

## **Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association Strategic Priorities, 2023-2027 (7/17/23)**

### **Our Vision**

Cambodian Americans and other ethnic minority groups are economically self-sufficient and actively engaged leaders of their communities.

### **Our Mission**

The CMAA is dedicated to improving the quality of life for Cambodian Americans and other minorities and economically disadvantaged persons in Greater Lowell through increased educational, cultural, economic, and social programs and opportunities.

### **Our Work**

- Positively reflect and support the Cambodian community in Lowell;
- Collaborate with community partners to advance mutual goals and interests;
- Empower and educate community members with programs, services, and information;
- Capture data and seek community feedback to demonstrate our impact and improve our services and programs, and
- Provide opportunities for volunteerism, full-time and part-time work to develop employment, philanthropic, and leadership skills.

### **Introduction**

The Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association (CMAA) is poised for a substantial period of growth. When CMAA was first established in 1984, a large percentage of funding for CMAA came from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to ensure recent Cambodian refugees could integrate into Lowell's social fabric. In 2011, Cambodians lost recognition as refugees by the ORR, creating a funding crunch for the organization and causing the organization to contract. In 2013, five out of six full-time positions and several of CMAA's programs were eliminated. After community meetings that featured frank exchanges with CMAA's clients and other community members, it became apparent that CMAA, while having benefited from federal funding for many years, had also become somewhat isolated and "siloed." The organization was disconnected from other organizations in Lowell, and community members felt that CMAA's services had not evolved with the issues Cambodians struggled with daily, including income inequality, poor health, linguistic, and cultural & generational gaps.

CMAA seized the financial shock and contraction of a decade ago as an opportunity to reshape the organization to fit the community's needs better and began to address the disparities that Cambodians in Lowell and Massachusetts faced. Since moving to its current location in one of Lowell's predominantly-Cambodian communities, CMAA has re-emerged to become a trusted resource and partner.

As part of its 2016-2018 strategic plan, CMAA engaged in new programmatic and organizational priorities. These included [new youth programming and increased civic engagement and advocacy work](#). While the current plan expired in 2018, CMAA has continued to grow its staff and programmatic activity. The COVID-19 pandemic saw CMAA pivot quickly to serve vital community needs attracting new funding.

CMAA's 2023-2027 plan intends to communicate the next energetic phase of growth and service to the Cambodian community. The plan details new priorities for the organization. Our vision is clear: we seek a united, active, and engaged Cambodian American community whose members reach their full potential, and we seek to build on our strength to serve similar groups as well. And, to realize our vision, CMAA will mindfully grow and nimbly respond to the evolving opportunities and needs of our Cambodian family and other immigrants, refugees, and ethnic communities we are connected to.

### **Current Activities**

Going into the current strategic planning process, CMAA's key programmatic activities include

- The Monorom Family Support Services Program provides caseworkers to assist developmentally disabled youth and their families with medical applications, forms, and transportation to doctor appointments both in and outside of Lowell. Monorom also provides educational workshops and other life skills to the clients and their families so that they are more informed about caring for their special needs children.
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Citizenship Programs, which improve our client's language abilities and help them prepare for citizenship
- First Time Homebuyer Program (with the Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership), which informs Cambodians in Khmer about the risks and rewards of buying a home and provides additional resources for those whose income qualifies them for down payment assistance.
- Youth Services Program has three components: (1) the after-school arts and cultural programming, (2) the mentorship program for high school juniors and seniors, and (3) the Rising Stars Sports & Leadership Summer Youth Program gives youth from the ages of 7-16 the opportunity to build leadership skills and create positive relationships as an alternative to gang affiliation.
- Advocacy and civic engagement programming such as voter registration, Get Out the Vote (GOTV), census counting, and engaging elected officials in dialogues about important community issues to increase connection to crucial community issues. We do this through engagement and education.
- Wrap Around Community Services (WACS), a walk-in service, to ensure our community can secure necessities like the "green card" and SSI applications, Personal Care

Attendant (PCA) eligibility, Mass Health registrations, legal aid and child support, and many other issues that the community needs.

- Khmer Language Services is a translation and interpretation service that ensures vital information gets to community members and local businesses while generating income for CMAA's operations.
- Cultural events, either as a sponsor or co-sponsor, to provide information and resources to the community, cultural exchange, and preservation. These events include the Khmer New Year, Remembrance of Cambodian Genocide, Khmer Flag Raising, Annual Meeting, and Community Forums on critical, timely issues.

CMAA enjoys a high degree of trust and an excellent reputation in the community. Its leadership is seen as visionary, and its staff is passionate, caring, committed, and willing to solve problems. The organization has partnered with various entities, including local and state governments and various local agencies. CMAA sees an opportunity to create new intergenerational programming, building on its youth programming and desire to reach out to older community members. With strong Cambodian businesses and faith communities, CMAA is poised to unite and engage the entire community. Yet, shifting demographics and new immigrants and refugees create opportunities for CMAA to share its experience and insights with others toward increased collective power. National attention to racial justice and social change makes unique funding openings for CMAA.

Still, the organization is growing fast and working to ensure staff capacity is not spread too thin, and continued training and professional development are a priority. The Board is also working to grow its strategic vision and capabilities. CMAA leadership is committed to increasing the space, infrastructure, and resources needed to meet this next phase in the organization's life cycle.

CMAA remains firmly rooted in Cambodian culture and traditions and is committed to this identity moving forward, even as the next generation of Cambodian Americans, and other immigrants, refugees, and ethnic groups are integrated into CMAA's work. CMAA is committed to meeting challenges, which will be critical to meeting increased community pressures due to gentrification, institutional racism, and pressing social needs for those most vulnerable in our community.

### **What's Next?**

Over the next five years, CMAA will work to increase its programming and outreach to older members of the Cambodian community. This is not only to ensure these revered members of our community are not isolated but to connect their stories and history to the next generation and the larger Lowell community. This is part of our desire to build awareness and celebrate Cambodian culture. The organization is committed to expanding its current programming. The CMAA will also continue to be responsive to the evolving needs of our community while we ensure that our society builds the collective power to meet these needs.

Continued growth is ahead regarding programmatic activity, organizational capacity, and community impact. Leadership and resources will be critical to ensuring the path forward is successful. CMAA is committed to growing its ability to demonstrate and communicate impact through more vigorous evaluation, data collection, and outreach.

### **Strategic Goals, 2023-2027**

While CMAA will continue its current activities, the next part of the plan is dedicated to the following four goal areas that CMAA wishes to emphasize in its work in the future. By the end of 2027, CMAA will:

#### **Goal #1: Look to the future while honoring the past.**

1. We are reconnecting and engaging older community members through religious institutions and local groups/organizations that serve Cambodian elderly populations—celebrating Cambodian history, arts, and culture by creating a dedicated space for such activities and creating ten events or programs of diverse types a year (such as blessing ceremonies, workshops in Khmer, media programs, arts & cultural performances, and story archives) that reach 1000 participants each year.
2. We are growing the next generation, reaching 100 *new* youth under 25 with current and new programming (such as STEM, life skills, community services, and advocacy work), and starting an alum network. CMAA currently reaches 20-30 school-aged children per school year and 60-80 in the Rising Stars summer program. CMAA is prepared and committed to engaging more youths in the Greater Lowell Area in the next year.
3. We are creating five new intergenerational projects, such as oral history projects focused on the older members of our community's life experiences. CMAA plans to partner with the Lowell National Parks Services for their One City Many Cultures programs.
4. We are currently reaching 250 new members yearly. CMAA plans to partner with other Greater Lowell organizations committed to helping the immigrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking community.

#### **Goal #2: Grow strategically to meet the needs of our community.**

1. We are expanding program offerings by introducing a new community-based program to serve at least 60% of the CMAA community. This program aims to help the community through increased well-being, community awareness, a new skill, a sense of empowerment, etc. The CMAA hopes to face these problems head-on and increase harm reduction measures through community outreach & engagement, financial empowerment, health & mental health access, youth services, small business assistance, Khmer language & culture, and wrap-around services.
  - Increasing staff capacity by 25%, investing in new technology, and detailing a plan for expanding benefits offered

- Growing financial resources to achieve goals by doubling the operating budget (through income-generating projects, new federal dollars, and new private funders) and adding 300 new individual donors (10 of whom give at least \$10K).

**Goal #3: Be a leaderful organization by:**

1. We are developing staff leadership capacities through a 50% increase in professional development resources, quarterly workshops, and connecting staff members to community leadership opportunities (e.g., nonprofit boards, local commissions, and nonprofit networking). Increase the level of staff and board member involvement in regular CMAA activities.
2. We are leading within the Cambodian community, increasing civic engagement by 10%, participating in 10 community events a year, and reaching out to other Cambodian organizations to build a stronger collective identity.
3. We are an impactful voice for the Cambodian community by ensuring representation on at least one critical state or national board (e.g., MA AAPI Commission, SEARAC), holding an annual town hall for community input on important issues (e.g., housing), and connecting community members to legislators, local and state, through five advocacy events a year.
4. We are a leader and resource in building and trusting relationships with other ethnic, immigrant, and refugee communities, sending at least two representatives to events held by these communities and hosting one convening a year with other groups to plan for collective advocacy.

**Goal #4: Attract investment and support by:**

1. Plan for a capital campaign by creating a plan by the **end of 2024** supported by an advisory board, educating the board and staff on important community issues.
  - Demonstrating and communicating the impact through at least three public events connecting donors and beneficiaries a year, reviewing data collection, and recommending five key metrics to track organization-wide, and creating at least three impact highlight pieces a year, including an annual report.
  - The CMAA plans to gain at least three Million dollars in revenue from donation-based aid by the goal date.
  - Telling compelling stories to many audiences in many ways, including a community magazine published two times a year and five other products a year (e.g., TV, podcast, web story) that highlight the voices of the Cambodian community and CMAA programs leveraging existing resources and plans (e.g., Southeast Asian Digital Archive at UMass Lowell, Lowell National Historical Park exhibition on CMAA history)
2. Acquire adequate space to meet CMAA's needs by adding at least 15,000 square feet of new programming and commercial space.