Final Report and Recommendations
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Project goal & process

The primary project goal was to “Improve the lives of the CAPI food shelf participants.” The DFG team referenced a three-step iterative design process model to approach this goal.
PROJECT GOAL & PROCESS // DESIGN PROCESS

**Identify**
Research the problem-space and goals for personas

**Evaluate**
Test prototypes with audience members

**Prototype**
Ideate and Model Potential Solutions
Service-model opportunities

Through a comprehensive mapping of the service-model space (e.g. getting food and participants to the space, and distributing food in the space), the DFG team identified three primary opportunity areas where the customer-experience could be improved or the service made more efficient.
A. Create a more active role for “participants”
Currently they are doing minimal “participating”

B. Improve the use of volunteers
Regardless of how frequently they visit

C. Automate inventory tracking
For an improved understanding of what, how much, and when things move through CAPI
Participant data

The DFG team interviewed a number of CAPI food shelf participants, as well as hosted “Community Listening Events” during which participants’ shared memorable personal stories related to food access. The following is a comprehensive overview of the stories that were shared and themes that emerged.
CAPITAL Food Shelf + AIGA Design for Good Pilot Project

PARTICIPANTS
Identifying Their Roles and Significance In CAPI’s Food Shelf Through Interaction and stories

Conducting Informal Investigations and Engaging Participants

CAPI participants are essential to the process and progress of CAPI’s future. They are also stakeholders who have an essential role to play within the food shelf as it continues into the future. The DFG (Design For Good) team was tasked with the essentials of improving the lives of CAPI participants. Since the staggering makeup of CAPI participants is 80% Hmong, that’s were a lot of the focus was directed. They became the focal point, and through exploration we read books like the ‘The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down’ by Anne Fadiman and ‘The Latehomecomer’ by Kao Kalia Yang to better understand the significance of this dynamic group of people. We also visited community-gathering spots like Hmong Village and Hmong Town (local markets known for their cultural ties to the community), and Golden Harvest (a Hmong-owned grocery store).

The DFG team needed to understand more about the participants, so we did one-on-one interviews and participant observation at the food shelf. Before engaging in community listening sessions (that’s what we had decided to call them instead of ‘focus groups’) the DFG team, led by Sieng, conducted informal anecdotal interviews because he was able to fluently communicate in Hmong, asking simple questions such as:

- How many people are in your family?
- How long have you been participating?
- Are you participating for anyone else other than yourself?
- When did you come to the United States of America?
- Where in Minneapolis are you from?
- How has your experience been?
- What changes would you like to see?
- Do you have any complaints or concerns?

These were just simple questions asked to the participants, but many of them shared a lot more about their personal lives. They shared many stories of past and present struggles, and also moments of joy when they receive assistance from CAPI. This small amount of food that participants receive can be beneficial in a life and death situation. We documented such a story as we conducted our interviews.
Invisible Pain

On Monday July 1st of 2013 at 11:06 in the afternoon before the festivities of the holiday weekend. An elderly woman in her early sixties walked into the food shelf. Like every other participant she normally waited quietly in line looking at the ceiling above or the ground below trying to blend in with the pale yellow walls. Sieng gently approached her to do an informal interview. He asked all the basic questions and learned that she has been living in Minneapolis since 1987, has been to other non-cultural specific food-shelves, came back because of her children and was unable to find work.

Then Sieng finally asked to her where she had learned about CAPI. Her voice became very soft and quiet while tears filled her eyes. She proceeded to tell Sieng about how she and her family were on the brink of death because of starvation, but while visiting a doctor, he told them about CAPI. She was so relieved to hear that CAPI offered culturally sensitive food, especially rice that was essential to her diet. At the end of her tearful story she dried her eyes and shared a very powerful quote. “There is an old saying, those who are poor can be identified by the tattered clothing on their backs, but hunger is invisible”

Through this informal interview process there was a common theme. Many of the participants especially the older ones had many stories to share. They also wanted to share their stories so they can be heard. Sharing and talking about their life experiences empowered participants and listening to these individuals’ just shows that CAPI cares about them.
Community Sessions
A Place to share stories to empower and increase a sense of care through listening

Developing Community Listening Sessions

We wanted to go beyond our informal interviews and participant observation at the food shelf. We wanted to hear and do more for the participants. A focus group would be a conventional choice, but we wanted it to be less ‘focused’ or linear. DFG wanted to create an experience for interaction, conversation, community, and empowerment. There was not going to be any sort of translation going on, so non-Hmong speakers like Sook Jin and Ange could be more focused on the mood, atmosphere and body language of the participants. Not understanding the language also made them both vulnerable, kind of like the participants who could not speak English. It was a good lesson in empathy. The DFG team wanted to work with the participants as partners of change. It was all about the participants engaging in conversations.

Community Listening #1

The first community listening session was designed around food. The DFG team wanted to utilize food as a catalyst for conversation, so we purchased a wide variety of food including, tofu, fish, Hmong sausages, ramen, fresh vegetables and much more. We strategically spaced the food along a table into a presentable fashion that is reflective of a grocery store. We used round tables so that all the participants could face each other while Hmong music played in the background to encourage conversation. We allowed the participants to select four items each, from all the food that we had purchased. DFG made sure that it wasn't about showing food products that could be introduced into the food shelf. It was about creating conversation through food and we did this by asking three basic questions.

Why did you select this product?
What do you do with it, in terms of cooking/prepping?
Can you tell us a story about your past/present life that is food related?

These questions prompted immediate responses as we went around the room so everyone could share something. Once again like the interviews conducted at the food-shelf, many of the participants shared intimate stories about life before coming to the United States. Some shared stories of how they lived off the land as an agrarian culture while living in Laos, but due to the war they became refugees who were dependent on others for help. This loss of independence and not having the capability to provide for their family was very devastating to their morale, pride and spirit. Never before being dispersed from their homeland have the Hmong felt vulnerable and
had to rely on others for survival. The ability to have a venue to express these hardships through stories was a relief. Having many people who were in the room with similar stories was also very beneficial and made participants feel at ease. There was however a very notable story about a courageous independent woman named Chee Moua who stood out with her story of survival and experiences.

**The Courageous Chee Moua**

Chee Moua was born in Laos. Her family was very poor during the wartime era. When the war was over her family was displaced hiding and running from the Communist Lao for years. She remembers foraging the jungle for edible roots and tree bark for survival. It wasn't until July of 1987 that her family finally made it to the refugee camps of Thailand. When they first arrived in the camps they didn't have paperwork to receive food aid, so through family contributions they were able to receive a little to survive. Chee remembers when her family of seven would share two packs of ramen. They would add additional water to the ramen so that each person could have a little taste along with their rice.

Luckily Chee and her family did not have to stay long in the refugee camps. By January of 1988 they were allowed to come to the United States of America. Coming to the USA was no different; they were still poor because they had nothing. She said that they were poor because of the inability to find work or drive. She keeps all these memories of struggle dearest to her heart.

Today Chee comes to the food shelf because of these experiences she had and the struggle that persists still today. She tells her kids that she is poor and uneducated. Chee wants to work badly to earn a living even if that means a five-dollar wage and long hours, but cannot find an employer.
(Chee Moua’s Story Continued....)
Chee also talks about her seven children. Her oldest son is in the US Army, a daughter who has finished college and another that is almost done. Chee was very concerned about one of her sons in particular because this year he will be finished with high school, but he still has no plans for a post-secondary education. This made Chee very concerned for her son, so she told him that, “Your mother is always using the food shelf, and so I don’t want you to be using it. Some people say that food shelves only provide expired food and that it’s very embarrassing to go.” Even her own husband refuses to go and help her participate, so she does it alone many times.

Chee spoke about this seemingly complicated matter with laughter and stability. Even though sometimes Chee is upset with her husband’s unwillingness to help, her independent nature moves her forward to provide for her children. Chee understands that what she gets at the food shelf is not much, but she saves a little money that can be used elsewhere. To her even salt can become expensive when you don’t have the monetary means. Chee knows that the food shelf is for her and many others to use. She is very thankful that she had this opportunity share her story and wants to see younger Hmong people who care about the poor too.

Chee encourages and wants DFG to use her story to help send a message that the participants need help. At the very end she finally talked about her reasons for choosing cereal because it’s for her kids. She also noted that even though her children eat American foods such as burgers and pizza, they are still Hmong and like Hmong food.

*These stories and many more will be provided to CAPI as raw files untranslated audios*
The Results
The DFG team was able to get useful information from this whole community listening session. We saw the strength of these individual women (there were a few men who came but did not verbally participate) who shared their moving stories. The listening session was by far a success. Some of the key themes that we noticed or heard were about:

**Education**
Education was very important to many of these women who had children. They understand that education is the key to escaping poverty. Many of the participants had no formal education before coming to the USA. They did not have the proper skills to join the modern workforce. Through the hardship of looking for work without skills/education they are very encouraging and push their own kids and others to pursue higher education.

**Storytelling**
The Hmong culture has a rich oral tradition. They have historically learned through story telling because there was no known written language developed prior to French colonial rule in Indochina. Sharing and telling stories is a fundamental for communications as CAPI moves forward when trying to engage participants.

**Health**
When selecting food and asked to describe why the participant selected that particular food product, many replied with health conscious answers. Many of the participants were elderly, so they were concerned with their own health. They have always relied on healthy diet of fresh vegetables from their yearly harvest while living in Laos, but here in the USA there isn't much access to fresh produce without having to purchase it. The younger participants who were mothers were also concerned about the health of their children.

**Thankful**
Before participants finished telling their stories they all graciously thanked CAPI for all the amazing services they have provided and were very encouraging of the fact that we were there to help. The participants know that CAPI works very hard to service the Hmong community.
Cultural Connection
Many participants have attended other food shelves, but came back to CAPI for one reason. The reason is because CAPI has a cultural connection to the Asian community in Minneapolis. CAPI could just be a general food shelf that gave out rice to specific groups of people, but it’s not. There are great people like Smidchei and Pa Lee Yang who have establish amazing working relationships with the participants. The participants easily identify themselves with CAPI. Now it’s just comes down to how CAPI can interact and be involved with participants to make them feel more welcomed.

Independence
The women who all attended were strong independent individuals who would go distances to provide for their families. Although the family structure in the Hmong culture is still traditionally patriarchal with the man as the head of the house, these women defy the social norm by relinquishing their pride and doing what is best for the family by coming to the food shelf for food; that can be seen as begging, since for many generations the Hmong people have lived independently without help from others outside of the clan structure. The Hmong culture is structured around respect and honor. The lost of face or honor can be very harmful to the male figures within a household. So the women who are participating are such strong individuals because of this act of humility.

Adaptability
CAPI along with DFG easily identified that the traveling distance to South Minneapolis for many participants was problematic. This was supported by data showing the demographic regions of participants and also by complaints of participants wanting closer food access. Many of the participants had mentioned it during the listening session, but that still isn’t a first and foremost concern. (Increasing the amount of rice is generally their first wish.) However what is important is the participants’ adaptability. These are people who have seen the terrors of war, fled for their lives, lived in refugee camps and finally were resettled in an urban area that had the complete opposite living style they were accustomed
to in the span of fifty years. Many people will never experience these circumstances in their lifetime or the next. No matter what situation they were put into many survived obtaining immense experience and having language as their only barrier. So the distance of the food shelf may seem like a problem, but it is not as big as imagined. (Having a place close to participants would be very beneficial, but is not an immediate concern.) The participants have solved traveling problems through carpooling with family and also having family/friends participate for them. Participants have such a need for CAPI that they will virtually find their own solutions to adapt. Adaptability is important because this can be useful when integrating other programs or any sort of implementation that can change CAPI’s structure.

**Wanting to help**

Many of the participants want to contribute back to CAPI and the listening sessions allowed them to do that. They also want to help Smidchei at the food shelf, but just don’t know how. The participants are willing to give back for all the great services that CAPI has provided them.

These are just some of the common themes that the DFG team had noticed. They are essential to understanding the needs of participants. Other notable observations are:

- Service is needed
- Canned foods remain untaken
- Very social
- Many of the participants knew each other
- Did not bring kids along
- Understood some English
- Photogenic
- Patient
(Continued)

Community Listening #2

After the success of the first community listening session, the DFG team wanted to do another one based on storytelling and sharing. Prior to the listening session the DFG team developed long-term stories that asked one simple question. What would CAPI be like if there were no restrictions? DFG shared two stories: one was a story written by Sieng, which talks about a completely rebuilt food shelf that integrated its food shelf into a community center. The story walks the reader through the process of intake all the way through leaving the food shelf. This was an integrated model utilizing CAPI as a one-stop shop for everything. The second story written by Sook Jin was about a food shelf that was also part of an education center (K-8 for younger children, and adult education classes for those seeking other skills to learn English, or make them more employable). The readers get a glimpse into a place that encourages volunteerism among CAPI participants to help educate others like them. We wanted to present these stories to participants to get feedback.

Like the first listening session we designed this session around storytelling and participants. We wanted to present them with visuals to create conversation. This time however there was no food besides the snacks and we unintentionally set up a lecture-like scenario (which was not ideal but was a good learning lesson) with Sieng presenting in the front stopping at intervals to ask questions. This was different from the first set up, but nonetheless we wanted to see the effectiveness through experimentation and risk taking.

Section 1: Sheng Lee’s Story

(See Long Term Vision, p. 86)

Sieng presented Sheng Lee’s story to the audience taking a break at each section indicating changes that CAPI would implement if it had the dream infrastructure to support its participants. The group was mainly filled with women and not many men or children.

Sieng opened up by thanking everyone for their time and coming here to listen to what the DFG team had to say. He explained to the participants what DFG is and why they are here today. Sieng continued his presentation of an integrated food shelf model where it becomes a one-stop shop. He displayed an interactive 3d model of a building with a walk through of the food shelf process. Intake is done right before the participants receive food and the food selection becomes a shopping experience.
It was very quiet at first as many of them seemed loss, but soon conversation started to pick up when we asked them for suggestions. There was a part in particular that was very informative and also gives us an insight into what the participants may want to see. There wasn't a story in this part of the listening session, but great suggestions.

Participant Suggestions

‘One place for many things’ – a participant’s quote

Participants understand the concept of wanting to create an environment for more than just food. The participants talked about a community room for gathering if there were events. They also liked the idea of a place to encourage learning and teaching especially when it came to learning how to use each individual food product. One of the younger participants voiced her opinion for CAPI to teach the older people how to use canned goods when they take it home because she also notices that few people take canned goods. The participants don't want to see anything wasted.

So why is this important since CAPI and DFG already knows that what participants are saying is problematic? It's important because now we are aware that they are also aware of the food situation, such as unwanted canned goods and little knowledge on how to utilize each particular product at the food shelf. The DFG team has talked about many changes and one of them being recipe cards or cooking classes. Hearing the participants wanting to see it implemented helps reaffirm us that it's a valuable idea to include as we develop recommendations for CAPI.

Other notable participant suggestions were:
- Surveys
- Place to educate Children
- Banquet hall
- Place to suggest ideas/food
- Accessibility (it’s hard for older people to push carts to car)
- Wider space
Section 2: Nancy Yang’s Story

(See Long Term Vision, p. 91)

This second session was very interesting because it was very diverse. This time half the group was men, and included children along with women of varying ages. Like previously Sieng started the presentation by formally introducing the DFG team and why we are here. This session was set up in a very similar way to the first story. The only difference is the story. The story was about an elderly woman named Nancy who is part of another integrated one-stop shop food shelf that is also a school. The visuals that were displayed were illustrations that help contextualize the story for the viewers. It was an alternative way of telling a story through simple illustrations.

This group was different from the last. About half of the people that came here to do intake haven't participated yet, therefore they don't have any idea of what or how CAPI is like (currently). Many of the participants didn’t understand what we were trying to do, but by sharing our story they also shared theirs. There was one story in particular that talks about being new to the country.

My First Time in America

There was young woman who was prompted to share her story after we talked about Nancy's and also encouraged participants to share theirs. She remembers living in the refugee camps and getting married when she was only sixteen years old. She arrived in Los Angeles, California 1989 with her husband’s family, while her own mother and father ended up going to Minnesota. When she arrived in L.A., she was pregnant and living with her husband’s brother.

The home they lived in did not have additional space to accommodate them. She remembers being so hungry because she felt like a stranger in a strange household. They had breakfast very late around 10:00 a.m. so she was so hungry because she was used to waking up early to eat around 8:00 a.m. in Thailand. But on one particular day it was already 11:00 a.m. and there was nothing to eat. She told her husband, but he told her to wait until 12:00 p.m. until his brothers woke up because many of them worked at night. She was so hungry she left the house to get her mind off of hunger, pacing back and fourth around the
(Continued)

She did not know any English at the time, so while sitting on the edge of a railing crying a stranger approached her and she had no clue what he was saying. After he got done speaking he went and brought her a glass of milk. She was so thankful of this stranger even though she could not understand him. She was six months pregnant at the time and realized that the man could see her pain. After she finished the milk the man said three words that she could understand because she learned a little English from the immigration workshops, “You need more?” She responded with excitement, “Yes!” The stranger went and got her some bread.

After this whole ordeal she called her mother in Minnesota and cried to her telling her about the whole story. Her mother was able to earn a little money and sent her some. She remembers till this day the $100 dollars that her mom sent her. This was her first experience in the USA. She mentions that food is life and that’s why as a mother she works so hard to find food for her children. That’s why she is not ashamed to participate at CAPI.

This story shows the courage and will power of this mother who was young in a strange land. She has made it through all that hardship and understands that receiving help from others is necessary to create a better life for herself and her children. Stories like these are sad but have many truths about how hunger affects an entire community especially if it’s a mother. Without proper nutrition a mother cannot bring up a child so that he/she can have a higher chance of success in life.
(Continued)

The Results
There were a lot of things that could be changed from this community learning session. We could work on it more so it didn’t seem as if we were just up in front of the room presenting to an audience, but overall the feedback, stories and responses were worthwhile. Some key points worth mentioning are:

New participants
The second part of the story saw many new participants who are doing intake for the first time. Many were young and seem to understand enough English to get by. They heard about CAPI and its culturally sensitive food, but have never participated. They were very curious and decided to try it. There is still much more growth for CAPI and the demographics will slowly change from illiterate people to those who can read. This trend and shift should be acknowledged as CAPI prepares for the future.

Growth
There is a lot of potential for CAPI to increase the amount of participants (If that is what CAPI wants). As mentioned before there were a lot of people who came only knowing a little bit about CAPI. If participants knew more about CAPI and the great work they do, it would be beneficial to CAPI because the participant’s integration into CAPI’s food shelf process could be simplified. They could feel comfortable about CAPI even before participating. This could be established by giving first time participants who come to intake more information with friendly graphics introducing CAPI and also a small welcoming gift such as a gift card or even a bag for them to use throughout their process.

Children
Some of the mothers brought along their kids, and this could be a useful time to engage the children and parents. CAPI can encourage participants to bring along their kids since many of the mothers like to talk about their children anyways. What if they were invited to bring children along to do a mother and child workshop? It’s
sometimes easier to communicate to the children so that they can pass on the information to their parents, since the kids would know English fairly well and are adapted to the American culture. This can increase and strengthen bonds between parents and children.

**Educate**
These intake processes are great for educating people on changes that CAPI is implementing. They can also be a place to teach about food as we mentioned in our recommendation. But overall the use of this time can be crucial to developing a strong community in CAPI.

**Volunteerism**
When asked to see if how many people would want to help out at the food shelf, many people said they would be willing to, especially the older women. But what is ideal is to influence sons and daughters of these mothers to contribute a little of their time to help people like their mothers.

After hearing everyone talk a little about themselves through story telling or suggestions that they may want to see at CAPI. We thanked everyone for his or her time and hoped to see him or her in the future. The DFG team was also thrilled to have Va Chia Xiong, a CAPI participant invite us into his home. We had wanted to do a home visit so we can see how participants live. Va Chia even pointed out the fact that if we wanted to understand the participants we must come into their homes and eat what they eat, even if it’s bland. Pa Lee was kind enough to facilitate the meeting for us. This was the opportunity that we were waiting for.

**Visiting The Unknown**
When we the DFG team dove into the structure, operations and logistics to better understand how CAPI operates, we were able to identify ‘problem’ areas within the food shelf model. One of the problems that we encountered and discovered was that we had no clue what was happening to the food or the participants once they leave the food shelf. Thanks to a generous offer from Va Chia Xiong, who we had met with at the second listening session, we were able to see and explore this unknown territory with him. Va Chia had told us that “if you want to learn about how we live you must come see it for yourself”. So on September 12th Pa Lee, Sieng, Sook Jin, along with Peter had the honor of visiting Va Chia’s home in Brooklyn Center.
Before going to visit Va Chia and his family the DFG team talked about how the process should be. Va Chia has invited us into his private space and now we must be cautious, empathetic and considerate. DFG decided to bring along some food for dinner, so we bought Hmong sausages and papaya salad from the local Hmong grocery. We also decided to bring a fifty-dollar Cub Foods gift card as a token of appreciation. We understood that Va Chia’s family is going to have to use their own resources to provide us dinner, so the gift card was a nice gesture. Pa Lee brought additional food to the dinner too (Chinese-style vegetable stir-fry). DFG planned to go in and just see what the outcome could be like. We did not have expectations, but just wanted to learn about them through empathy and also gain knowledge on their lifestyle.

The Simple Man’s Journey

The DFG team (with the exception of Ange), along with Pa Lee (CAPI staff) and Peter (AIGA videographer) decided to meet at Va Chia’s house around 6:30 pm on September 12th in Brooklyn Center, Minneapolis. Va Chia’s home was like every other ordinary home within the area. It was a one-story ranch home with bushes in the front yard. (We did not ask if they owned or rented the home because it felt improper to talk about their financial situation) A home is very important to Hmong families so they strive very hard to become homeowners because so much of our rights and rituals are practiced in a private setting that only a home can provide.

The DFG team along with Pa Lee was greeted by one of Va Chia’s son outside. (Note that this particular son has a mental condition.) He led us inside and called for his mother. Va Chia was not home. His wife greeted us, we told her that we were here for a home visit and she said that she would go look for Va Chia at the local park, where many people were actively participating in sports activities. Although Va Chia was not home, his youngest son Cha Xiong kept us company. Cha was a freshman in college and received a full scholarship to St. Thomas. He wanted to study mechanical engineering. For someone who has arrived late to this country as the last wave of Hmong refugees in 2004,
Cha has done a tremendous job of graduating high school and continuing his education. DFG along with Pa Lee offered support and encouragement to this young man. We made sure that he felt supported in his pursuit of higher education. Sieng also left his phone number for Cha, just in case he needed help with anything.

We all waited about thirty minutes before Va Chia finally returned. The waiting was not a problem since he was kind enough to invite us. He was apologetic and shook hands with everyone. Va Chia sat down and we started having small talk about each other’s families. Sieng proceeded to ask if Va Chia knew his grandma since they have the same clan names and she was still in Thailand when Va Chia was still there. It is proper to talk about ones family lineage so that we can understand who is who. The Hmong community is small and we all know each other in some way or another. In addition the dense concentration of Hmong people into the refugee camps created long lasting friends and family among many individuals. The Hmong have the utmost respect and honor for family lineage because that is what has kept them from being able to communicate and diversify all over the world. After a short talk with Va Chia, Sieng was unsure if Va Chia knew his grandparents that were living in Thailand, but Pa Lee did figure out that she has family ties with Va Chia.

After the introductions Pa Lee and Sook Jin went into the kitchen to help Va Chia’s oldest daughter Mai Xiong prepare dinner. Mai was the first child; she and her husband along with their children are currently living with her parents. Mai is also a CAPI participant and usually brings her mother along to the food shelf or participates for her. Mai’s mother is suffering from a chronic illness that is causing her legs pain, preventing her from walking long distances, so Mai is taking care of her.

Sieng stayed behind and did an informal interview with Va Chia. Sieng really wanted to capture Va Chia’s story because Va Chia has seen plenty in his lifetime and has lived very differently through unintended changes. As previously indicated Va Chia
and his family were late arrivals to the United States.

Va Chia Xiong was born in Laos in the late 40’s. He could still remember the Japanese occupation of Indochina and soon after the reintroduction of French colonial rule. Va Chia was very young (before he was 18) when he enlisted into General Vang Pao’s Royal Lao army. Va Chia spoke about the war briefly and how that affect his family displacing them, and forcing them to be on the move constantly. Where ever they went they still had to become farmers to feed their families. Due to the inconsistent nature of having to fight and then settling down affected the way his family was growing crops, it became sporadic and quick. It was not sustainable in the long run. Va Chia remembers working the fields whenever he was not called to combat. His small family would work about a four-acre plot of land on a hillside. In one year Va Chia and his family doesn't produce or plant much, but they have enough to survive. Everything was done by hand, so it was very hard labor. Meat was also a rare commodity. In Laos the dependence of ones yearly harvest meant life or death. Unable to freely work the land, which Va Chia and his family have done for many generations, life became hard.

After the defeat of the Americans in Vietnam, the communist party in Laos became embolden and pledged to annihilate those who opposed them, primarily the Hmong people. Va Chia was concerned about the safety of his family, so he proceeded to flee into neighboring Thailand. His family of five at the time was lucky enough to of have survived through the ordeal as they fled for their lives. Once they reached the Mekong River, they were able to buy off a boatman to take them to Thailand. Va Chia and his family were among some of the few families who made it out of Laos very early. They went to Nong Khai, the earliest settlement for Hmong refugees who fled Laos. After staying there for about a year his family was bused to Ban Vinai, the largest refugee camp.

In Ban Vinai, Va Chia talks about not being able to cultivate the land to provide for his family. They relied on outside aid, such as
USAID (United States Agency for International Development) for assistance. He partook in a process that is similar to the food shelf. They relied on monthly rations where they could participate three times a month for survival, since there wasn’t immediate means to find work or plant your own crops. Va Chia mentions that one person can receive up to a small pot of rice, so the bigger the household the more rice. USAID also donated a variety of meat products ranging from pork to fish. Life in the refugee camp in terms of getting enough to eat was good, but the lost of self reliance and independence had a negative effect on morale.

Va Chia stayed in Ban Vinai until it finally closed in 1992. His family had decided not to come to the USA, so they took refuge in a Buddhist Monastery called Wat Tham Krabok, along with thousands of other families. As Va Chia and his family sought refuge in Tham Krabok they no longer received a steady flow of help from USAID. Despite no longer receiving aid from an outside source life was pleasant. Many of those who were living in Tham Krabok along with Va Chia could move freely in and out of the monastery to find work outside of its gates. They worked as migrant workers doing odd jobs. Va Chia explains that there would be a car to pick them up in the morning and then bring them back at night. He would earn about 120 baht a day, which is equivalent to four US dollars. It was easy to work with the Thai people. Even though Va Chia could not speak Thai he understood their culture and how they ate since it was similar to the Hmong culture.

In 2004 the Thai government decided to close down the established settlement of Hmong people in the Tham Krabok due to accusations of drug trafficking and notoriously housing rebel Hmong soldiers who were still fighting a secret war in Laos. By this time Va Chia decided to finally come to the United States. Life here in the USA was hard because when he arrived to the USA, he was already old. These days he is unemployed and just (Va Chia’s Story Continued...) stays home with his wife. They watch their grand kids to help
out their own children, as they pursue the American Dream. Va Chia tries to stay active and keeps up his psychological health by going to the park to be with old acquaintances and staying social. Unlike Thailand where he could travel and go wherever he wanted, he couldn’t do that here in the USA because of language barriers and lack of transportation. At this late in his life he feels caged, but because there is opportunities for his children and grand children he is content with his life.

*These stories and many more will be provided to CAPI as raw files untranslated videos*

The Results
After conducting the interview it was time for dinner. With the help of Pa Lee and Sook Jin there was a complete meal fit for a king. Sook Jin was able to peer into how food was prepped and cooked with all its simple ingredients. This home visit along with the informal interview of Va Chia, while documenting his lifestyle through each individual phases of his life truly is an eye opener to how much this man and his family has lived through. What we learned from this experience is that:

**Happiness**
These are complex people who have been through tremendous hardships who just want to live a simple and quite lifestyle. They are very happy with what life has thrown at them currently because they have seen worse.

**Teaching**
The participants taught Pa Lee and Sook Jin how the food was carefully prepped and cooked. They had simple recipes using squash and minced pork to create a savory dish that Sook Jin could not get enough of and they even offered Sook Jin some freshly grown squash to take home.

**Welcoming**
Although this may not be applied to everyone, culturally speaking Hmong people are very welcoming to strangers.
It’s been long traditions to provide for travelers or those who wish to have a drink of water. Many people are humble and respectful of strangers inside their household.

**Family Orientated**

There were a lot of people living within that single house. Mai and her family of about five was staying with them, along with Va Chia’s two sons and his wife. There may have been additional people there too. But what is important is that they all care for each other, watching out for one another. Mai watches her parents and provides for them as the oldest child especially when her mother is having trouble walking around. They care very deeply for the whole of the family.

**Simple Eating**

The food was nothing extravagant, but very tasty. It was humble and modest that lacks an overwhelming flavor, but is soft and subtle texture was very enjoyable. Like Va Chia and his wife, many elderly Hmong people rely on a strict diet of rice and boiled vegetables. They only add a small amount of salt if needed. They eat very plain remembering the simple life they once lived in Laos. They don’t eat a lot, just enough.

These unique stories can only be captured through empathy and understanding of these unique individuals who are part of the great things that CAPI is doing. CAPI is providing a service that allows their participants to increase their living standards, so they can be like any other American. Va Chia clearly articulates his struggles, but smiles as he speaks about all the things he has seen and done. As a person who has accumulated great wisdom and experience he is just one example of how many unique individuals come monthly to work with CAPI for a singular cause, and that cause is to develop a strong connection not only in terms of food but also identity.
Personas

The participant interviews as well as additional research at local food shelves and interviews with representatives from United Way and Second Harvest informed the creation of six persona documents, which guided the remainder of our research.
Mai Vang
Age: 55
Birthday: June 15, 1958
Location: North Minneapolis
Marital Status: Married

Mai is a refugee who came to the United States because war had destroyed her homeland of Laos. In 1987 she left Ban Vinni, a refugee camp in Thailand. Mai was married and already had four kids. Her family decided to come to Minneapolis because they already had relatives here who would be able to assist them.

Although Mai and her husband were very hard workers who had always been able to provide for their family through an agrarian lifestyle they had previously experienced in Thailand. Minneapolis was a different place because it was industrial, modern and urban. It was much harder for Mai to find a job without any skills, and to make things more complicated she was also pregnant.

Her husband was able to find work in an assembly line, but with four kids and another on the way, the father's meager wage was unable to fully support their children.

Mai had plenty of family and friends who came to Minneapolis earlier, so they knew how to obtain government assistance. One of Mai’s close relatives had told her about a place that gave out free food. She was willing to give it a try.

Mai was also confronted with the problem of transportation. Being fairly new to the country she had no drivers license, therefore she requested her relatives to drive her to do Intake, an interview process to see if she was eligible for free food. She was able to do her Intake with the aid of the CAPI staff and her cousin, so now whenever her relatives went to the food shelf she also went along.

Goals:
- To provide nutritious food for her children.
- To raise her children up while her husband works to provide for them
- Find a part-time job

Likes:
- Listening to Hmong Music
- Gardening
- Watching Asian Dramas

Dislikes:
- Driving
- Strangers
- Dogs
Joua Xiong

Age: 46  
Birthday: June 15, 1967  
Location: North Minneapolis  
Marital Status: Married

Joua was born in Laos, and fled to Thailand with her mother and relatives. She was only ten years old, but could vividly recount what happened as her family crossed the cold waters of the Mekong River and drifted ashore on the Thai Lao border, very close to Nong Khai, Thailand. She had lost her father in the war, who left behind a widow, four sons and three daughters. Joua was the oldest daughter and her brothers were all older than she was.

Once Joua and her family reached Thailand they were first shipped to Ban Vinai Refugee camp. They stayed there for two years and were soon shipped off to live in a different refugee camp in northern Thailand called Chiang Kham, due to overcrowding. While in Chiang Kham she got married at sixteen. She gave birth to three kids. Finally in 1992 her family was approved to go to the United States. They choose go to Minneapolis because her husband’s extended family was there.

When they arrived in Minneapolis life was different, but fortunately they were able to assimilate quickly and found jobs through social workers. Since Joua and her husband were very young it was easier for them to find jobs. Joua had worked for eight years, but lost her job. She didn’t know what she would do to feed her six children. So upon overhearing a conversation about CAPI’s food shelf from her family members she decided to go and get food.

Joua was independent and had her own transportation so things were much smoother and easier for her. She was able to drive herself to do Intake and also to the food shelf. Many times her children would accompany her to the food shelf as translators.

Goals:
- To provide nutritious food for her children.
- To be a temporary SDUWLFLSDQWXQWLOVKHÀQGVD job.
- To learn English while she is unemployed.
- Make sure her kids receive a proper education.
- Be a home owner

Likes:
- Cooking
- Family
- Singing traditional songs

Dislikes:
- Socializing
- Peanut Butter
Toua Cheng

32 years old, married, 1 child on the way
Fluent in spoken Hmong (learning written) and English

Degrees:
International Business (Hamline University, 2002)
Masters in Nonprofit Management (Hamline University, 2015)

As a Hmong refugee to the US in 1991, Toua knows firsthand the importance of access to food and social services the government provides. Toua is excited for his new position as Food Shelf Coordinator for CAPI. He is looking forward to directly applying his skills to help his Hmong community here in the Twin Cities. It is a perfect fit for him as he returns to school for his Masters in Nonprofit Management.

In his “free time,” Toua does a lot of reading and plays soccer once a week. He and his wife love exploring the city on their bikes, knowing that the snowy winter (which Toua dreads) is never far enough away. Toua loves to cook, and enjoys using the fresh produce that his wife grows in their backyard garden. He is looking forward to being a father, and starting a family (even if it is a little nerve-wracking!)

GOALS:
· Help others as he has been helped
· Work closely with those who are experiencing change/transition and are in need of basic services
· Form personal connections with CAPI participants

LIKES:
+ organization, order, cleanliness
+ conversations
+ food, culture, stories
+ biking and other outdoor activities

DISLIKES
- inactivity, laziness, complacency
- snow
- wasting time
Sammi was born and raised in the beautiful city of Hangzhou, China. Her grandparents were farmers, and her parents were installers at an automotive factory. There were times when the factory would shut down due to low demand, and as a result, the Lee family would go hungry. Sammi would spend her afternoons in the community public school, working on her homework, while coming up with stories in her head to distract herself from the hunger pangs in her stomach.

She secured a scholarship to attend the prestigious Zhejiang University, studying political science and land resources management. She then spent five years working with local non-profits on improving the Hangzhou community’s access to fresh food, as well as working with the local minority tribes (especially the She people) to improve their access to farming supplies.

She decided to further her studies into food security issues and community development in the minority communities. Graduating from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public Affairs, she had since moved to Minnesota to work closely with the Southeast Asian immigrant communities here. New to CAPI and the Midwest, she enjoys farmers’ markets and the local co-ops as they reminded her of her grandparents. She is an avid gardener, and her favorite plants are herbs, especially hot peppers.

**Goals**

- I want to ensure CAPI participants get food, shelter, education, and job skills they need.
- I want CAPI participants to feel connected to their community, and to us.
- I want CAPI participants to have a fulfilling life.

**Dislikes**

- Lack of food; seeing people go hungry
- Not knowing who to go to if needs help to support participants
- Bureaucratic rules that impede doing good; lack of flexibility

**Characteristics**

- Friendly, open-minded
- Flexible
- Service-oriented
- Empathetic
Alison
Works for Corporation Foundation

Goals
“I want to make this world a better place to live in.”
“I want to provide resources to those who need it the most.”
“I want to make sure my fund recipients get the most out of what they receive.”

Pain Points
“What areas of ‘doing good’ should I focus on?”
“How can I do good while staying true to my foundation’s values?”
“Who needs my help?”
“Am I really making an impact?”

Characteristics
- Holistic, strategic overview on what she does
- Holds key to resources (funding, network of people, etc.)
- Has to make smart, worthwhile investments
- Responsible
- Has choices to make
- Needs to decide issues of relevance to invest in (recency, mission-driven, affiliation to key organization, etc.)
Rowena  
*Works for State Food Bank*

### Goals
- “I want to ensure healthy, nutritious food be accessible and available to everyone.”
- “I want more healthy and culturally-appropriate food for my food bank.”
- “I want people to get food when they need it.”

### Pain Points
- “Where do I get food I need?”
- “How do we store and track the food we get and send out?”
- “What do our agencies need for their people?”
- “Are the recipients using all our food?”
- “How can we avoid waste?”

### Characteristics
- Focused mission – food security
- Relies on other donors (corporations, USDA, commercial associations, etc.)
- Converts ‘general donations’ to ‘specific needs’ (provide agencies what they need)
- Intuitive, quick decision-making, ability to be flexible/spontaneous with excess/unexpected donations
Participant goals

The research, personas, and listening sessions helped the DFG team identify three primary goals to help achieve the overall project goal.

1. **Increase sense of self-confidence and self-sufficiency**
   As it relates to food access and providing for family

2. **Improve access to preferred food**
   Culturally-relevant, nutritious, and fresh

3. **Create a stronger sense of community**
   Within CAPI and across Greater Twin Cities
Recommendations

OVERVIEW
Space & logistics | Internal processes | Volunteers | Community Outreach | Partnerships | Events | Advocacy
---|---|---|---|---|---|---
Federal/State assistance programs [1, 2, 3] | Management system [1, 3] | The Hmong community as experts [1, 2, 3] | Mobile Farmer’s Market (with Hmong American Farmers Association) [2, 3] | CAPI Cook-Off! Fundraiser [1, 2, 3] | Narratives of food in refugee and immigrant communities [1, 2, 3] |
Identity & signage [1, 3] | Re-intake process [1, 2, 3] | Participant led cooking classes [1, 2, 3] | | |
Information graphics [1, 2] | | | | |
Spatial improvement [1, 2, 3] | | | | |

Rice distribution [N/A] | Participant feedback [1, 2, 3] | Message center [1] | | | |

Immediate
Requires new space

Short-term
Requires additional time or funding

Immediate
Given current capacity

Kitchen [1, 2, 3]

Hospitality lounge [1, 2, 3]
Recommendations

SPACE & LOGISTICS
**Rice distribution**
Multiples of 5 pounds and 10 pounds for rice distribution

**Basis of recommendation**
Due to the high average family size for CAPI recipients, most families collect the 15 or 20 pound bags of rice, which are heaviest to pack and transport. By simplifying the rice bagging process to be in 5 or 10 lb bags only, the packing process will be simplified and all family sizes will be more easily served.

**Key points**
- Bag rice in 5lb and 10lbs only

**Measurement**
- Amount of time formerly dedicated to bagging rice
- Amount of time dedicated to bagging rice using this model

**References:**
- N/A

**A note about participant goals:**
This suggestion is primarily focused on increasing the efficiency of the food shelf service model and easing the heaving lifting burden for staff and volunteers. It does not directly relate to any of the three participant-focused goals.
**Transportation equipment**

Easing the heavy lifting for the food shelf coordinator and volunteers

“Cantaloupes!” exclaimed Ker as she dashed to the newly arrived crate. Toua and Nancy laughed. Ker helped her grandmother load up the shopping cart with her favorite fruit. Usually Nancy would reprimand Ker for taking more than two cantaloupes. The fruits were heavy, and sometimes if she could not get a cart, it would be burdensome to carry all of them up the ramp. She could only come on the days when the shelf was busiest, so she would need to wait at least twenty minutes to get a cart to push her collection back to her neighbor’s car. These days, with two additional carts, she was confident there would not be an issue. She picked up two additional packs of spaghetti sauce—something she had never done in the past—while Ker contemplated the choice of her third cantaloupe from the crate.

**Basis of recommendation**

Participants have to transport their food from the food shelf space to their cars via two ramps and an elevator. This process can take up to 20 minutes to complete, and currently happens via a shopping cart or flatbed dolly. By increasing the number of carts, you should be able to improve the efficiency, possibly serving more families per day; it would also reduce reliance on borrowed or shared equipment from Sabanthani’s food shelf. If participants feel more capable of transporting heavy goods, they may take in greater quantities.

**Key points**

- **Dolly**: A designated stand-up dolly to assist with moving food within and around the food shelf (Stays in the space)
- **Shopping cart**: One additional shopping cart to help people transport food more quickly and efficiently, and reduce the turnaround time between participants.

**Measurement**

- Number of families served per day (Reduced turnaround time of carts)
- Number of pounds of food taken per family

**References:**

- **Neighborhood House** uses shopping carts in a space as comparable in size to CAPI’s current space in Sabanthani.

**Contact information:**

- **Neighborhood House**
  179 Robie Street East, Saint Paul, MN
  **Contact person:** Sarah Yang, Basic Needs Program Manager (sayang@neighb.org)

**A note about participant goals:**

This suggestion is primarily focused on increasing the efficiency of the food shelf service model and easing the heaving lifting burden for staff and volunteers. Indirectly, it may increase participants sense of self-sufficiency, as they are better able to transport food; it also increases the connection between normal grocery shopping experiences.
Identity & signage

Creating a sense of place

“There you are!” Pa greeted her neighbor as the entire family walked up to the food shelf entrance. “Was it difficult to find?” Oh no, we followed the signs. We saw other families walking past us, so we figured this is the right way. Her neighbor, Dawb, adjusted her hold of her youngest son, currently sleeping in her arms. Her daughter, Lia, grinned. “I can read the signs, Auntie! I told Mommy we need to go down into the basement.” Pa laughed. “You’re a clever girl, Lia. Come in, come in, I’ll introduce you to Toua and he can get you started.”

Basis of recommendation

During our first visit to Sabanthani, each member of the DFG team got lost searching for the CAPI food shelf. Although CAPI does not own the space, some visual indication of “You are headed in the right direction” or confirmation that “You are in the right place” is reaffirming to participants. Besides improving CAPI’s visibility, this change can increase the participants’ sense of ownership or connection to the space, as undesirable as it may seem to CAPI staff. It is important to keep in mind that the CAPI participants do not necessarily share the same desire of wishing the space was bigger or in its own space. (As we know it, they are more concerned with their younger family members having enough food and receiving a good education). Because of this, it is important that CAPI reflect a sense of pride and ownership over the existing space.

Key points
- Removable storefront
  - Request for an easel to set at the top of the stairs (during CAPI’s open hours) with a foam core poster indicating CAPI’s location with a logo and arrow pointing downstairs
  - Set an easel with a foam core poster board (during CAPI’s open hours) in front of the current space.
    - Label the board with CAPI’s logo, and a welcome message
    - Optional: Include multilingual instructions with accompanying visual icons to indicate the process (e.g., 1. First come, first served. 2. Present intake card for all families you are collecting for, 3. Collect food)

Measurement
- Participant responses (see “Reintake process,” pg. 53)

References

CAPI’s food shelf space is unique to the others that we visited, as it is located within another (large) building, and unrelated to the other organizations or activities housed within that space. For that reason, and due to the illiterate nature of many participants, clear visual signage is necessary.
Information graphics

Increasing food selection for participants from what’s currently available

Sheng Lee paused in front of the shelves, trying to figure out what to cook for this week. There was a new recipe card shared by Mrs Vang. She knew Mrs Vang. The cheerful middle-aged woman was the one who shared that amazing cake recipe incorporating evaporated milk and canned fruits. Sheng was no baker, but that recipe gave her confidence to try it out. Her son loved it, and said he wanted his mother to keep making that cake every year for his birthday. Sheng took some time to analyze the new recipe card, and noted that she would need to combine the can of spaghetti sauce, the can of green peas, some ground beef and Thai chilli peppers for a great tomato-based stir-fry dish. Sheng laughed in realization that with this recipe, Mrs Vang gave her an out for her lack of tomatoes in the winter. Humming to herself, Sheng stocked her shopping cart with all the ingredients she needed to make it happen.

Basis of recommendation

At the “Community Food Day” event held at St Olaf Lutheran Church, North Minneapolis, CAPI participants gathered to learn healthy recipes from a Simply Good Eating representative. They were shown how to make chicken and noodle salad, and mixed berry smoothies. The mixed berry smoothies were made with spinach leaves, frozen blueberries and raspberries, yogurt and milk. Although this is not a traditional Hmong recipe or common in Asian households, it was enjoyed by the participants who were present. Many noted that they knew these are nutritious recipes to learn and prepare for their children.

There are a number of food items that CAPI receives (either via donations or TEFAP purchase) that are unrecognizable by participants, making them less desirable and resulting in them being left on the shelf. Through graphic recipe cards, we hope to increase participants’ familiarity with average food shelf items, enabling them to make easy dishes with these often-overlooked items and possibly shifting their food preferences to include some of these more neglected options. This change may also stimulate conversations amongst participants, as they are visually prompted to share what they have done with the food items or how else they could use them to create meals and side dishes.

In addition, we can further empower the participants in their food selection process by including simple visuals near each food item or section that indicate how many items can be taken according to their family size. This would also help communicate to volunteers, who may be unfamiliar with the collection process.

Key points

- **Canned Food Recipe Cards**: Label canned food items with visual recipe cards, indicating which other items are available in the food shelf.
- **Section cards**: Indicate how many items can be collected according to family size

Measurement

- Track movement of less-desirable food shelf items (e.g. green beans, kidney beans)
- Participant responses (see “Reintake process”, p. 53)
- Satisfaction with current food selection
- Confidence in their abilities to select relevant food items for their family
Section cards are currently in use at Merrick, Neighborhood House, and Keystone to indicate how many items are allowed per household.
Spatial improvement

Enhancing the food shelf experience though the five senses

“To Toua, the new food shelf space is really a sight to behold. It’s more of a large community grocery store, with lots of low, open shelving, and plenty of room to maneuver palettes of food. The food shelf now sports a course that leads participants through the space, traffic easily directed and controlled. Participants start off with fresh produce selections. Today, there are eggs and milk, too. Toua shows CAPI’s newest participant, an elderly woman by the name of Mai Lee, where the Asian section is located. She selects pho noodles and soy sauce, and leaves the rest behind, as she is conscious that others may need the other items more than her.”

Basis of recommendation

CAPI’s current space can benefit from spatial improvement. While some improvements will require i) time, ii) capital/asset investment, and/or iii) a new space, there are simple changes that can be done immediately.

Key points

In current space (basement of Sabanthani Community Center)

- **Shelves** that are packed, or tightly stocked much like a grocery store. Non-duplication of items more than two or three columns in a row. This is to evoke a “grocery store” shopping experience where shelves are fully stocked.

- **Better ambient lighting** to induce a warmer, more welcoming mood. Current lighting is poor and gloomy. Having lights over key areas (eg. over canned goods shelf) makes it more welcoming. If installing lights is an issue, include lights from a standing lamp.

- **Music/ambient sound.** Research has shown that music of a moderate tempo can induce movement and activity within a space. Potential use of music in the current space can encourage participants to talk, or to look/browse through the canned goods shelf. Good use of music can also be used to reflect CAPI’s values indirectly and reinforce participants’ experience and aspirations. We recommend using Hmong, Lao and Vietnamese music (both popular and traditional).

In current space, with a different layout; or, in a new space

- **Organization of space/food shelf layout** to encourage a full client choice model (eg. mimicking a directed shopping experience, ala IKEA), but to also influence healthy eating habits or selected food choices. (See reference: Keystone Midway Food Shelf)

Measurement

- Number of canned goods distributed per month (before and after spatial adjustments)

- A general sense of whether more conversations or activities are happening within the food shelf. (see “Reintake process” pg. 43, and anecdotal observations of food shelf coordinator).

References

- **Keystone Community Services, Midway Food Shelf.** Keystone’s Midway Food Shelf uses a client choice model, where participants start with a shopping cart, puts food items in it, and weighs their selection at the end. The food shelf has a clean, directed layout that is structured intentionally to influence what participants take from the shelves. Fresh produce (ones in limited quantities) are placed up
front in refrigerators with glass doors to make it an appealing start to their ‘shopping’ experience. Less healthy food items (eg. sugar cookies, cakes, donuts) are placed on cramped shelves opposite the fresh produce section. According to Christine, their participants are less likely to take as many of the less healthy items as they would have, as they are primed on ‘being healthy’ by the presence of fresh produce in the space. The participants then will walk past the canned goods section, and finally the dry pantry items section (think pasta, rice, and other dry staples) before arriving at the weighing station. Here, if the participant manages to get to their allocated weight (eg. 50 pounds), they will ring a bell for ‘getting the weight right’. As a reward, they can pick two additional items from the shelves. Participants who fall short of their allocated weight tend to just grab items off the nearest shelves - therefore, Keystone places their healthier dry pantry items closer to the weighing station (eg. organic brown rice noodles, multigrain products). Keystone recently renovated the space. It is now brighter to make the entire space look more appealing to participants.

- **Neighborhood House**: Neighborhood House's food shelf is of a similar size, comparable to CAPI’s. It utilizes a full client-choice model (participants with shopping carts, weighted), just like Keystone Midway, but due to the size of the room, navigation is tighter. Nonetheless, they manage to have a shelf specifically for cultural/ethnic food. This shelf is placed in the middle of the room, bringing prominence to its presence.

- “**How can in-store music increase sales?**” RetailWeek. URL: http://www.retail-week.com/stores/interiors/how-can-in-store-music-increase-sales/5029706.article

**Contacts:**

- **Keystone Community Services, Midway Food Shelf**
  1916 University Ave. W., St. Paul, MN
  (651) 917-3792
  Hours: Monday-Friday, 10:00-11:30 and 1:00-3:30 p.m. Walk-in only.
  **Contact person:** Christine Pulver (cpulver@keystoneservices.org)
  Director, Basic Needs Program.

- **Neighborhood House**
  179 Robie Street East, Saint Paul, MN
  **Contact person:** Sarah Yang, Basic Needs Program Manager (sayang@neighb.org)
Kitchen
Creating a relaxing atmosphere for CAPI participants.

“There is a medium size kitchen area—complete with a deep sink, low countertop, and communal island that can seat 20 people—where food shelf staff or participants can rinse produce that is received or gather to regroup and pack their goods. CAPI also uses this area for groups of volunteers (including some food shelf customers) to repack rice. Sometimes the kitchen is used for “Open Cooking” or “Open Kitchen” opportunities, including recipe demonstrations and seasonal food preservation events.”

Basis of recommendation
As we envision a new space and service model for CAPI, we recommend having a food-shelf space that considers the broader experience of food. Food is a cultural and community experience, and despite CAPI’s participants having limited access to resources, they still take time to gather around the table and share food as a family. This experience could be expanded upon and supported by CAPI’s facilities. This means including a kitchen area or features of a kitchen (e.g. a large island or butcher block) that allows people to congregate as they clean and prep their food, and even cook food in “Open cook” opportunities.

Key points
- Food prep area: Incorporated within the food shelf-space, to be used primarily for the cleaning or prepping of food shelf items.
  - Large butcher-block or island
  - Deep sink or wash basin
- Full-scale kitchen: A separate space to be used to host additional food-related events.
  - Large butcher-block or island
  - Deep sink or wash basin
  - Multiple demonstration islands, with mirrors (to be used at educational events)
  - Space to sit and observe demonstrations
  - Stove, oven, dishwasher, refrigerator, freezer
  - Hmong utensils (special knives, cutting boards, and mortar & pestle set)

Measurement
- N/A

References
- Neighborhood House has a full-scale kitchen, outside of its food shelf space but in the same building, that is available for use. In addition, they have some kitchen-prep areas in the back of their food shelf space, including refrigeration, prep island, and deep sinks, that can be used by staff when intaking food donations.
Contact info:

- **Neighborhood House**
  179 Robie Street East, Saint Paul, MN

  **Contact person:** Sarah Yang, Basic Needs Program Manager
  (sayang@neighb.org)
Hospitality lounge

Creating a relaxing atmosphere for CAPI participants.

“Sheng Lee loved the new building. Walking in, she always noticed the beautiful mural just outside the entrance, depicting Hmong people harvesting rice like how they used to in Laos. The scent of pastries and tea greeted her as she entered. There was music in the air - a mix of Thai, Lao, Vietnamese and Hmong hits across the decades. It felt relaxing to be here, she mused, as she sat down on one of the comfortable sofas in the waiting area. Her son ran to the corner to join other children. There were toys and books to keep them entertained. Sheng Lee took this opportunity to relax. She liked the way the sofas are arranged - the circular pattern made it easier for her to talk to others. There were magazines and brochures on the coffee table, mostly on cooking, healthy living, and money matters. She picked up a copy of Hennepin County’s vaccination program, set in Hmong, and began reading, while she kept an eye out on the cooking show airing on the television set on the top corner of the room.”

Basis of recommendation

Throughout our visits to the food shelf, we noted that conversations happened within the food shelf, but not out of it. It was peculiar, as families knew each other, but they would only exchange a simple “Hello” while waiting in line, and nothing else. Most of them stood silently. Upon entering the food shelf, the participants would talk to each other (and to Smidchei), laugh, and joke. They would talk about what food items to take—and which to leave behind—and have ongoing dynamic conversations in the space, while those waiting their turn in line remained silent.

We also noticed during our community listening events that many participants knew each other, or at least felt familiar enough to engage in casual conversation. (About half of the room would start talking in a manner as if they were already familiar with each other.) From our interviews and through the listening sessions, a key theme that emerged was the sense of identity, affiliation, and ownership of space that the participants felt with CAPI. We wanted to extend that feeling to a more permanent space that was spatially and emotionally designed for the user to experience a sense of community, flow of information (formal and informal), and comfort.

Key points

• Cultural artifacts such as paintings, murals, and music of relevant cultures (to the food shelf participants) to set the ambiance of comfort, acceptance and identity.

• Toys and books for the children. This is to keep them engaged while their parents converse with each other.

• Inclusion, not exclusion, in layout, beginning with the arrangement of chairs and tables, and the use of space. The layout should be conducive for discussions, and there should be no obstacles in movement. Movement should be fluid.

• Information (formal and informal) as another key highlight of this space. Brochures in Hmong and English, magazines, recipe cards, and cooking shows aired on television are among the many ways one can receive information in this space.

Measurement

• Responses to Participant survey (see “Reintake process” pg. 43)

• Comments left in drop-box, phone line, website (see “Participant feedback,” pg. 50)
References:

- We do not have specific references on hospitality lounges for food shelves, but there are good pointers in this Fast Company article on doctor's waiting rooms (URL: http://www.fastcodesign.com/1664797/six-ways-to-improve-doctors-waiting-rooms). Many of the principles mentioned are to improve user experience, and are directly applicable to this.
Recommendations

INTERNAL PROCESSES
Participant feedback

Providing an outlet for immediate, casual feedback.

“Sheng Lee stopped by the white board on her way out of the food shelf. It was an avenue for participants to write down their thoughts and comments. Many of them wrote their thoughts on what they would like to see at the food shelf. Currently, the board was peppered with notes - there were ones requesting for chicken nuggets, ice cream, tofu, and fish paste, and a witty remark requesting for more music by Jasmine Tierra, the African American Hmong singer to be aired in the lobby. Sheng laughed. She added a comment to request for more Thai chili peppers as she did not have the time to start her own garden this year.”

Basis of recommendation

One of the current strengths of CAPI’s organization is its re-intake sessions that encourage community sharing and listening between participants and CAPI staff. To strengthen and support this structure, we recommend a few other places where feedback can be solicited from participants in a less structured setting. While not all suggestions may be able to be accommodated, just having a place to share them can strengthen lines of communication between participants and CAPI staff.

Key points

- **Drop Box:** An anonymous box to drop-off suggestions. It can be a suggestions on food, improvements, and complaints. Placement suggestions include on the coordinator desk, on a small card table placed in the hallway, or mounted on the wall near the canned food items.
- **Phone line:** A dedicated phone line for leaving suggestions or ideas (Google voice numbers are available for free). List this number outside the food shelf, and on Participant Surveys and other communications.
- **Activity Board:** A movable bulletin board to place outside CAPI’s doors where participants and staff can share employment, health, and food related messages, as well as post sign-up forms for community engagement sessions. Messages posted by CAPI should be multi-lingual; others can post in their native language.
- **Website:** While the website is currently not the main mode of communication, it is free to implement this change, and can accommodate children or grandchildren who may be looking for an easy way to communicate their (grand)parents’ suggestions.
- **Participant surveys** (see “Reintake process,” pg. 53)

Measurement

- Number of drop box suggestions
- Number of phone messages
- Number of activity board postings
- Number of online form submissions

References

- N/A

A note about participant goals:

The third goal (increasing sense of community) may be more indirectly reached, as participants feel more a part of things. This can be gauged via their responses on the Participant Surveys (see “Reintake process,” pg.53).
Intake process

Setting expectations and opening lines of communication

“So, here’s the freezer bag that I would recommend you bring every time you visit us, so you can keep the meat and fresh produce in the best condition when you travel back with your food,” explained Toua to Sua Xiong, CAPI’s newest participant. She nodded, and thanked him repeatedly. Toua smiled gently. “I do what I’m doing because I grew up seeing my mother work really hard to feed me. We need to take care of each other.” Sua Xiong’s eyes softened. “I feel welcomed here. I am really happy to go home with some food today. With this bag of rice, I can at least eat something tonight. Thank you.”

Basis of recommendation

Our observations at the food shelf noted that many participants brought their own bags and used CAPI’s extra boxes to collect their food. While most of the food is easily transported in this manner, the frozen goods and fresh produce would benefit from a separate bag that keeps them cool, especially during the hottest months of the year (June-August). It may also encourage people to take items such as frozen blueberries, if participants have a way to keep them from inconveniently thawing and making a mess.

We also learned, through meetings with CAPI staff, that participants are directed regarding the collection process during their initial intake session—which can happen either at CAPI’s office or during a reintake session. During our second listening session, a number of new participants were present, and had questions about what to expect or what was going to happen at the food shelf. In order to streamline these communication efforts and reaffirm participants about the process, we recommend distributing a Welcome Kit to all new intakes. We also recommend using this intake process as an opportunity to collect feedback and initial expectations from participants, thus establishing a standard for two-way communication. (Please note: We are recommending this in addition to the standard intake questions already used).

Key points

- **Welcome kit**
  - Five lb. bag of rice
  - Freezer bag
  - Visual instruction sheet, similar to storefront (See “Identity & signage,” pg. 40)
  - Notice of upcoming events (CAPI hosted, as well as those sponsored by outside organizations)
  - Pack of visual recipe cards (see “Information graphics”, pg. 41)
  - Contact card: Include ways to contact CAPI, as well as provide feedback (see “Participant feedback, pg. 50”)

- **Participant Survey**: Gauge initial status & expectations through a simple survey that could be tracked using Client Track or another database. Encourage participants to complete it during their initial intake, while staff wait and can translate.
  - How did you hear about CAPI?
  - What types of food does your family most need?
  - What types of food would you most prefer?
  - What other type of assistance is your family receiving? In need of?
  - Other comments?
Measurement

- Participant survey responses

References

- The Welcome Kit is a customized, unique suggestion designed to specifically address CAPI’s participants and their needs.
- Neighborhood House, Merrick, and Keystone all administer quantitative data-driven participant intake questionnaires, but do not conduct Participant Surveys focused on gathering qualitative data. This is a unique suggestion for CAPI.

A note about participant goals:
This suggestion only minimally or indirectly addresses #2, as it provides more rice immediately and allows for participants to share what types of food would be most helpful to them.
Re-intake process

Better understanding the effectiveness of CAPI programs

“From the data we’ve gathered in the past six months, there is an increased sense of empowerment among our participants, especially those who also participated as volunteers, as leaders in our cooking classes, and in the community gardens project,” noted Sammi Lee, CAPI’s program manager. “Our intern Suado completed the analysis of all the data gathered during the re-intake process, and that was our key finding. ‘The participants are also fans of our community empowerment sessions that we conduct concurrently with the re-intake process,’ grinned Suado. Everyone in the boardroom laughed, knowing very well that Suado was referring to the overwhelming response they had been receiving at these events. The most recent one, featuring a top Hmong gardener from St. Croix, drew a crowd which included many members of extended families of the food shelf participants. ‘The ladies said he was really handsome.’”

Basis of recommendation

The re-intake sessions that are required for CAPI participants every six months are one of the unique components of CAPI’s food shelf service. CAPI already uses these sessions as opportunities to educate and further engage their participants, as well as check-in regarding their current status (as it relates to food need). These required sessions keep participants connected to the organization, and are a critical mode of communication.

Generally, we seek to streamline the process of how these sessions occur, allowing for the addition of participant surveys, our key change recommended. These surveys will help to standardize and record participants’ feelings regarding CAPI’s services. Asking participants directly how they feel or inviting them to share a story, from which you can glean their emotional response, can provide good qualitative data to support your goals that are more emotionally driven (e.g. participant goal #1).

We also heard a resounding desire from participants that they would like to help or give back to CAPI in any way they can. By distributing opportunities for them to do so, we hope to make this connection more immediately possible.

Key points

- General process
  - **Administer Participant Survey** (see items below), and allow to complete while waiting
  - **Distribute and share notice of upcoming events** and opportunities to assist or volunteer with CAPI events
  - **Host a featured event** (see suggestion list below), bringing in outside community members to educate and inform participants on timely and relevant topics (see “The Hmong Community as Experts”, pg. 65)
  - **Individual check-in**: Immediately record responses from Participant Survey and other normally collected data in ClientTrack
  - **Informal community gathering**: While participants are waiting for individual check-in, encourage them to congregate.
    - Bring suggestion box, contact cards, and message board from food shelf
    - Bring garden harvest and information about securing their own plot
(Continued)

- **Participant Survey questions**
  - How easy was it for you to locate the food shelf during your first visit?
  - How do you feel when you are at the food shelf?
  - How satisfied are you with CAPI’s current food selection?
  - How confident are you in your abilities to select relevant food items for your family?
  - How connected do you feel to other CAPI participants?
  - Do you feel confident to ask questions of CAPI staff in regards to helping your family with food and other social services?
  - How do you feel when you come to other CAPI events?
  - What other things can CAPI do to help you?
  - Is there anything else you’d like to share?

**Measurement**
- Responses to Participant Survey questions
- Number of drop-box suggestions/messages
- Number of phone call suggestions/messages

**References**
- These items are inherently unique to CAPI, and were not observed in practice at other food shelves.
Federal/State Assistance Programs

Educating and capitalizing on other food assistance programs not used.

“Here you go,” said the elderly gentlemen as he handed Nancy her bag of vegetables. Nancy was thrilled to be able to use her EBT card at the local farmers’ market. This new farmers’ market, located in the heart of North Minneapolis, had many Hmong and Vietnamese farmers. It made her happy to know that she could support them by purchasing produce from them. It made her happier to know that she could cook Mai and Ker’s favorite squash and ground pork dish tonight. She could do so more often, now—without the card, she would not have enough money to do so.”

Basis of recommendation

CAPI participants are not making use of the other food assistance and social benefits program provided by the federal and state governments. Our analysis of the CAPI food shelf participant data (of the 884 participant records available; data captured during intake process) revealed the following statistics:

The only program where CAPI food shelf participants took advantage of is SNAP, and even for that, less than half of CAPI participants are enrolled.

During the Older Adult Food Access workshop (Food Access Summit), it was discussed that research shows older adults’ attitude on SNAP results in lower enrollment. “The kids need this more than I do” is a common perception that if they enroll, there will be lesser support available for younger adults. Action plan has to include older adults as leaders of their community, and to be the ones encouraging others to seek assistance.

Key points

- **Enroll** those who qualify, and educate them on using SNAP, especially the elderly
- **SNAP/EBT cards** can now be used at farmer’s markets. There are programs out there that allows for additional value (or doubling of value) if EBT is used to purchase fresh produce
- **Neighborhood House in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Health** has an outreach program to encourage SNAP enrollment in the Latino and Hmong community. There are materials and strategies specifically focused on these communities. Note that Neighborhood House’s coverage is within the Ramsey county. CAPI can bring this to Hennepin county residence. (Caveat: Sarah Yang from NH mentioned challenges in the program; therefore, CAPI can approach this and be mindful of potential challenges, and tailor their strategies accordingly to make this successful for their own participants.)
- **Marie Claire** (from the Department of Health, MN) mentioned Nutrition Assistance Program for Seniors (NAPS), where eligible seniors will get a box of appropriate food every month (partner: Second Harvest). Box of food: fruits, vegetables, grain, meat, juice, cereal, beans, two pounds low fat American cheese, powdered milk, UHT milk.

Measurement

- Ratio of CAPI participants enrolled in an assistance program to those
(Continued)
not signed up
- Number of CAPI participants signing up. (Monthly.)
- Frequency of CAPI participants using the programs they are enrolled in
- Feedback on their effectiveness (see “Reintake process”, pg. 53)

References
- **Neighborhood House**
  179 Robie Street East, Saint Paul, MN
  **Contact person: Sarah Yang**, Basic Needs Program Manager (sayang@neighb.org)
Recommendations

VOLUNTEERS
Volunteer message center
Empowering volunteers and improving the efficiency of their efforts

“Restock canned goods, sweep the floor, pack the rice. Restock canned goods, sweep the floor, pack the rice,” chanted Pao under his breath as he pulled out cartons of newly delivered canned beans and peanut butter from the EFN pallet. Beside him, Hli and James laughed. They liked to tease Pao for being a fastidious person. ‘Hey, Pao, CAPI put up the message board for a reason, you know? You can always check it when you’re done stocking the shelves to know what to do next. Plus, what if Toua changes the order of things we need to do?’ Pao grinned. ‘Just admit it. The both of you are bad at remembering things.”

Basis of recommendation
The number of volunteers is minimal, with some being consistent from week-to-week, and others only appearing once or twice. This, along with the unpredictable nature of donations that are received, means that volunteers are they are heavily reliant on the coordinator’s instructions in order to know what needs to be done.

Key points
- “Volunteer Message Center” (mounted dry-erase board)
  - Daily tasks checklist: Checklist for what needs to be done at the shelf so the coordinator doesn’t have to be directing them all over or simple instructions and tasks that need to be fulfilled. This could even be expanded beyond what is currently done, to include other things such as shelf-facing (moving all the items to the front), sweeping, greeting participants, etc
  - Important announcements: Depending on the (day, week, month), there may be special messages that the coordinator wants everyone to aware of (e.g. “On Monday we received a huge load of green beans. Please encourage people to take as much as they want, as we can’t keep it past Wednesday”)

Measurement:
- Number of one-time volunteers
- Number of regular volunteers
- Number of volunteer hours
- Volunteer survey questions (see “Volunteer Management System”, p. 59)

References
- Neighborhood House uses a dry-erase board as a volunteer message center, keeping it updated daily.

Contact info:
- Neighborhood House
  179 Robie Street East, Saint Paul, MN
  Contact person: Sarah Yang, Basic Needs Program Manager
  (sayang@neighb.org)

A note about participant goals:
This suggestion is primarily focused on increasing the efficiency of the food shelf service model by improving the use of volunteers. However, per other suggestions, there may be participants serving as volunteers as well. In this way, it would could their sense of self-confidence and self-sufficiency.
Volunteer management system

Connecting with volunteers to provide an optimal service

"Pao was really happy to see his uncle, Li, turn up at the food shelf to volunteer. Li needed more work reference in his resume to apply for a job at local factories. Meanwhile, he just needed something to keep himself preoccupied, or as he would jokingly say ‘an escape from my wife’s constant nagging’. Toua was not available to brief Li, but it was not an issue. Pao pulled up the orientation video on the iPad that Toua often used, and he sat there in silence as Li watched. Pao then showed him around the space, and where the tasks listed would take place. Li flexed his arms and grinned. ‘Time to get started, nephew. I think I am ready.’"

Basis of recommendation

One of our key observations in the food shelf was the inconsistency and minimal presence of active volunteers. The most volunteers observed at any time was four; typically there were 2 or 3 volunteers present. In addition to making changes to the Volunteer message board (see pg. 58) in the food shelf space, a system for recruiting and managing existing volunteers would be helpful in managing large groups or individuals who feel uniquely tied to CAPI and desire to volunteer on a short-term or long-term basis.

We also heard directly from participants that they would love for ways to give back to CAPI or otherwise help the coordinator with his work. By creating a Volunteer Management System that also communicates with Hmong-speaking or other Asian immigrant populations, we hope to create a more sustainable volunteer base, that could expand beyond the food shelf, and into CAPI’s general services as well.

Key points

We recommend that all of the following are available online and in paper form, for most effective distribution.

- **Welcome Kit**
  - **Average tasks**: List and briefly explain the common tasks required of volunteers. Include schedule and ideal commitment expectations.
  - **Orientation video**: Visualize tasks for those volunteers who may not speak or read English/Hmong, using Hmong narration and including other subtitles

- **Volunteer surveys**
  - **Sign-up** (New volunteers): Collect demographic data on new volunteers, including their availability (days, hours), affiliation (i.e. a school, organization), and how they heard about CAPI
  - **Follow-up** (Current/Former volunteers): Communicate with volunteers within 2 months of their initial participation, to understand their experience and make necessary improvements/changes to the Volunteer Management System
    - How helpful do/did you feel when you volunteer(ed) at CAPI?
    - What are other ways you would like to help?
    - What could we do to make the volunteer experience better?

- **Volunteer message board** (See “Volunteer message board,” p. 58)
For current or former CAPI participants, we recommend providing additional volunteer opportunities that speak to their specific capacities and unique connection to CAPI.

- **Participant-specific volunteer opportunities**
  - Pack rice
  - Greet participants at Sabanthani
  - Assist in re-intake process (e.g. providing translation to new participants)

**Measurement**

- Number of one-time volunteers
- Number of regular volunteers
- Number of volunteer hours
- Number of volunteers who are current/former food shelf participants
- Volunteer survey responses (sign-up and follow-up surveys)

**References**

- **For an ‘ideal’ scenario**
  - **White Bear Lake Emergency Food Shelf** (URL: http://whitebearfoodshelf.org) 1884 Whitaker Street, White Bear Lake, MN 55110. Contact person: Ann Searles (ann@whitebearfoodshelf.org). They have a really impressive, intuitive electronic volunteer management system that is customizable to suit any food shelf’s technical and electronic needs. Ann spoke highly of it at the MACC Food Shelf Affinity Group meeting (July 25, 2013). Among the uses she highlighted: volunteers can enter client’s name and check their last visit, and connect the system to the weighing scale to record the pounds received automatically. For drop-by donors, volunteers can also customize and print out donation letter. Among the hardware that one can connect to this system include touchscreen devices, computers, weighing scales, pallet-type weighing scales, and electronic card swipe devices. Ann Searles is in talks with her Second Harvest representative to expand on the use of this system. Donald Warneke has recently visited the food shelf (on September 18, 2013), and will be able to report further on this system.

- **Keystone Community Services, Midway Food Shelf.** Keystone's Midway Food Shelf recruits its participants as volunteers. They are first screened, then provided a two-hour training and training manual, where volunteers are briefed on client serving etiquette, equipment handling, and other related training. New volunteers then will have to 'shadow' an existing volunteer to see the tasks in action.
(Continued)

Contact info:

- **White Bear Lake Emergency Food Shelf**, http://whitebearfoodshelf.org
  1884 Whitaker Street, White Bear Lake, MN 55110
  **Contact person: Ann Searles** (ann@whitebearfoodshelf.org)

- **Keystone Community Services, Midway Food Shelf**
  1916 University Ave. W., St. Paul, MN
  (651) 917-3792
  Hours: Monday-Friday, 10:00-11:30 and 1:00-3:30 p.m. Walk-in only.
  **Contact person: Christine Pulver** (cpulver@keystoneservices.org)
  Director, Basic Needs Program.
Volunteer recruitment campaign

Increasing ties in the community through meaningful involvement with the food shelf

“Sheng Lee liked seeing new faces in the food shelf. Today, the volunteer assisting her with food collection is a high school senior by the name of Pao Vue. Recently, CAPI struck a deal with the nearby high school to provide community engagement opportunities to the students. The students got additional credits out of it, and would be able to put the experience in their resume. Pao told Sheng that he signed up to give back to his community in a more meaningful way, as most of his relatives were once CAPI’s food shelf participants. Pao informed Sheng of what’s new and fresh, and helped push the cart as she selected the items she wanted from the shelves.”

**Basis of recommendation**

We recommend this in tandem with having a volunteer task checklist and volunteer management system. One of our key findings throughout our research process is CAPI’s participants’ desire to be more involved with CAPI and give back for all the help they received from CAPI. The amount of physical work required to run the food shelf, the reliance on the coordinator’s presence to retrain new volunteers, and the infrequent presence of volunteers add to the necessity of a source of constant volunteers. If CAPI can establish a connection or opportunity where volunteers are 1) locked in for a minimum of a given period, 2) provided clear task guidelines on what to do, when to do, and how to do, and 3) are self-managed (via a system), this will help CAPI capitalize on the help of additional human resource.

**Key points**

- **Campaign to increase volunteerism among participants**
  - A mini campaign to encourage current participants (or their children/grandchildren) to volunteer. The incentive is resume-building skills and a professional reference, as well as the chance to give back to CAPI (as they repeatedly have asked for in our research).

- **Partner with local schools**
  - Internship/volunteering program as part of the ‘community outreach’ aspect of schooling experience. Increasingly, schools look to include a community involvement element into the curriculum to help boost the competitiveness of their graduate’s application to college. Partnering with a school (especially one with a high density of Hmong students) will provide the younger generation with an opportunity to know more about food access and food security issues, learn about culturally-appropriate food practices, and be more culturally competent.

- **Make tasks clear, achievable, and self-managed.**
  - Shannon Garret (founder and director of SMG Strategies), presenting at the Food Access Summit’s Maximize Volunteer Time and Talent breakout session, informed attendees that it is very important to make your volunteer’s tasks as clearly defined as possible (so they can set the right expectations), have the tasks fun and challenging (have an achievable goal even if the volunteer task consists of just repetitive physical tasks), and keep it self-managed (to make it empowering for the volunteers).

**Measurement**

- Number of new volunteer sign-ups per campaign
- Length of stay per volunteer (on average) per campaign
(Continued)

- Volunteer exit interview
  - Reason for leaving
  - General sentiment on the experience
  - Feedback on how to improve the process/experience

References

- **The Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration** has commissioned Mai Moua of Leadership Paradigms to do original research on volunteerism in immigrant and refugee communities. The report can be found at URL: http://mavanetwork.org/diversity

- **Neighborhood House** has a clearly defined list of volunteer tasks to make it attractive for volunteers to sign up (clear expectations, clear tasks, clear deliverables). URL: http://www.neighb.org/volunteer_aboutus.aspx

Contact info:

- **Neighborhood House**
  179 Robie Street East, Saint Paul, MN
  **Contact person: Sarah Yang**, Basic Needs Program Manager (sayang@neighb.org)
Recommendations

COMMUNITY OUTREACH
The Hmong Community as Experts

Connecting with and sharing among the community-at-large

“Girls are not encouraged to pursue education. They aren’t even told they can have dreams. But this is changing. It doesn’t mean going against Hmong culture. It could mean embracing culture. We living today have the power to redefine culture everyday.” MayKao Hang delivered her speech earnestly to the audience of CAPI participants, mostly mothers, grandmothers, and daughters. It was a meaningful event for everyone present to hear from MayKao, currently the CEO of the Wilder Foundation. Nancy was glad she could bring Ker along for this event. She remembered encouraging Mai, her daughter, to work hard and pursue her dreams. Now it would be Ker’s time. She gazed fondly at her granddaughter. ‘Grandma, can I be like her someday?’ ‘Of course you can.’

Basis of recommendation:

Key members of the Hmong community are sensitive to cultural shifts and changes that have happened and are happening within their community-at-large. We are fortunate to have an abundant amount of progressive thinkers and leaders within the Twin Cities community. We recommend inviting them to attend a listening session, asking them to share their stories of their own hardship and eventual success, in order to embolden or empower CAPI participants in a comfortable setting.

A prime example of an engaging guest would be Maykao Hang, CEO of the Wilder Foundation. She could be a guest speaker at a listening session to share her own experiences as a Hmong woman who defied all odds to become a leader and a role model for many Hmong girls. Another great example would be people who are involved with politics, like Blong Yang who is currently running for city council member for ward 5 in Minneapolis. Many of CAPI’s participants are from the same area that Blong Yang is campaigning. Not only could the participants become more active citizens, by exercising their right to vote, but Blong Yang could potentially become an outlet for them to voice their opinions and be proud that a Hmong person is representing them. Blong Yang could come into the listening sessions to listen to individual needs with the community, like the need to have more vacant lots converted into gardens.

Through the stories of these leaders who are directly working to reshape the Hmong American experience, CAPI can inspire and set a positive example for the next generation of leaders and visionaries.

Key points

- Guest presentations on relevant topics by Hmong community members, including but not limited to:
  - Maykao Hang, CEO of Wilder Foundation
  - Blong Yang, Politician and community activist
  - Kao Kalia Yang, Writer
  - Foung Her, State Senator
  - Kazoua Kong-Thao, Education/Community Activist
  - Dai Thao, Take Action MN
  - Noah Vang, Writer/Historian
  - Lee Pao Xiong, Educator/ Curator Center for Hmong Studies at Concordia University
  - Wameng Moua, CEO of Hmong Today
COMMUNITY OUTREACH // Short-term improvements

(Continued)

Measurement:
- Participant survey responses (see “Reintake process” pg. 53)

References:
Food preservation

Storing food safety and for as long as it can last

“Peeking into Nancy’s pantry, one noticed a different sight now. A year ago, there would be a few sad-looking onions, shallots and garlic bulbs, accompanied with as much rice as she could get her hands on, and a few cans in a corner, all dusty. Now, brightly-colored jars of canned tomatoes, Thai chilli peppers, and cucumbers lined the shelves. There was a small glass jar on the corner of the shelf filled with mangoes and apples. Nancy laughed. That was Ker’s pet project. She wanted to try pickling them as snacks. As her grandmother, Nancy humored her sense of adventure, and got extra apples at the food shelf just for that.”

Basis of recommendation

Preserving food (especially fresh produce) is crucial in a state like Minnesota, as harsh, long winters often mean a short growing-harvesting season. Food preservation allows for best practices to keep as much of these fresh produce as possible via methods such as canning, freezing and pickling. The Hmong community has some traditional food preservation techniques—the family of Va Chia Xiong (whom we visited) is one of those who preserve leafy greens in a large glass jar by soaking them in brine.

Key points

- Food preservation classes/workshops
- Conducted by food preservation experts (eg. from a co-op,
- Alternatively, to be taught by an ‘expert’ from the Hmong community/participants themselves.
- Dialogue or community discussion event
- Sharing of food preservation techniques among participants.

Measurement

- Number of participants in food preservation classes/workshops
- Number of food preservation classes/workshops (organized by CAPI or in collaboration with others)
- Survey of food preservation and sustainability (administered in survey via “Reintake process,” pg. 53).

References

- The Hmong community has traditional food preservation techniques they use, including basic pickling for leafy greens. CAPI participants will be a great source of knowledge in this area.
- Neighborhood House: They intend to start a food preservation workshop. CAPI should be in touch with Sarah Yang to discuss collaboration (eg. a series of workshops in both Hennepin and Ramsey counties.) She has mentioned the possibility of collaboration during our visit.
- The University of Minnesota Extension has resources on preserving and preparing food (by category). URL: http://www1.extension.umn.edu/food/food-safety/preserving/ The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (part of the University of Minnesota) provides additional information, organizations to approach and also contact person on this subject matter, all available at URL: http://www.misa.umn.edu/FarmFoodResources/LocalFood/PreservingFood/index.htm
COMMUNITY OUTREACH // Short-term improvements

(Continued)

Contacts:
- Neighborhood House
  179 Robie Street East, Saint Paul, MN
  Contact person: Sarah Yang, Basic Needs Program Manager (sayang@neighb.org)
Participant-led Cooking Classes

Sharing knowledge and best practices in food preparation

"See, I told you my idea of using those funny-looking cans of berry jelly as a sauce works!" teased Pa as she stirred the thick gooey concoction in the pot. The class was filled with the scent of sweetness and spiciness, with a touch of citrus sharpness from the lime she squeezed into the chili sauce was demonstrating to the class. Earlier on, she demonstrated making egg rolls and stuffed chicken wings. The chili sauce served as a condiment, and she surprised many of the students in her cooking class by using jellied cranberry sauce, an often overlooked item in the food shelf. Her students crowded around her, some picking up an egg roll or a stuffed wing, and tentatively dipped them into the sauce. A chorus of wonderment broke out. 'Wow this is good. The color looks beautiful, too,' commented Vue, one of her younger students. 'Wait till you see what you can do with mashed potatoes. That's for next week's class,' laughed Pa.

Basis of recommendation

1) From our various informal interviews at the food shelf and the second community listening event, we gathered that participants would like to know more about using the food items they got from the food shelves. Some noted that they avoided certain items that were not familiar to them. 2) We heard conversations and had anecdotes of participants taking ‘less popular’ items from the food shelf because they found a way to utilize them - either as an ingredient in their meal, or sometimes for other purposes (eg. poultry feed).

We come to see education and awareness as a key to increasing their food choices at the food shelf (i.e. willingness to take food items that are less familiar because they know what to do with it), and in increasing their self confidence (i.e. the assurance that there will be a meal on the table tomorrow, because they have more food items to cook with). We want the sharing of best practices among participants so the ‘recipes’ are not dictated by CAPI, but are shared among members of the community. CAPI is to serve as this conduit or ‘meeting space’.

Key points:

- **Community sharing cooking classes**
  - CAPI participants to share their recipes and cooking tips with each other. Each session can be thematic - eg. cooking with seasonal vegetables, Hmong traditional cooking, cooking with food shelf classics (i.e. canned goods and the Asian staples), American cooking with a Hmong twist, etc. This is to empower participants to share their knowledge and innovation with each other.

- **Culturally enriching cooking classes**
  - Elder Hmong participants (especially women) to share their recipes with other participants (especially the younger participants). Dishes taught will be traditional Hmong cooking to foster cultural continuity via food.

- Note that all the recommended cooking classes make use of CAPI participants as a source of expert knowledge. This changes their perception of what they eat, how they eat, and validates their knowledge on making food available to the family.

Measurement

- Number of participants in each class
- Number of classes conducted per year
- Number of CAPI participants stepping up to lead a class
- Number of returning ‘students’ in the class
References

- Cooking events currently done by CAPI. CAPI's current model of organizing community events with a ‘cooking class’ focus is a good start to this broader model. CAPI can incorporate the nutrition aspect of having a Simply Good Eating consultant/presenter with the suggestions above; the Simple Good Eating consultant can talk about the nutrition value of the recipe taught by the participant-leader of these sessions, thus enriching the understanding of participants of these cooking classes with regards to the things they cook at home. It also provides incentives for the participant-leaders to be healthy and savvy about doing so in meal preparation.
Recommendations

PARTNERSHIPS
**Mobile Farmers’ Market with Hmong American Farmer’s Association**

Introducing another stream of fresh produce to the community, from the community

“Here you go,’ said the elderly gentlemen as he handed Nancy her bag of vegetables. Nancy was thrilled to be able to use her EBT card at the local farmers’ market. This new farmers’ market, located in the heart of North Minneapolis, had many Hmong and Vietnamese farmers. It made her happy to know that she could support them by purchasing produce from them. It made her happier to know that she could cook Mai and Ker’s favorite squash and ground pork dish tonight. She could do so more often, now—without the card, she would not have enough money to do so.”

**Basis of recommendation**

During the Food Access Summit, Sook Jin talked to one of Hmong American Farmers Association’s summer interns, Addison Vang, on the project he was working on—establishing mobile farmers’ markets in low-income areas. CAPI can partner with HAFA on this by identifying where most of the CAPI food shelf participants are, and bringing a Hmong mobile farmers’ market to their area of residence. If combined with the SNAP/EBT program, this can be a powerful partnership that will benefit both CAPI and HAFA. CAPI will be able to introduce another fresh produce source that is more readily accessible to its food shelf participants, and HAFA will be able to target its mobile farmers’ markets to areas with high Hmong population, so their constituents (Hmong farmers) can contribute to the well-being of their fellow Hmongs.

Thus far, most Hmong-focused farmer’s markets are located in St Paul, notably the weekend farmer’s market located in the parking lot of Unidale Mall/Sun Foods (corner Dale St and University Ave).

**Key points**

- **Bring a mobile market to North Minneapolis** to provide low income families (especially the Hmong) with a source of fresh food on a weekly basis.
- **Use data and analysis from CAPI’s participants and Hunger Free data** to find out best location for this.
- Potentially combine with food rescue or food pick-up from farmers in the mobile farmers’ market to eliminate wastage and provide the farmers an opportunity to give back to the community.

**Measurement**

- Number of mobile farmers’ markets (from this partnership)
- Number of farmers/vendors per mobile farmer’s market
- Number of visitors per mobile farmers’ market
- General survey of the attendees and vendors of the farmers’ market

**References**

- **The Hmong American Farmers Association** (HAFA), is a relatively new non-profit created in October 2011 to serve, support and advocate for Hmong American farmers and their families. HAFA is the only organization in Minnesota that was started by and is led by Hmong American farmers. It is the only one staffed by bilingual and bicultural Hmong Americans with over 40 years of combined experience in farming. And it is the only one singularly focused on the advancement
of Hmong American farmers and their families.

- **The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy** runs a program to help facilitate starting mini farmer’s market (URL: http://www.iatp.org/issue/mini-markets). According to its website, “IATP helped secure passage of a 2007 City of Minneapolis policy that greatly reduced the time and expense of starting a small market. This new policy has enabled a variety of community centers, senior residences and other neighborhood organizations to host a mini farmers market right on their own property. Since the inception of the project, IATP has provided training, technical assistance, promotional support, evaluation and other services to our Network of Mini Markets. Starting in 2012, IATP is transitioning leadership of the Mini Market Network to four community organizations that will serve as Network Coordinators (Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches, Kingfield Farmers Market, West Broadway Business and Area Coalition, and the Northeast Minneapolis Farmers Market). The Network Coordinators will act as the liaisons between the markets and the City of Minneapolis, provide an ‘umbrella’ service with the State Department of Agriculture so that the markets can accept Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) coupons, help with technical assistance and troubleshooting throughout the market season, and foster communication among market managers. Each existing market has been assigned to one of the four Network Coordinators.” Contacts are listed in the URL below.

**Contact info:**

- **The Hmong American Farmers Association**
  941 Lafond Avenue W, Suite 100, Saint Paul, MN 55104
  http://www hmongfarmers.com
  **Contact person:** Pakou Hang, Executive Director (pakou@hmongfarmers.com)

- **The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy**
  http://www.iatp.org/issue/mini-markets
Produce Pick-ups (from farmer’s market)

Increasing the selection of fresh produce in the food shelf

“We have too much of these for the season. Harvest has been really good! I am sure these will come in handy,’ laughed Mr Hang, handing over a large box of Thai chilli peppers to Toua and Pao. They thanked him and loaded the box into the CAPI van. This weekend, they were scheduled to pick up excess produce from the farmers at the new North Minneapolis Farmer’s Market. The farmers were often generous as they understood the need for fresh produce to add on to CAPI’s food shelf offerings. CAPI’s campaign to recruit farmers to contribute proved to be a success - it appealed to their core values surrounding food and feeding the family.”

Basis of recommendation

This is another method of increasing the selection and quantity of fresh produce in the food shelf. This suggestion relies heavily on coordination of these partnerships with farmers, farmer’s markets, and volunteers (from CAPI). CAPI participants have a preference for healthy food (see “Participant data”), and having produce pick-ups can help expand the variety of fresh produce that will be available to them at the food shelf.

Key points:

• CAPI’s van as primary transport.
  › We can transform the van into a vehicle for produce pick-up by removing the seats from within the van.
  › A regular volunteer can make the pick-ups instead of the food shelf coordinator if the task is clearly outlined
• This can be beneficial to the farmers, too, as they would not waste their produce.

Measurement

• Total pick-up weight per week
• Number of contributors (farmers/vendors) who signed up and participated

References

• The unofficial guide to farmers’ markets in the Twin Cities (URL:http://twincitiesfarmersmarkets.com/the-markets/) lists all markets according to area, their offerings, and their website/contact details. This will help CAPI to target potential partner farmer’s markets.
• Neighborhood House runs regular weekly food pick-ups from the St Paul Farmer’s Market and Trader Joe’s.

Contact info:

• Neighborhood House
  179 Robie Street East, Saint Paul, MN
  Contact person: Sarah Yang, Basic Needs Program Manager (sayang@neighb.org)
Partnership with Asian grocery

Creating a presence in the greater Twin Cities Asian community

“Today is special—it’s the last distribution of the special Golden Harvest bags! About 4 times a year, customers receive this special gift, provided through a partnership with the local Hmong grocery store, Golden Harvest. These donation bags (much like those you see at Cub) are purchased by their customers and are full of Hmong favorites, including rice, khaub poob and pho noodles, herbs, spices, treats for the kids (including ramen, shrimp chips, and cake mix). Items rotate each season, and are always enjoyed by CAPI participants.”

Basis of recommendation

A significant component of getting culturally-specific preferred foods is having a distributor or donor who can provide such specific items. While CAPI does a good job of acquiring rice, noodles, bamboo shoots, coconut milk, beef paste, and vermicelli noodles, there are still plenty more items that would be preferred; in addition, greater quantities of many of these items are frequently requested.

While American grocery stores such as Cub and Kowalski’s are often paired with food shelves, the food is generalized to the average recipient. Partnering with one of the many local Asian food stores would be a way to acquire more culturally-preferred foods, as well as increase awareness of CAPI amongst the Asian community. As we know, word of mouth is one of the most effective ways that participants find out about CAPI, and this could help further increase its reach.

Also, we know that the religious ceremonies of the Hmong and other Asian populations generally center around food. While much of that food (e.g. beef, eggs) is perishable, other items, such as incense and paper money, is not. Hosting ongoing collections of these items to be distributed via CAPI can be a way to helpfully defray some of the cost or burden of hosting one of these large familial gatherings.

Key points

- **Food donation drives** (Seasonal)
  - Conducted 3 or 4 times yearly
  - Request specific Hmong favorites that are typically not available at the food shelf, or which are in high demand (e.g. noodles, spice packs, soy sauce, vegetable oil) and perhaps some additional treats for the kids (e.g., ramen, shrimp chips, cake mix).

- **Ritual item collections** (Ongoing)
  - Request non-perishable items needed specifically for religious ceremonies (e.g. incense and paper money)
  - Distribute these “bags” at the food shelf and at reintake sessions, whenever it is indicated that families are in need

Measurement

- Number of food donations received
- Number of ritual items donations received
- Participant survey responses
(Continued)

References

- Neighborhood House’s partnership with Kowalski’s on Grand for a regular, annual food drive. Volunteers hand out food shopping lists to incoming customers, collect food donations and thank exiting customers who purchased food items for the food drive. Arrows pointing to the food items needed are placed beside the food labels in the store.

- A couple favorite Asian grocery stores include:
  - Golden Harvest
    900 Maryland Ave E, Saint Paul, MN 55106
    (651) 772-3200
  - Dragon Star
    633 W Minnehaha Ave St Paul, MN 55104
    (651) 488-2567
Recommendations

EVENTS
CAPI Cook-Off! Fundraiser

Generating excitement and local awareness about culturally-specific food

“We have always wanted to try Hmong food, but never knew where to start. This cook-off gave us the right avenue and excuse to do so,’ exclaimed an enthused Zachary and his girlfriend Ana, both self-proclaimed foodies from the Longbottom neighborhood in Minneapolis. ‘We heard there will be authentic Hmong home cooking here. My mom is Thai, and my dad is Mexican, so I am no stranger to spicy food,’ grinned Ana as she dug into her serving of khaub poob.

Twenty CAPI food shelf participants were invited to showcase their culinary skills at the CAPI Cook-off!, and it was heartwarming to see their families and friends coming along, cheering them and helping with the preparation of ingredients. The cook-off was such that attendees could come up to them and talk about the recipes. ‘I heard we have a stuffed chicken wings expert in the house. We need to talk to her later,’ Zachary noted as he pointed towards the direction of Nancy, one of the ‘chefs’ of the day, whose fingers deftly snuck in morsels of stuffing into a chicken wing.”

Basis of recommendation

As part of a short-term improvement to reach all three participant goals, we recommend hosting a Cook-Off fundraiser. This event would attract local foodies, locavores, and other potential CAPI supporters to the rental space (or a nearby venue) for some inspired Hmong food and healthy competition. It is a way of focusing on existing talents within the Hmong community, sharing the importance of culturally-specific food, and increasing awareness of CAPI as a social-service provider in Hennepin county.

Key points

This event would take significant planning and fundraising talents, but could become a model for a repeating annual event. The items below are not exhaustive of all the components necessary to successfully host this event; however, they give a big-picture idea of how to structure an event of this nature.

• Hmong-food competition
  › Invite CAPI participants to cook traditional Hmong dishes, providing the kitchen space and the ingredients they need to cook for the selected number of attendees
  › Create brackets and vote for winning dishes, eventually getting to one “winner”
  › Determine an appropriate prize for the winner and their family

• Food-shelf chef competition
  › Invite local chefs to cook dishes using only ingredients available at CAPI’s food shelf.
  › Create brackets and vote for winning dishes, eventually getting to one “winner”
  › Promote the winner in CAPI communications and fundraising efforts

• Marketing and promotions
  › Sell tiers of tickets (for example):
    • Foodie, $75—Sample plates from both Hmong and local chefs and participate in both votes
    • CAPI Supporter, $25—Sample plates from the Hmong cooks and participate in the Hmong vote
    • Attendee, $10—Watch cook-off and participate in additional raffles and fundraisers
  › Promote in CityPages, Minnesota Monthly, Facebook, Twitter, CAPI’s website
EVENTS // Short-term improvements

(Continued)

Goals: 1, 2, 3

- Additional on-site fundraiser
  - Silent auction/Raffles
    - Related to local food (e.g. dinner out at a local restaurant)
  - Fundraising items
    - Related to CAPI food shelf needs (e.g. “50 servings of khao poob, $50” or “Rice for a family of 10 for 1 month, $100”)

**Measurement**

- Number of tickets sold
- Number of attendees
- Number and types of donations collected
- Number of new volunteers signed up

**References**

- Kindred Kitchen (http://kindredkitchen.org/kitchen.html) Rents commercial-grade kitchen space to those looking to produce food (for profit or in-home use)
- Neighborhood House also has commercial-grade kitchen space, and could be a potential partner
Comfort Food Drive

Reframing the understanding of a food shelf participant’s needs

“Samantha and her daughter Lilly stopped by the red brick building on Lake Street, home to CAPI, to drop off two large packs of rice. Lilly recently received money as a gift from her grandparents, and had surprised Samantha when she said she would like to buy food for a food shelf. ‘Ker said her family gets food from a food shelf, and they get special food that Hmong people eat. At the moment they are collecting more special food, Mommy. Ker brought this poster to school with pictures of those food. Can we help them buy more?’ The receptionist greeted them happily, and offered Lilly a star-shaped sticker for being a hero. Lilly beamed.”

Basis of recommendation

Telling the story about why culturally-specific food is so important is critical to an organization such as CAPI, who serves a predominantly Hmong population. Doing this in a unique and memorable way is most important, as other organizations are fighting to tell similar stories in order to gain new and retain existing donors.

We recommend drawing comparisons between foods that are “comforting” to CAPI’s participants (using their direct stories) and foods that are more familiar or comforting to Minnesota’s Scandinavian population, or even other former or current immigrant populations (e.g. German, Hispanic), such as lefse, wiener schnitzel, or pozole.

This food drive could easily align with other state-wide initiatives, such as Minnesota Food Share (annually each March) or Give to the Max Day (annually on November 14).

Key points

- Collect “comfort food” stories from participants
  - Ask them to share stories about food they remember from home, food they wish they had, etc (what’s comforting and why)
  - Translate stories
  - Photograph participants, and record their names to use as testimonials
- Create comparable comfort-food stories
  - Gather stories from CAPI board members and staff about their favorite comfort foods (what and why)
- Campaign promotion outlets
  - Facebook, Twitter: Share snippets of the stories on Facebook, with weekly or daily rollouts depending on the timeline of the campaign
  - GiveMN: Create a GiveMN page that is specific to this campaign
  - Razoo: Create a Razoo donation page that is specific to this campaign, for general use
- Unique donation forms
  - Accommodate large collections of key comfort food ingredients
  - Encourage monetary donations that directly relate to the cost of a featured comfort food (i.e. “Your $500 can funds 100 servings of kahub poob”)
- Donor Thank yous
  - Include follow-up communications that reiterate this story
(Continued)

**Measurement**
- Number of total donors (via food or money)
- Previous donors
- New donors
- Pounds of food collected
- Amount of money donated

**References**
- While a number of organizations participate in Give to the Max Day or Food Awareness Month initiatives, we believe framing it in this manner is unique, and could be repeatedly used by CAPI if done well (i.e.g if it’s branded and owned by CAPI).
- **A similar initiative:** Neighborhood House partners with Kowalski’s on Grand for a regular, annual food drive. Volunteers hand out food shopping lists to incoming customers, collect food donations and thank exiting customers who purchased food items for the food drive. Arrows pointing to the food items needed are placed beside the food labels in the store.
Recommendations

ADVOCACY
Narratives of Food in Refugee and Immigrant Communities

Amplifying the voice of CAPI participants on the policy arena

“If you want to improve on our future, you must first see and walk in the world we live in,’ expressed Va Chia Xiong in earnest. ‘You all have done that. Thank you. Thank you for listening to our stories and witnessing our lives in hunger. Thank you for doing something for all of us, so our children will live better lives. That is why we choose to come to the United States of America. We believe in a brighter future for our children, just like all of you. Thank you.’ The rotunda thundered in applause. It was a landmark event at the Minnesota State Capitol in St Paul, where hundreds of food shelf participants from communities of color gathered in celebration of a new state-wide policy to fight food access and food security issues in low-income areas. CAPI food shelf participants turned up in red t-shirts bearing the CAPI logo, and they cheered loudly when Mr Xiong stepped off the stage. ‘You made us proud, dad,’ his son greeted him, eyes tearing up.”

Basis of recommendation

From our research, our interview with Amy Lopez (Greater Twin Cities United Way), and our key takeaways from the Food Access Summit, we gather that CAPI (and its strength as an organization that the Hmong community in Hennepin county identifies with) can leverage its position to ensure the narratives of hunger in the Hmong (and other immigrant and refugee communities it represents) are part of the state-wide narrative on hunger and food issues. The industry is at a potential tipping point as support for food agenda galvanize, particularly in Minnesota.

From the Food Access Summit, the key takeaway points are:

• Food access and food security issues are systemic challenges faced by our society. The underlying causes are often economic (poverty), and our current system is broken. Participants of food-related social services are caught in a vicious cycle. Our current solutions/services are temporal, and cannot solve these issues for the long run.
• Collaboration among organizations/individuals is key to strengthening our political and social impact power.
• Advocacy and lobbying are essential in creating systems-wide changes.
• CAPI has stories to tell. Legislators need (and want) to know how they impact real lives, by means other than numbers.

For the next year, attendees have called for the organizers to focus on developing the political and collaborative power of the organizations/individuals working on food access issues.

Key points

• **Play an active part in advocacy initiatives** surrounding food access, food security, and food justice. This may include awareness and educational campaigns on how these issues affect the Hmong community, and the unique challenges faced.
• **Engage in geo-political collaborations.** During the Food Access Summit, the emergency food providers in the Metro Twin Cities area got together to discuss potential strategies moving forward. This may be led by the Metro Food Access Network, a collective that meets quarterly. They have five priority areas (food security/hunger, food literacy, food production, food access, and institutional food environment). CAPI can take leadership in making sure the narratives of the communities they represent (especially on food as cultural identity) is included in the discussion.
• **Amy Lopez** is a key supporter for CAPI to step up and be the leading voice in this area. She may be a good resource on potential ways of doing this.
(Continued)

**Measurement**
- N/A

**References**
- From the Food Access Summit 2013, these following sessions are of relevance. (Documents can be found online at: http://stagetimeproductions.com/foodaccesssummit2013/presentations.htm)
  - *Growing Strategic Alliances to Get the Job Done* by Pakou Hang, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Hmong American Farmers Association
  - *Engage Your Board* by Beth Olson, Executive Director, First Witness Child Advocacy Center
  - *Working with New and Traditional Media* by Lori Young-Letica, MUSET Coordinator (multimedia specialist, events and training), First Witness Child Advocacy Center, Dan Krakker, Minnesota Public Radio, Marty Weintraub, AimClear and Hlee Lee, The UpTake
  - *Moving People to Action with Stories* by Erin Vilardi, Leadership Program Director, Athena Center for Leadership Studies at Barnard College, Columbia University
  - *Food Policy Councils: Making Them Work for Better Food Access* by Mark Winne, Mark Winne Associates
  - *How to Speak to Elected Officials about the Farm Bill* by Mary Pat Raimondi, MS, RD, President of Strategic Policy & Partnerships, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and Colleen Moriarty, Executive Director, Hunger Solutions Minnesota
  - *Collaboration: An Approach to Engaging Community and Ending Hunger* by Byron Laher, President, Community Emergency Assistance Program, Eric Nyberg, President/CEO, Keystone Community Services, Christine Pulver, Director of Basic Needs, Keystone Community Services, Cathy Maes, Executive Director, Loaves and Fishes Too, Marcia Fink, Director of Basic Needs, Greater Twin Cities United Way and Amy Lopez, Community Impact Manager, Greater Twin Cities United Way
Long-term visions

The DFG team brainstormed immediate, short-term, and long-term changes for CAPI. The long-term vision narratives were created from the perspective of a participant, and were used to elicit feedback from participants.
Sheng Lee’s Dream Food Shelf Experience

Preparing to go to shelf
Every first week of the month I wake up early anticipating and planning on going to CAPI’s food-shelf. I get myself ready and always make sure to bring along the nice sturdy bag that CAPI has provided for me. The food-shelf is located about a mile from my house in North Minneapolis. It’s within walking distance. Sometimes I would walk there if more of my kids were home, so we can each carry something. Today it’s just my youngest son and I because the rest of my children are in school, so I decided to drive to the food-shelf make it easier. My family has lived in Minneapolis ever since we arrived here in 2005. Before that we lived in a Buddhist sanctuary called Wat Tham Krabok along with more than 15,000 other Hmong people. Life was very hard compared to how we live now. My six kids can go to school and are healthy, so I am a very happy mother. I work part-time and also attend a community school that teaches English in the evening because education is very important to me. I want to work hard so that I can have a better life in the future. I am very thankful for the life that I am living today.

Waiting for intake
When I arrive at the food-shelf there were already many families who have arrived early too. The parking lot was filled so I parked on the street, not too far from the food-shelf. The building is a remote location away from CAPI’s main office building on Lake St. It’s a nice medium size single story building with a beautiful mural on the outside of the entrance depicting Hmong people harvesting rice like long ago when they used to live in Laos. When I entered the food-shelf I could smell the sweet aroma of pastries and tea that have been set out for the participants. Music was also playing in the main lobby. It was a mix of Thai, Lao, Vietnamese and Hmong. I recognized the song playing immediately and felt really relaxed. The waiting area was spacious and had seats for people to sit down. All the chairs and sofas were facing each other in a circular pattern so to promote conversation and engagement. On the tables there were books and brochures about cooking, education, health, and financing written in Hmong and English. The lobby was a clean simple setup to make people feel at home. There was even a place by the corner filled with toys and books where my son could go and play while we waited patiently. I took a number indicating my position in line waiting to be called for a short intake with a CAPI staff before I received food.

It was a busy morning so I was tenth in line. I grabbed some tea and went to sit back down. I saw a friend who lives very close by, so I decided to chat with her. We talked about how it is so much more convenient now that CAPI’s food-shelf is here in North Minneapolis. She was old and her vision was bad so driving was not an option and taking the bus all the way to South Minneapolis was very long and tedious for someone her age. Usually she would have someone drive her to South Minneapolis, but these days she
could just walk to the shelf. She told me that her grand daughter was sick and they will be performing a soul calling ritual for her this weekend. She also invited me. These ceremonies were very taxing on families and require a lot of food to serve guests who come, so it's a good thing that she was able to come out and get food just incase she won't have money to get more after the ceremony. Her number was called and a volunteer helped her to the office. I bid her farewell and continued to sit quietly.

I watched my son play happily with the toys that were at the corner of the lobby. There wasn't much but he was certainly entertained and I was able to have a little break. I looked up at the TV that was up against the wall. There was a cooking show on. The lady was preparing some sort of salad. It looks like she was cutting up some chicken and was using spinach. It looked very good. I could not understand what she was saying completely since she was talking very fast, but I understood many parts of how to prepare it. This made me think back to the days with my mother who taught me how to cook back in Laos. She had passed away when I was young, but I remember her showing me which plants in the forest were good for eating and how to prepare them for the family. I also remember learning how to cook Thai cuisine from some friends who gathered during events to prepare food during festive times. The show that was going on was very similar and without much knowledge I could figure out the gestures she was trying to convey. It gave me several ideas for when I have family gatherings at home.

**Intake**

Finally, I was called into a small room with a single desk and two chairs for guests. The lady who did intake was a very young and charming, as well as educated. Her name was Pa Houa Thao. She has been working here for only a year and told me that she graduated from the University of Minnesota with a degree in sociology. I was very proud of her and always told her to work hard. Pa Houa spoke fluently in Hmong. I have been to other food-shelves where it was primarily English speakers and it was hard, but here I can tell them what I need easily and they understood me much better. I have worked with Pa Houa many times and she greeted me with a beautiful smile. She already knew that I have been here for eight years and I have six kids. When I first arrived in Minneapolis, my sisters, who came to this country before I did took me to CAPI to look for work and to use the food-shelf. This has been one of the most helpful things that I have ever experienced. Back in Thailand no one would help us like this because we were minorities and often discriminated. All Pa Houa did was just simply asked me if anything has changed around the house. I told her that my husband had found a job again. She congratulated us. She told me that we don't have to worry; we were still qualified for the same resources as we once did. I thanked her and she marked something down quickly on her computer.
Volunteer

After that a volunteer came and took my son and I to get our food. The volunteers here were very helpful. Many of them were Hmong kids who were recruited from the local high school as a part-time volunteer opportunity. CAPI was able to set up a deal with the school to have this volunteer opportunity be more worthwhile by giving the students three elective credits for helping. Only high school seniors could volunteer and those who did worked in the morning and went back to school in the afternoon. This was a great opportunity for the community and also offered these kids a chance to be more active within their community. Those of the volunteers also had family they knew directly that also participated in the food-shelf. Creating this renewable micro community that is self-sufficient by helping each other. Many who volunteered were Hmong and knew very little Hmong, but they still understood the participants culturally and were more sensitive towards our needs. The young man that was helping me was most helpful and he was very fluent in Hmong. He told me that his name was Pao Vue and even handed a piece of candy to my son. I asked him who his parents were and when he came to the United States. He said that his parents were Noah Neng Vue and Mai Choua Thao. He came to the United States in 2004. When they arrived he was only eight years old. Now he is a senior in high school and wanted to help families who are in need. He spoke of being poverty stricken in Thailand. I knew exactly who his parents were because they had lived in the same place as my family did in Thailand. His parents were good people and had raised a fine son. Pao was most helpful. He pushed my cart for me because I was holding my son.

The food shelf

When we entered the food area, Toua Cheng the food-shelf coordinator who spoke very kind and was happy to see me back here again greeted me. Toua has been working for CAPI for ten years. His family came to the United States in 1978 so he has been living here for a long time and knows the Hmong community very well. For most of his professional life he has been a community activist and organizer within the Hmong community helping those who need it. Toua is very passionate and well respected among the elders and also by his colleagues. As I stood there waiting he told me that there was a large shipment of bread and apples today and said that Pao will guide me through the food-shelf.

The room where all the food was housed was very liner. It weaved like an obstacle course where traffic was easily directed and controlled. Each section as designated with numbers indicating how many items you can grab per family size. Many people are respectful of this system and only take what they need. We started off by the fresh vegetables. I asked Pao when these vegetables came in, and he told me that they came in fresh this morning from the local Hmong gardens around Minneapolis. I grabbed some
radishes, green onions, and cilantro. Next I grabbed a carton of eggs and some milk. Milk was very expensive and my son drinks a lot of it to grow big and strong. I finally arrived at the Asian food section. This is why I come to this food-shelf rather than other ones in the area. We like getting noodles, bamboo, and fish sauce, but most importantly we can get rice. Rice is an essential food for our diet. I can still remember working in the rice fields back in Laos as a young child. I would run around guarding the rice from rodents or bugs. I would also stay out in the fields in a hut with my father all night to protect the rice field from thieves and evil spirits. I have many good and bad memories with rice. Many of the bad memories with rice were not having enough of it, like when my family lived in Ban Vinai refugee camp. The rationed rice was filthy and could barely feed a family of ten. But today I am most thankful for the kind people who are able to give us this free rice. Without it my family would go hungry. I appreciate CAPI’s efforts and will always remember their good deed.

After I grabbed what I needed from the Asian section I went onto the canned goods. I left behind the fish sauce and pho noodles because we still had some at home and I wanted to be conscious just incase other families needed it more. I don't really like the canned food, but I still take some because there is no limit. I usually take spaghetti sauce, fruits, green beans, and canned tuna. These are things that my children like to eat. I come here mostly for them, so that they don't have to worry about food and can focus in school. I want them to grow up strong and smart. I don't want them to have the same struggles as their uneducated mother. I want them to worry free as they work towards their goals.

The last stop for me was the bread and apples that arrived this morning. I took some French bread and a birthday cake for my children. I also saw some croissants; they are my favorite so I took them. There were lots of apples. Pao handed me a plastic bag and I filled it with ones that looked nice. Many were bruised and soft, but my kids still enjoyed fruits. They like these sour green ones because you can cut them up and sprinkle some salt along with crushed red pepper onto them. This was the last stop. Pao helped me repack all my goods into the bag that I was given by CAPI and also brought me a box for some of the extra food that could not fit in my bag. After he helped me pack Pao pushed my shopping cart up onto a scale and recorded the pounds of food that I had received today. I had taken sixty pounds of canned and dried goods along with some fresh produce. I thanked Pao and said farewell hoping to see each other next time. He reminded me that if I needed extra food this month just come back a second time.

**Leaving the food shelf**

As I left the food-shelf area I saw the surveys and a white board that allowed participants to request food. Usually I am very happy with what I get, but
today I wanted to write something down on the board. I saw that some people had wrote chicken nuggets, ice cream, tofu, fish paste, and more so I wrote down Thai chili peppers since this year I didn’t have the time to start my own garden. From here I pushed the cart by myself through a short hallway and back into the lobby. Sometimes the volunteers help me push it all the way to my car if they see that I needed an extra hand, but today it was busy, so I pushed it myself. I pushed the cart back to the entrance and saw that there were more people, but they sat patiently and quietly chatting amongst themselves waiting their turns and the kids also played joyfully in the corner of the lobby. I saw one of my cousins who had arrived a little late today. I stopped briefly to talk to her. She said she was going to ask me to participate for her today, but she had some time and decided to come herself. If she had asked me to do it the intake process would have been the same except that she would have to come in another time or by phone just to do a quick update of her current status that month. I said good-bye to her and went out into my car. I loaded up the goods and put my son in the car and we drove home happy.

Key points

• Location is in North Minneapolis
• It’s a single story building with sufficient space
• Volunteers are recruited from that community of people
• The food-shelf area is designed for a smooth flow of traffic
• Volunteers assist participant from start to finish
• Play area for kids and sitting area for adults with music and TV
• It was a place for learning and educating like the food channel
• Place to suggest food or voice opinion
There were days when she remembered the taste of the Mekong as if it was only yesterday that she lost her brothers to it. There were days when she remembered the warmth of the sun she basked in as the ladies sat under the large tree in Ban Vinai, their chatter low, urgent, and their fingers animated. Needles and threads were all over. People she knew made appearances on those blue cloths, their stories embedded and preserved in colors as they make their way over the sea, taking the journey before most of them ever got to. She was then in her young twenties, married to the handsomest young man in her village, and her daughter Mai was their sun and sky.

There were days when she remembered how her stomach rumbled in the quiet darkness of this new world. At times it became so loud, that in the silence of the night, it sounded almost deafening, like the ringing of a gunshot in the thick of the jungle.

These days, her alarm clock rings louder. She gets up to her morning routine of watering her plants, cleaning up, and preparing a simple breakfast for little Ker—her granddaughter. Mai found a job in Rochester as a nurse with the Mayo Clinic, but does not earn enough to pay for daycare. Leaving her in the arms of her grandmother in Brooklyn Park makes more sense. Ker mumbles to herself as she walks into the bathroom and prepares for school— English words that sounds like a lilting rhyme to Nancy’s ears.

Nancy. That becomes her name after an episode where she got so sick, the txiv neeb suggested a name change. Said that her given name was too attached to the Mekong River, and that maybe taking on a new name that reflects her presence in America to help her soul feel at ease with its decision to be here. She picked Nancy, the name of her nurse that was at the Children’s Hospital when she gave birth to her children, Pa, Vue, and Tommy.

These days, the school bus honks louder. Ker ran out with her toast in her hand, and Nancy followed suit. The bus ride was filled with the chatter of other mothers – and sometimes grandmothers—and their children. Ker got into an animated discussion with a group of other second graders about the New Year’s dance they were enlisted to perform in a month’s time.

They got to the School. The building has a different name, but to Nancy, she always calls it the School. It was not just Ker’s school, but their School. Ker joined the younger ones in their respective classes, learning things like English and numbers and how to speak Hmong and dance Hmong, but the older ones—ones like Nancy—spent their time on what she considered as learning about their culture and other things necessary to survive in the new world. Nancy was a great cook, and so she was asked to head the kitchen. She remembered that very moment in time, when she was going to the
food shelf for her regular pick-up of rice, noodles, produce and sometimes cans. She was approached by Toua, the nice young man who worked there, and he asked her if she would be interested in this new initiative. She also remembered her response. “Me? I am too old and too stupid to be teaching anyone! I cannot possibly lead anything. I don’t even work!”

“We are trying to preserve the culture. We want you to share your recipes and talent for cooking. There are also classes. Ker gets to go to school, and you will be there too, in the same building. You can teach others to cook wholesome meals for your grandchild and all the other children, and they will be served these food for lunch. This way, you will be able to make sure she eats well and healthy. If you want, you can attend classes too. We have Ms. Xiong who said she would love to teach paj ntaub, as her mother was the one who started making them in the refugee camps. Mr. Lee will teach gardening for those who want to work on the vegetable plots we have on the side of the building. There is a bus who will pick you and Ker up in the mornings, and send you back before the evenings. Isn’t that great?”

Nancy remembered staring at the cans of preserved fruit and boxes of mashed potatoes she cradled in her arms. “There will be food for us?” She asked quietly. Toua nodded, earnest. She had begun to treat him like her son, for he reminded her of Tommy. If Toua said it will be good for her to sign up, then she should. “Alright. Let me know what I need to go.”

Today, she walked into the kitchen, knowing very well that James, Dawb and Hli will be there. She had promised them yesterday that she would teach them how to make the perfect stuffed chicken wings. That dish was a favorite of the school children, and Nancy could never make enough to cater to the entire school. They would also prepare stir-fry of vegetables and meat for today’s meal. In the afternoon, she would attend a traditional song-and-poetry reciting competition in the main lobby area. It was something she was looking forward to, as Hli would be participating. Hli had been modest about her beautiful voice, but Nancy knew better.

James was a fast learner. His stuffed chicken wings were neatly done and tightly packed. Dawb and Hli did a great job too, and Nancy could not be prouder of them. James excused himself during lunchtime, as he had to complete his homework for tonight’s English class. Dawb spent the time chatting with her nieces in the cafeteria, their little fingers plucking apart the wings she carefully made hours earlier. Hli was nowhere to be seen, no doubt preparing for the competition. Nancy smiled. She missed the company of younger people when all her children moved out to pursue their careers. Only Mai remained in Minnesota, but she would spend her weekdays in Rochester, and only come home over the weekends to visit Ker. After losing her husband to heart attack ten years ago, Nancy lived a quiet
and lonely life if it was not for Ker’s presence. Now, by helping out in the kitchen, she felt invigorated. The chatter of the younger ones reminded her of those times when her children would all help her out around the house.

The children dispersed from the cafeteria. Nancy knew it was time to gather in the lobby for the competition. She bumped into Toua on her way there. He was leading a family of five to the office. He greeted her cheerfully and introduced her to the family. Nancy smiled, and decided to accompany them. As the husband talked to Toua about his family’s needs, Nancy’s eyes rested on the youngest child of the family. The little girl looked at her, unfazed, curious. Just like Mai when we first asked for help, she thought to herself. “She reminded me of my daughter,” said Nancy to the mother. “Send her to school here. And come spend some time here, too. We will take care of you.” The mother smiled nervously. “Thank you. It has been rough. We finally heard of this place, and had to give it a try. We got too hungry. None of us can speak good English, and we cannot find work. This was our last resort.”

As Toua handed the husband his intake card and led the family to the food shelf to select food items from the shelves, Nancy quietly nodded to the wife. “We all came here because of that. We needed it. We also needed everyone else’s support to start living again. This is a good place to start.” Toua came out with a bag of rice. To the backdrop of families chattering and the fan whirring, the bag of rice fell into the family’s cart with a resounding thud.
CAPI’s identity is key.

CAPI’s strong connection to its Hmong participants—through Hmong-speaking staff, the culturally-specific food, and a strong connection to the community—are really what makes the organization unique. Participants exhibit a strong emotional connection to the organization, forgiving its shortcomings.
while remaining appreciative of and loyal to the organization. As you consider the recommendations provided to you, the DFG team wants to reinforce that this identity should remain strong and central to your vision.

Our research indicates that nothing in CAPI’s food shelf service is broken.

Our recommendations are provided to help make a good thing better.