEAST ASIAN ELDERS IN CALIFORNIA BY SURVEYED MAAs AND FBOs, AND FUNDING FOR THOSE SERVICES
SEARAC CALIFORNIA MAA/FBO ELDERS SURVEY, 2003

Types of Service	Percentage of Organizations Offering Service	Percentage of Organizations Funded Specifically to Offer the Service
Advocacy	67%	35%
Arts/Cultural Preservation	48%	22%
Citizenship	70%	35%
Computer Training	35%	22%
Crisis Intervention	49%	20%
Domestic Conflicts	44%	15%
Driver's Education	7%	2%
Environmental Education	28%	11%
English Language Training	43%	28%
Farming/Gardening	13%	2%
Meals-on-Wheels/Food Dist.	30%	13%
Funeral Expenses	17%	9%
Health Education	67%	57%
Health Services	46%	22%
Housing	52%	11%
Interpretation/Translation	85%	44%
Job Training	30%	24%
Mental Health	30%	17%
Mentorship/Tutoring	33%	17%
Microenterprise/IDAs	15%	13%
Voter Registration	41%	15%
Welfare Benefits	41%	17%
Others	20%	17%

X. Present and Future Service Priorities

Surveyed organizations were asked to list up to three program areas they think are most important to continue and up to three program areas they would most like to begin implementing in the future. These lists provide funders and policymakers with recommendations on program areas that require increased support.

The service categories most often listed as priorities for continuation were:

1. Interpretation/translation (46 percent);
2. Meals-on-Wheels/food distribution (37 percent);
3. Advocacy (28 percent);
4. Citizenship (26 percent);
5. Health education (22 percent);
6. Health services (22 percent); and
7. Mental health (20 percent).

Service categories rated as the highest priorities for program expansion included:[16]

1. Transportation (28 percent);
2. Housing (28 percent);
3. Recreation/traveling (22 percent);
3. Meals-on-wheels/food distribution (20 percent);
4. Health education (20 percent); and
5. Outreach/counseling/support groups (20 percent).

16 Notably, the only program areas included in this list to appear in pre-set survey categories were "health education" and "housing."

TABLE 14:
SERVICES THAT SURVEYED ORGANIZATIONS WOULD MOST LIKE TO CONTINUE OFFERING TO ELDERS, AND SERVICES THEY WOULD MOST LIKE TO BEGIN OFFERING TO ELDERS
SEARAC CALIFORNIA MAA/FBO ELDERS SURVEY, 2003

Types of Service	Percentage of Organizations Stating Program Areas Among Their Top Three Priorities for Continuation	Percentage of Organizations Stating Program Areas Among Their Top Three Priorities forImplementation in the Future
Advocacy	28%	4%
Arts/Cultural Preservation	7%	9%
Business Dev't./Financial Asst.	0%	2%
Citizenship	26%	11%
Computer Training	11%	2%
Crisis Intervention	7%	7%
Domestic Conflicts	4%	4%
Elder Clubs	2%	0%
Environmental Education	4%	7%
English Language Training	13%	7%
Farming/Gardening	2%	0%
Meals-on-Wheels/Food Dist.	37%	20%
Funeral Expenses	2%	11%
Health Education	22%	20%
Health Services	22%	15%
Home Visits	2%	9%
Housing	13%	28%
Interpretation/Translation	46%	15%
Job Training	2%	2%
Mental Health	20%	11%
Mentorship/Tutoring	4%	2%
Microenterprise/IDAs	4%	4%
Outreach/Counseling/Support Groups	2%	20%
Recreation/Traveling	0%	22%
Senior Day/Home Care	0%	9%
Voter Registration	9%	4%
Transportation	11%	28%
Welfare Benefits	7%	0%

XI. Conclusion

California, the state with the largest population of Americans with heritage in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, is the ideal location for a study focused on the demographics and service priorities of Southeast Asian American elders.

Through an analysis of 2000 Census results and the findings from a survey of Southeast Asian American MAAs and FBOs in California, this report provides a baseline for further study as well as guidance for policymakers and grant makers who work with Southeast Asian Americans, and material for Southeast Asian American-focused fundraising efforts. However, this study remains a preliminary attempt, and further efforts to understand and address the needs of Southeast Asian American elders that are urgently needed. The authors of this report hope that the Southeast Asian American elders conference in Sacramento, California, on October 17, 2003, will provide added information and momentum for such efforts.

Major findings of this report include the following:

Urgent Service and Economic Needs: Californian elders from all Southeast Asian American communities experience urgent service needs and high rates of poverty;

Limited Access to Mainstream Service Providers: Elders in these communities are limited in their interaction with mainstream service agencies by Limited English Proficiency and other factors; and

Under-Supported Ethnic-Specific Service Agencies: Ethnic-specific organizations such as MAAs and FBOs provide vital support for Southeast Asian American elders, although their services to elders are not usually supported with designated funds from grant makers, public or private.

Notes on Attribution

The authors of this report include Max Niedzwiecki, Ph.D., Saroeun Earm and KaYing Yang of the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), the Washington, DC-based, national organization for all Americans who trace their heritage to Cambodia, Laos and/or Vietnam. Dr. Niedzwiecki is SEARAC's Director of Programs and Resource Development. Ms. Earm was SEARAC's intern during the summer of 2003. Ms. Yang is the organization's Executive Director.

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VERB receives major funding from the Compassion Capital Fund (CCF) of the Office of Community Services (OCS) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). VERB is the first federally-funded project to specifically reach out to refugee or immigrant-specific Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) seeking to strengthen their social service capacity, as well as community-based organizations such as Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs). SEARAC's partners in VERB include:

- Cambodian American National Council (CANC)
- Hmong National Development, Inc. (HND)
- Laotian American National Alliance (LANA)
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
- Migration Policy Institute
- Mosaica: The Center for Nonprofit Development and Pluralism
- National Alliance of Vietnamese American Service Agencies (NAVASA)
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Migration and Refugee Services (MRS)

For more information on VERB, visit http://www.searac.org/verb.html or contact Naomi Steinberg, Project Manager for Administration, at naomi@searac.org, or Sophy Pich, Project Associate, at sophy@searac.org.

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- Naomi Steinberg (SEARAC): Report review
- Bo Thao (HND): Report review

Appendix A:

Contact Information for Southeast Asian American MAAs and FBOs in California that Participated in SEARAC's 2003 Elders Survey

Mr. John Thao
Executive Director
Asian Advancement Association, Inc.
7240 E. Southgate Drive, Suite F
Sacramento, CA 95823
Ph: 916/424-8784
Fax: 916/428-6832
jthao@yahoo.com

Mr. Rasmey Sam
President
Asian American Resource Center
1115 South E St.
San Bernardino, CA 92408
Ph: 909/383-0164
Fax: 909/383-7687
rasmey.sam@verizon.net

Mr. Him Chhim
Executive Director
Cambodian Association of America
2390 Pacific Ave.
Long Beach, CA 90806
Ph: 562/988-1863
Fax: 562/988-1475
caa@cambodian.com

Ms. Lucy Dul
Executive Director
Cambodian Community Development Inc.
1900 Fruitvale Ave. Suite 3B
Oakland, CA 94606
Ph: 510/535-7172
Fax: 510/532-5839
lucydul@yahoo.com

Mr. David Kea
Executive Director
Cambodian Community of Stockton
4212 N. Pershing Ave., Suite A-9
Stockton, CA 95207
Ph: 209/951-7087
Fax: 209/951-7091

Mr. Lai Van Luu
Executive Director
East Bay Vietnamese Association
1218 Miller Ave., #101
Oakland, CA 94601
Ph: 510/533-4224
Fax: 510/533-4219
ebva@aol.com

Mr. Lue Nhia Yang
Executive Director
Fresno Center for New Americans
4879 East Kings Canyon Road
Fresno, CA 93727
Ph: 559/225-8395
Fax: 559/255-1656
luenyang@fresnocenter.com

Mr. Chukou Thao
Executive Director
Hmong American Community
1044 Fulton Mall, #207
Fresno, CA 93721
Ph: 559/237-4919
Fax: 559/237-5905
hmongamer@att.net

Mr. Sor Lo
Executive Director
Hmong Cultural Center of Butte County
932 W. 8th Ave., D
Chico, CA 95926
Ph: 530/892-0831
Fax: 530/892-0831
LoSa@cws.state.ca.us

Ms. May Ying Ly
Executive Director
Hmong Women's Heritage Association
2251 Florin Road, Suite 104
Sacramento, CA 95822
Ph: 916/394-1405
Fax: 916/392-9326
myxly@hmongwomenheritage.org

Mr. Loc Van Vu
Executive Director
Immigrant Resettlement & Cultural Ctr.
422 Park Ave.
San Jose, CA 95110
Ph: 408/971-7857
Fax: 408/971-7882
ircc@irccsj.com

Ms. Tia Lam
Executive Director
Khmer Society of Fresno
4729 E. Kings Canyon Road, #114
Fresno, CA 93702
Ph: 559/252-0474
Fax: 559/252-3149
tialam@pacbell.net

Mr. Robert Boon Khoonsrivong
Executive Director
Khmu International Federation, Inc.
1044 N. Eldorado St.
Stockton, CA 95202
Ph: 209/463-3410
Fax: 209/463-7148
lkacenter@aol.com

Mr. Khamdaeng Vongsing
Director
Lao Community Development, Inc.
360 S. Bailey Avenue
Fresno, CA 93727
Ph: 209/228-0862

Mr. Chaosarn Chao
Executive Director
Lao Family Community, Inc.
1551 23rd Avenue, 2nd Floor
Oakland, CA 94606
Ph: 510/533-8850
Fax: 510/533-1516
chaosarn@laofamilynet.org

Mr. Pao Fang
Lao Family Community of Fresno, Inc.
4903 E. Kings Canyon Road, Suite 281
Fresno, CA 93727
Ph: 559/453-9775
Fax: 559/453-9705

Mr. Pheng Lo
Executive Director
Lao Family Community of Stockton, Inc.
807 N. San Joaquin St., Suite 211
Stockton, CA 95202
Ph: 209/466-0721
Fax: 209/466-6567
plo@laofamilyofstockton.org

Ms. Moung Saetern
Executive Director
Lao Iu Mien Culture Association, Inc.
485 105th Ave.
Oakland, CA 94603
Ph: 510/333-7229, 510/635-8358
moungkhoun@hotmail.com

Mr. Phiane Sayarad
Executive Director
Lao Senior Association, Inc.
220 25th St., #A
Richmond, CA 94804
Ph: 510/237-4064
Fax: 510/236-4572
lsi@aol.com

Ms. Grace Kong
Lead Organizer
Laotian Organizing Project, Asian Pacific Environmental Network
220 25th St.
Richmond, CA 94804
Ph: 510/236-4616 ext. 302
Fax: 510/236-4572
gkong@apen4ej.org

Mr. Houa Vang
Director
Merced Lao Family Community, Inc.
855 West 15th St.
Merced, CA 95340-5822
Ph: 209/384-7384
Fax: 209/384-1911
laofamily@merced.com

Ms. Mary F. Blatz
Director
Mt. Carmel Cambodian Center
1851 Cerritos Ave.
Long Beach, CA 90806
Ph: 562/591-8477
Fax: 562/591-1367
maryblatz@aol.com

Ms. Mary Anne Foo
Executive Director
Orange County Asian & Pacific Islander Community Alliance (OCAPICA)
12900 Garden Grove Blvd., Suite 214A
Garden Grove, CA 92843
Ph: 714/636-9095
Fax: 714/636-8828
mafoo@ocapica.org

Mr. Xia Kao Vang
Executive Director
Sacramento Lao Family Community, Inc.
5840 Franklin Blvd.
Sacramento, CA 95824
Ph: 916/424-0864
Fax: 916/424-1861
saclao@yahoo.com

Mr. Sen Nguyen
Executive Director
San Joaquin Indo-Chinese Assn.
4502 N. Pershing Avenue, #C
Stockton, CA 95207-6738
Ph: 209/472-7145
Fax: 209/472-1107
senguyen1@juno.com

Ms. Linda Gross
Missionary/Director
SEAM International Christian Training
P.O. Box 28714
Santa Ana, CA 92799
Ph: 714/991-4417
Fax: 714/991-4429
seam@juno.com

Sister Nicole Nguyen, M.S.W.
Executive Director
Seton Senior Center
211 - B Foothill Blvd.
Oakland, CA 94606
Ph: 510/663-4681
Fax: 510/663-4411
setonsenior@yahoo.com

Ms. Laura Leonelli
Interim Executive Director
Southeast Asian Assistance Center
5625 24th St.
Sacramento, CA 95822
Ph: 916/421-1036
Fax: 916/421-6731

Mr. Philip Tuong Duy Nguyen
Executive Director
Southeast Asian Community Center
875 O'Farrell St.
San Francisco, CA 94109
Ph: 415/885-2743
Fax: 415/885-3253
seaccphilip@juno.com

Ms. Megan Bui
Branch Director
Southeast Asian Community Center
1415 Koll Circle, Suite #108
San Jose, CA 95112
Ph: 408/436-8438
Fax: 408/436-8745
seaccmegan@juno.com

Ms. Rifka Hirsch
Executive Director
The Cambodian Family
1111 E. Wakeham Ave., Suite E
Santa Ana, CA 92705
Ph: 714/571-1966
Fax: 714/571-1974
cambodianfamily@sbcglobal.net

Ms. Sylvia Rosales-Fink
President & CEO
The New America Foundation
2974 Adeline St.
Berkeley, CA 94703
Ph: 510/540-7785
Fax: 510/540-7786
info@anewamerica.org

Ms. Margaret Iwanaga-Penrose
President
The Union of Pan Asian Communities
1031 25th St.
San Diego, CA 92102
Ph: 619/232-6454
Fax: 619/235-9002
mip@upacsd.com

Mr. Sereivuth Prak
Executive Director
United Cambodian Community, Inc.
2338 E. Anaheim St., Suite 200
Long Beach, CA 90804
Ph: 562/433-2490
Fax: 562/433-0564
sereivuthprak@yahoo.com

Mr. Steve Her
Executive Director
United Hmong Foundation
4568 East Pine Ave.
Fresno, CA 93703
Ph: 559/252-5566
Fax: 559/252-5064

Ms. Carol Dunstan
Executive Director
United Iu-Mien Community, Inc.
5625 Stockton Blvd.
Sacramento, CA 95824
Ph: 916/457-4496
Fax: 916/457-4499 (& phone)
caroldunstan@sbcglobal.net

Ms. Phaeng Toommaly-Anderson
Executive Director
United Laotian Community Development, Inc.
120 Broadway Ave., Suite 4
Richmond, CA 94804
Ph: 510/235-5005
Fax: 510/235-5065
phaengta@comcast.net

Mr. John K. Liu
General Secretary
Vietnam Chinese Mutual Aid and Friendship Association, Inc.
777 Stockton St., Suite 103
San Francisco, CA 94108
Ph: 415/398-3726
Fax: 415/398-4722

Mr. Nghia Diep
Acting Executive Director
Vietnamese American Chamber of Commerce, Orange Co.
9121 Bolsa Ave., Ste 203
Westminster, CA 92683
Ph: 714/892-6928
Fax: 714/892-6938
nghiadiep@hotmail.com

Mr. Thai Dang
Administrator
Vietnamese Community Center of San Francisco
766 Geary St.
San Francisco, CA 94109
Ph: 415/351-1038
Fax: 415/351-1039
info@vietccsf.org

Mr. Trung Duy Nguyen
President
Vietnamese Community Development, Inc.
2319 International Blvd.
Oakland, CA 94601
Ph: 510/383-8561
Fax: 510/534-7345
Trungvnn@aol.com

Ms. Mai Cong
President
Vietnamese Community of Orange County, Inc.
1618 West First St.
Santa Ana, CA 92703
Ph: 714/558-6009
Fax: 714/558-6120
vncoc@aol.com

Dr. Huu Ding Vo, M.D.
Vietnamese Community of Pomona Valley/Pomona Medical Clinic
1182 E. Holt
Pomona, CA 90720
Ph: 909/623-8502

Ms. Nina Hang
Coordinator
Vietnamese Family Community, Inc.
2551 Mission Bell Drive
San Pablo, CA 94806
Ph: 510/620-0458

Mr. Diem Ngo
Executive Director
Vietnamese Voluntary Foundation, Inc.
4410 N. Pershing Ave., Suite C4-5
Stockton, CA 95207
Ph: 209/475-9454
Fax: 209/475-9341

Ms. Glades Perreras
Executive Director
Vietnamese Youth Development Center
150 Eddy St.
San Francisco, CA 94102
Ph: 415/771-2600
Fax: 415/771-3917
info@vydc.org

Appendix B:

SEARAC MAA/FBO Elders Survey Terms of Reference

Advocacy: Speaking in favor of your community. Representing your community in relation to others (for example, elected officials and their staff, the fire department, the police department, etc.). Helping your community members represent themselves more effectively.

Arts/Cultural Preservation: Classes in dance, painting, drawing, crafts, music, language, religion, etc.

Citizenship: Providing classes to help people become U.S. citizens. Helping people to fill out forms to become U.S. citizens.

Computer Training: Teaching people how to work with computers.

Crisis Intervention: Providing help to community members at times of emergency — for example, fires, floods, robberies, death of a family member, etc.

Domestic Conflicts: Helping individuals and families who are facing serious family problems, including physical abuse, divorce or other kinds of problems.

Driver's Education: Teaching community members how to drive.

Environmental Education: Teaching community members about dangers in the environment (for example, pollution). Teaching community members about ways they can protect the environment (for example, recycling).

English Language Training: Teaching community members how to speak, read and write in English (for example, ESL).

Farming/Gardening: Helping community members become farmers or improve their farming. Help them start their own garden as an activity.

Meals-on-Wheels/Food Distribution: Distributing food to low-income community members.

Funeral Expenses: Helping community members to pay for funeral expenses.

Health Education: Teaching the community about diseases, nutrition and other health concerns.

Health Services: Providing medical services to community members. Examples include providing medical services through your own health care workers, providing office space for health care workers and escorting non-English-speaking patients to medical appointments.

Housing: Helping community members obtain good housing, learn about mortgages or communicate more effectively with landlords. Building and/or managing housing complexes.

Interpretation/Translation: Providing spoken interpretation or written translation services to your community.

Job Training/Professional Development: Helping community members learn skills that could help them get and succeed in jobs. Examples include classes in auto mechanics, training
in starting businesses, help with writing resumes, introducing employers and job-seekers, etc.

Mental Health: Providing mental health services or education to community members. Examples include providing mental health services through your own staff, providing office space for mental health clinicians, escorting non-English-speaking patients to psychiatric appointments and educating community members about mental illnesses.

Mentorship/Tutoring: Helping students with their homework outside of school. Helping older people to build relationships with younger people, so the younger people can learn better.

Microenterprise/IDA: Helping clients develop small businesses through "microenterprise" or "microcredit" programs. Helping clients develop bank accounts and learn about banking through "individual development accounts (IDAs)."

Voter Registration: Helping community members register to vote.

Welfare Benefits: Helping community members get access to public/government assistance (for example, Medicare, Medicaid, TANF, food stamps, social security, etc.).

Other: Other specific kinds of work an organization does, besides the ones described above.

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
1628 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009-3099
202.667.4690
www.searac.org

Funded by:

The California Endowment

21650 Oxnard Street, Suite 1200
Woodland Hills, CA 91367
800.449.4149
www.calendow.org

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