

HMONG CULTURAL CENTER STRATEGIC PLAN 2014-2018

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About Hmong Cultural Center



Hmong Cultural Center's (HCC) mission is **to promote the personal development of children, youth and adults through education while providing resources that enhance cross-cultural understanding between Hmong and non-Hmong.**

Established in 1992, Hmong Cultural Center is well-known in the community for its long-running Citizenship, English as a Second Language (ESL), Qeej, Dance, Marriage and Funeral Song Instruction Classes. The St. Paul-based organization has an established reputation for providing cultural education and bridging parents, community members and organizations who are seeking to improve cross-cultural understanding.

In the late 1990s, the Hmong Cultural Center started the Hmong Resource Center Library (www.hmonglibrary.org), a unique collection of Hmong-related books, dissertations, journal and newspaper articles which has grown into the largest collection of Hmong-related scholarly research in the United States. Hundreds of high school and college students, scholars and community members use the resource center library each year, many of these library patrons come from beyond the Twin Cities area to utilize this institution's unique collections of books, theses, dissertations and journal articles about the Hmong.

In 2003, Hmong Cultural Center developed a "Building Bridges: Teaching about the Hmong in Our Communities" (Hmong 101) curriculum which has been shared with at least 5,000 persons in community presentations and through visits to the center over the past decade. The center has also engaged in recent initiatives to develop resources that educate the public about Hmong traditional folk arts including:

- www.learnabouthmong.net, a multimedia website with videos and powerpoint presentations intended to teach about Hmong folk arts and history and culture
- www.hmongembroidery.org a recently launched virtual Hmong textiles museum in partnership with the Hmong Archives intended to engage viewers in learning about Hmong culture and Hmong folk arts as practiced by Hmong Minnesotans.

Over the past twenty years, Hmong Cultural Center has served the Hmong and non-Hmong community with several important programs to promote education about Hmong culture and history and facilitate the adaptation of Hmong in American Society. Looking ahead, it is important to celebrate from our experiences as well as learn how we can provide future direction for sustained impact.

The long-term goals as stated in the organizational bylaws adopted in December of 2005 are:

- 1) To teach traditional Hmong culture and knowledge;
- 2) To expand community awareness and understanding of Hmong people and their culture;
- 3) To provide Hmong people with community resources necessary for their success in a multi-cultural society;
- 4) To assist Hmong and non-Hmong people in creating opportunities that promote Hmong traditional medicine, religion, language, art, and music;
- 5) To provide community gatherings that strengthen family and clan unity within the Hmong community;
- 6) To provide community between Hmong children and elders for the purpose of reaffirming self-esteem and mutual respect.

Summary

Through interviews with 20 Staff, Board, funders and community members and with three focus groups of 11 adult learners, the data informs on priorities for HCC programming and administration. These fall into three core areas:

- Program development: Besides the ESL and Citizenship classes and cultural classes such as qeej, wedding and funeral practices, HCC programs were not well known. Furthermore, there is recognition of the cultural programs above, but not advanced knowledge of program delivery and outcomes.
- Administrative processes: As a smaller organization, there has been a history of loose organizational practices which have led to ambiguity around roles and responsibilities, performance measurements and external communication. This has hindered the organization to leverage its small staff to adequately represent HCC in the community.
- Organizational outlook: As is the usual case with strategic planning, there is a lack of clear direction of HCC's future to guide capitalizing on opportunities and executing improvements. This can impede branding, fundraising and community engagement.

Based upon this feedback from internal and external stakeholders, the following goals are recommended for HCC for the next five years:

- 1) Evaluate program effectiveness as it relates to the mission.
- 2) Develop a multi-year fundraising plan to include a diverse revenue stream.
- 3) Establish sound organizational practices related to personnel, including volunteer management.
- 4) Enhance community partnerships through networks and collaborations.
- 5) Build organizational capacity to adequately and efficiently support programs and services.



Environmental Analysis

Hmong Cultural Center was established for the purpose of promoting and preserving Hmong cultural heritage and teaching about the Hmong people. At the time of the organization's establishment in 1992, the first Hmong families had been in the United States just under 20 years. In 2014, Hmong families have been in the United States for almost 40 years. There are more American-born Hmong than there are foreign-born. More than half of the Hmong in MN are under 18 years of age. Hmong families are slowly but steadily moving up economically, socially and politically. There is vast diversity within the Hmong community in terms of religion, political views, economic mobility and educational outcome. Furthermore, intergenerational differences between young and old, first generation and second generation, are complicating cultural beliefs and practices.

While the changing population requires HCC to reassess how we remain relevant to Hmong Americans, it also means HCC has an even more critical task to capture cultural traditions and educate a new generation of Hmong in MN.

The funding landscape for the nonprofit sector has been drastically affected and shaped by the Great Recession. Technological advances have resulted in high expectations of efficiencies for nonprofit operations. Mobile technology and web-based programs can streamline service delivery and enhance administrative capacity. Furthermore, technology has become a primary tool for communicating and connecting. Nonprofits can no longer address issues on their own; to adequately make long-term positive for the communities they serve, they must be able to work with others who share similar goals and who can enhance organizational and administrative capacity. The ability to network and collaborate is critical to strengthening communities for the far future. MN has consistently ranked high in civic engagement and volunteerism. Connecting with other organizations will not be enough; connection to individuals who can support an organization's mission will increase the number of champions for our mission but leverage their skills and networks to affect change at the community and policy levels. And finally, as funding become more competitive and as nonprofit adopt business practices to demonstrate return on investment, the sectors are blurring in terms of financial sustainability and organizational protocols. Nonprofit organizations are stepping up on important causes and are doing so through creative means such as social ventures, cause-related marketing and lean processes.

Organizational Analysis

HCC can be categorized as a cultural arts nonprofit organization. There is an executive director and nine staff, some of whom are part-time employees. Currently, a six-member Board of Directors governs HCC and is responsible for the performance of the Executive Director, the fiscal responsibility of the organization and the execution of the mission.

The organization's operating budget has ranged between \$265,000 and \$280,000 over the last five years, with a significant amount received from one funder. This places much responsibility for overall organizational sustainability upon one program: Adult Basic Education. There are limited alternative funders for this program beside the current funder. Funding for Cultural Enrichment and the Resource Center has been limited and less consistent. HCC is not alone in facing challenges to securing funds for programs under these two areas. In Minnesota, cultural arts organizations received about 18% of the \$144,400,000 in foundation grants to the arts, culture and humanities (\$25,992,000). However, after subtracting the largest grants totaling \$25,100,000 to five recipients, only \$892,000 remain for the remainder of the arts, culture and humanities organizations in MN.

Another major funder of the arts is the Minnesota State Arts Board, which awarded over \$21 million in grants last year. Their take on arts in MN is that "the arts define who we are. This is a place where people are transformed by high-quality arts experiences, and see the arts as essential to their communities. The arts are integrated into all aspects of our lives, connecting people of all ages and cultures, fostering understanding and respect." HCC is a recipient of MN State Arts Board grant awards.

While interviewees acknowledged HCC's commitment to its mission, they repeated a lack of focus and future direction for HCC. They also weren't confident describing current programs and services, only naming one or two services which they weren't sure were still active or not. They expressed not receiving any regular communications and updates from HCC. And depending on the interviewee, there was obscurity about who was the main contact for HCC: Txongpao or Mark.

Program Analysis

HCC has programs under three core departments. Under their Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Literacy, HCC offers English as a Second Language (ESL), Citizenship and Civics Classes. Through Cultural Enrichment, HCC provides classes in qeej, dance, Hmong funeral and marriage rituals. Finally, the Resource Center has the library, the Building Bridges crosscultural curriculum and the artifacts collections. The ABE program has become an anchor in HCC in terms of activeness and in revenues. The Cultural Enrichment and Resource Center have been valuable supportive programs but has not had the external investments to expand or engage larger audiences.

With such a heavy reliance on ABE, its success or failure will have significant impact on HCC as an organization. As the Hmong American demographic shifts to include a higher number of citizens and English speakers, enrollment will continue to decline at dramatic rates. However, there are growing numbers of English language learners and legal permanent residents among emerging immigrant populations such as the Somali, Karen and Burmese.

The Cultural Enrichment and Resource Center both include unique and important cultural education which is not readily available elsewhere in the community. The documentation of the wedding and funeral processes marked a critical benchmark in capturing oral traditions to be passed on from generation to the next. The Resource Center's collections have acquired scholarly and popular literature, artifacts and an extensive on-line tool on learning about Hmong.

Interviewees expressed the valuable work of HCC teaching wedding and funeral songs and qeej. They would like to see outreach to recruit more Hmong youth and adults to learn the cultural rituals. They also found the ABE classes to be necessary but agreed that at some point in the near future, they would no longer be needed. Only about half of the interviewees were familiar with the Resource Center's offerings but upon learning about them, they believed it was a good idea to have a collection of information on the Hmong.

Due to the funding environment, HCC has struggled to maintain and grow programming relevant to its mission. However, HCC has consistently managed not to be distracted by pursuing funding and programming in social services. Hmong arts and culture has always maintained a presence in HCC's work, just at various levels throughout its history.

Strategic Plan

Several times, internal and external stakeholders suggested the need to review the mission and vision of Hmong Cultural Center. However, this plan has been developed in the context of the current mission stated above.

Interviewees weren't hesitant to share the strengths and impact of HCC. They agreed that ABE, particularly citizenship classes, has been the most important work of HCC for the last few years. Other strengths were the Resource Center and the qeej classes. Some were pleased with the crosscultural education but wanted to see a more interactive and robust presentation process where the audience not only learns about Hmong, but feels a connection to the Hmong community.

Program and service opportunities presented by interviewees included offering Hmong language classes for youth and non-Hmong with a special emphasis on the first ring suburbs; expanding ABE to non-Hmong and creating a cultural center that provides visitors with a cultural *experience*.

Organizational and administrative opportunities presented by interviewees - in addition to increased funding - include increased visibility in the Hmong and non-Hmong communities; strengthening organizational leadership; and enhancing management and operations.

Based upon the valuable feedback, five goals for HCC to focus on over the next five years are:

- 1) Evaluate program effectiveness as it relates to the mission.
- 2) Develop a multi-year fundraising plan to include a diverse revenue stream.
- 3) Establish sound organizational practices related to personnel, including volunteer management.
- 4) Enhance community partnerships through networks and collaborations.
- 5) Build organizational capacity to adequately and efficiently support programs and services.

- I. **Evaluate program effectiveness as it relates to the mission.**
 - a. *Continue to offer ABE and increase enrollment through new marketing approaches.*
 - i. Evaluate current schedule of classes and consider offering evening, weekend or satellite classes.
 - ii. Assess the feasibility of offering higher-level ABE classes.
 - iii. Engage other underserved immigrant populations through relationship building and organizational partnerships.
 - b. *Grow the Cultural Enrichment programs through fee for service and developing a case for support.*
 - i. Understand the costs of operating the cultural education classes such as qeej, music, dance, and wedding and funeral rituals.
 - ii. Assess a sliding fee and prepare participants for investing in themselves and in the community.
 - iii. Develop programming for a younger, more English-proficient but less culturally knowledgeable Hmong population. Parents of US-born Hmong are interested in a place for their children to learn about their heritage.
 - iv. Create a case for support so potential funders can see a community benefit to Hmong cultural enrichment. This should be framed through an economic and political lens as well as quality of life.
 - c. *Promote the Resource Center through targeted approaches.*
 - i. Connect Hmong to the workplace in the Building Bridges curriculum such as working in teams, leadership and recognition.
 - ii. Target promotions to companies which have high populations of Hmong such as Boston Scientific, Starkey Laboratories and TCF Bank. To reach small to mid-size employers, engage with the MN Chamber of Commerce, the MN Business Partnership and professional associations including insurance, real estate and retail industries.
 - iii. Develop a cost structure for services in this program area.

II. Develop a multi-year fundraising plan to include diverse revenue streams.

- a. *Develop narrative for Hmong Cultural Center which appeals to a wide range of funders. This should also be followed by a communications plan to reach different audiences.*
 - i. The case of support, like the MN State Arts Board, should see culture and arts as enhancements to quality of life. For HCC, it can also be frame as an integration strategy to strengthen cultural security to participate in economic, social and political arenas as contributing Minnesotans.
 - ii. A great mission and vision cannot succeed if no one knows of it. A communications plan to reach a diverse audience will require engagement with Hmong and non-Hmong community members; media outlets; local, regional and state-level public officials, institutional partners in nonprofits, the arts and education.
- b. *Assess the potential for corporate sponsorships and fellowships for the Resource Center.*
 - i. Develop sponsorship packets to include recognition strategies and levels of support.
 - ii. Explore fellowships as a way to bring in revenue for individuals seeking to grow their knowledge and skills through service to the Resource Center.
- c. *Develop a cost structure for Cultural Enrichment programs.*
 - i. Establish a budget for these programs and implement a sliding fee scale.
Implementation of the fee schedule must be a consistent practice not only to ensure the continuous offering of cultural enrichment but develop behaviors which value the classes and skills of HCC.
- d. *Evaluate the capacity for individual giving.*
 - i. Research giving motivations of Hmong Americans.
 - ii. Develop budget for non grant-funded activities.
 - iii. Establish multi-year donor cultivation process.

III. Establish sound organizational practices related to personnel, including volunteer management.

- a. Increase the use and role of volunteers through opportunities, management and engagement.*
 - i. Develop opportunities for volunteers to enhance HCC programs and services.
 - ii. Increase staff capacity with management opportunities of volunteers.
 - iii. Engage community members through one-time or ongoing volunteer services.
 - iv. Review and update roles and responsibilities for staff and volunteers.
- b. Develop and implement an orientation process for all new hires and volunteers to ensure shared understanding of organizational practices and expectations.*
 - i. Identify responsibility for this task
 - ii. Create an onboarding and orientation process to be used.
- c. At annual staff retreat, review employee handbook and organizational goals and priorities.*
 - i. Incorporate team building exercises.
 - ii. Identify and implement opportunities for staff and Board engagement.
- d. Conduct regular performance reviews to give constructive feedback and assess training needs for staff and volunteers.*
 - i. Develop performance measures for evaluation.
 - ii. Allocate funds for staff training and development.



IV. Enhance community partnerships through networks and collaborations.

- a. *Equip staff to reach out to peers and other professionals in their respective fields.*
 - i. Attend job-related trainings (e.g. literacy, program management).
 - ii. Participate in field-related networks.
 - iii. Join memberships and associations related to job responsibilities.
- b. *Provide visibility for HCC in the field.*
 - i. Attend gatherings of nonprofits and cultural arts organizations.
 - ii. Expand HCC's network of peers and supporters.
- c. *Prepare materials to share with others during networking.*
 - i. Have electronic and hard copies readily accessible which concisely shares the impactful work of HCC.
 - ii. Create consistent messaging for external stakeholders.

V. Build organizational capacity to adequately and efficiently support programs and services.

- a. *Assess technological capacity for more web-based services such as webinars, portals and communications.*
 - i. Conduct a user-survey to gather information on what's working and what else it can do.
- b. *Ensure financial procedures necessary for income management including receipting, invoicing and tracking.*
 - i. Create processes which comply with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles.
- c. *Develop logic model or other program evaluation tool to assess costs, benefits and impact of programs and services.*
 - i. Train program managers and coordinators to review and assess programs through these tools.
 - ii. Develop a summary to share with external stakeholder including funders.
- d. *Conduct regular leadership and governance evaluation of Executive Director and Board of Directors to identify strengths and areas for improvement.*
 - i. Establish performance indicators and conduct regular Executive Director reviews, considering a 360 process.
 - ii. Hold an annual Board retreat dedicated to reviewing their individual and collective performance and the performance of the organization.

Other Recommendations for Consideration



Overall, interviewees were consistent in their responses and stayed within the boundaries of the current context in terms of programming and financial capacity. There was a comment repeated by several interviewees which was the ownership of property. However, there were varying perspectives on how this would affect Hmong Cultural Center. While this would require a big investment, it can have several benefits:

1) One benefit is the ability to adequately accommodate classes, the artifacts, the library and community space. Having quality space to showcase the collections which is welcoming and spacious would encourage more visitors such as school groups and out of town visitors. Hmong Cultural Center should be a place for people visiting the Twin Cities to patronize along with other cultural and historical institutions. HCC could also rent out rooms for community gathering spaces when not in use by HCC.

2) Another benefit is to have more opportunities to offer more classes to Hmong and non-Hmong, like the Hubbs Center. Classes can include the current ABE classes, but also Hmong language classes, cooking classes and history classes. These offerings can generate significant revenue as well as position HCC as an educational institution.

3) And finally, another benefit is to have the capacity to expand the organization and collaborations. As the ability to host events and gatherings grows, visitors become familiar with our work and will seek opportunities to work together for mutual benefit.

Property ownership will require significant initial investment as well as ongoing management and maintenance. It is an important investment that if handled poorly, can have long term, debilitating effects on HCC. However, current space does limit opportunities for HCC. There needs to be dedicated discussion among staff leadership and the Board on this decision to own property and the consequences of either to own or not to own. That decision can guide the direction of other opportunities in consideration.

Appendices

**Appendix I:Hmong Cultural Center Interview Guide-External Stakeholders
(11/19/13)**

Interview Date:	Interview Time: _____ to _____
Interviewee Name:	Organizational Affiliation:
HCC Affiliation:	Other Pertinent Affiliations/Background Information

A. Interviewee’s relationship and familiarity with HCC

1. How do you know of HCC’s work? How long have you worked with HCC?
2. How would you describe the work and programs being delivered by HCC?

B. Key Community Issues

1. How do you or your professional work reach the Hmong-American community in St. Paul?
2. What challenges are facing this community?
3. What are opportunities that are present to this community?

C. HCC’s Value Added and Stakeholder Relations

1. Over the past five years, or for as long as you’ve worked with HCC, what has been HCC’s most valuable contributions to the Hmong American community in St. Paul?
2. What do you see as challenges HCC encounters in serving the Hmong American community?
3. How would you describe the communications you receive about what’s happening at HCC?

4. What else could HCC do to share information and updates with you and the rest of the community?

D. HCC's Future

1. Thinking forward to the next five years and the new issues possibly on the horizon for Hmong Americans, how do you think HCC could best serve the community?
2. Are there particular services that HCC is currently not providing that you think you would be needed in the future?
3. What services, current or future, would be viable as a revenue-generating service?
4. What trends in the nonprofit sector will frame or impact, positively or negatively, HCC's work in the future?
5. What trends in the philanthropic sector will frame or impact, positively or negatively, HCC's work in the future?
6. Based on this outlook and HCC's capabilities, what would you recommend as a strategic goal for HCC over the next five years?
7. Are there activities or strategies that HCC should consider undertaking in order to operationalize these goals? Examples: national conferences, regional convenings, publications, and cross-cultural training and awareness raising sessions.

E. Advice and Recommendations to HCC

1. We want to make certain that we think outside of our current box: what have we forgotten to ask you? Do you have other advice or feedback for HCC? What else should we think about?

**Appendix II: Hmong Cultural Center Interview Guide-Internal Stakeholders
(11/19/13)**

Interview Date:	Interview Time: _____ to _____
Interviewee Name:	Organizational Affiliation:
Board _____ Staff _____	Other Pertinent Affiliations/Background Information

A. Relationship with HCC

- a. How long have you been with HCC? (less than 5 years; 5-10 years; 10 years of more)
- b. Did you know of HCC’s work prior to joining? If yes, what did you know?

B. HCC’s current organizational status. HCC’s mission “is to promote the personal development of children, youth and adults through education while providing resources that enhance cross-cultural understanding between Hmong and non-Hmong.”

- a. How well are we achieving our mission?
- b. What are the best ways we are doing our work?
- c. What have we struggled with in doing our work?

C. HCC’s community and target audience

- a. What are the key challenges facing our community?
- b. What are opportunities facing our community?

D. HCC's future

- a. Looking ahead over the next three to five years, how could we have a greater impact?
- b. What additional administrative capability or structure is necessary to effectively and efficiently support our programs and services?
- c. What services, current or future, would be viable as a revenue-generating service?

E. Thinking outside of the box

- a. We want to make certain that we think outside of our current box: what have we forgotten to ask you? Do you have other advice or feedback for HCC? What else should we think about?

Appendix III: Participants in Interviews

Staff - 8
Board Members - 4
Funders - 2
Community Members - 6
Students - 11