



Our Mission: The Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association is dedicated to improving the quality of life for Cambodian Americans and other minorities and economically disadvantaged persons in Lowell through increased educational, cultural, economic and social programs and opportunities.

Our Vision: Cambodian Americans, and other ethnic minority groups, are not only economically self-sufficient, but are active engaged leaders of their communities.

As an organization, we:

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

Introduction

This is a crucial and promising time for the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association (CMAA). When CMAA was first established in 1984, Cambodians were considered refugees by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and rates of new arrivals were substantially greater than they are now. Groups such as the ORR and others funded CMAA's work to help Cambodians assimilate to life in Lowell.

In 2011, Cambodians lost recognition as refugees by the ORR, causing a substantial drop in funding to CMAA, which impacted both staff and programs. In 2013, five out of six full-time positions and several of CMAA's programs were eliminated. After community meetings which featured frank exchanges with CMAA's clients and other community members, it became apparent that CMAA, while having benefitted from federal funding for many years, had also become somewhat isolated and "siloes" away from other organizations in Lowell, and that community members felt that CMAA's services had not evolved with the issues Cambodians struggled with on a daily basis including income inequality, poor health, linguistic and cultural gaps.

For example: Lowell has the highest per-capita population of Cambodians in the United States. According to Shirley Tang, Professor of Asian Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston, Cambodians have the lowest per-capita income out of all Asian ethnic groups in Massachusetts, with 53.3% classified as poor or low-income, and nearly 25% living in poverty. The White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) found that, among AAPIs, Cambodians as a group suffered from the second-highest rate of poverty in the U.S., at 29.3%. Poverty, coupled with a lack of early detection and treatment of many diseases, leads to very poor health outcomes for Cambodians.



For example, Chhan Touch, a community nurse practitioner in Lowell, has noted that, although an average of one in 10 foreign-born Cambodians in Lowell has Hepatitis B (20 times the national average), only 40% of Lowell's 30,000 Cambodians (69% of whom are foreign-born) have been tested for the disease which, if left untreated, can result in liver cancer. And, a 2013 Greater Lowell Health Alliance (GLHA) community needs assessment found that Cambodians suffer from diabetes at a higher rate than any other ethnic group in Lowell. The GLHA assessment also concluded that "Members of immigrant communities were named in most groups as a high-risk population with unmet needs", and that Cambodians in Lowell sought medical care "as a last resort", due to a general lack of knowledge concerning health care availability and procedures. Cambodians vote at a much lower rate than other groups in Lowell, due to a large percentage being both linguistically-isolated and foreign-born. Finally, Cambodian Americans have a high dropout rate from school (35%), and one of the lowest rates of college graduation (13-15%). These low rates of Cambodian graduation are a stark contrast to the fact that Asian Americans as a whole graduate from high school and college at a higher rate than any other ethnic group in the U.S.

The unfortunate necessity to pare CMAA down provided an opportune moment to re-shape the organization to better fit the current needs of the community, and to begin to address continuing disparities that Cambodians in Lowell and in Massachusetts face. With the help of new volunteers, CMAA continued and improved its hour-long television and radio shows, which provide mainstream news, community stories, interviews and other information pertinent to the Cambodians in Lowell.

Especially since moving to its current location in the heart of one of Lowell's predominantly-Cambodian communities, CMAA has re-emerged to become a trusted resource and partner. For example, since data collection started in 2015 over 300 people were assisted with accurate information regarding health insurance and legal documentation, and over 180 people were provided reliable information about Hepatitis B. CMAA partners with the Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership to increase the number of informed individuals buying homes, and has partnered with Lowell Votes to increase the number of Cambodians voting.

This 2016-2018 plan will provide an outline of how CMAA intends to strategically address issues facing the Cambodian community both currently and in the future. The plan will also detail new priorities for the organization and the resource implications of achieving them. *Our vision is clear: we are seeking a united, active and engaged Cambodian-American community whose members reach their full potential. And, in order to realize our vision, CMAA will mindfully grow and nimbly respond to the evolving opportunities and needs of our community.*



Current Activities

Today, CMAA continues some of its legacy programs:

- The Monorom Family Services Program, which provides a caseworker to assist developmentally-disabled youth and their families with medical applications, forms and transportation to doctor appointments both in and outside of Lowell.
- English for Speakers of Other Languages and Citizenship Programs (with Abisi Adult Education), 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.
- TV and radio shows, which provide news and information, as well as periodic community updates to the Cambodian community in Lowell.

However, two new initiatives have begun assisting community members on a daily basis: walk-in wraparound services and translation and interpretation services. CMAA assists many walk-in clients five days a week with necessities like green card and SSI applications, Personal Care Attendant (PCA) eligibility, Mass Health registrations, legal aid and child support, and many other issues. The latter are also available to local businesses, whose fees contribute to CMAA's income.

CMAA also sponsors or co-sponsors several events a year which provide information and resources to the community, and support cultural exchange and preservation through the events it sponsors (Cambodian New Year's) or co-sponsors with partners (Remembrance of Cambodian Genocide, Khmer Flag Raising and Community Forum on the progress of the Khmer Rouge trials in Cambodia). CMAA is evolving to remain a relevant and central part of the Cambodian community in the Lowell area, and with its selection as a [2016 Social Innovator](#) is in a great position to build increased capacity for programs and services in the future.

What's new in 2016 and where CMAA is headed

Opportunities

The Cambodian Mutual Assistance Program will be launching two new programs in 2016:

- The Young Professionals Program (re-started after a two-year gap), which is fully funded for 2016 and provides mentorship and employment-obtaining and retaining skills, and
- The Rising Stars Summer Youth Program, which will give youth from the ages of 7-16 opportunity to build leadership skills and create positive relationships as an alternative to gang-affiliation.



While funding still needs to be secured for the Rising Stars program, CMAA has obtained much of the budget for the program in in-kind services from the City of Lowell and Lowell Public Schools, and has, as of January 2016, also obtained \$3,500. CMAA also has a request pending with the state of Massachusetts (via a Shannon Grant dedicated to funding anti-gang activities in Lowell) and in December 2015 had a fruitful conversation with United Way program officers in Lowell about applying for funding which United Way specifically reserves for summer engagement programs like Rising Stars.

Challenges

With exciting opportunities come challenges, most of which are based on funding and staff capacity. As noted earlier, while the Young Professionals Program is fully funded in 2016, the Rising Stars program is not. There are two challenges with this: first, and most apparent, funding must be secured for Rising Stars and second, securing for both programs beyond 2016 needs to be a priority and a fundraising plan needs to be implemented in 2015. While these are challenges, with appropriate, strategic action along with strong measures and stories of success, the programs can be fully funded in the future.

Staff capacity may also be a challenge. With two new programs, both the Executive Director and the Director of Programs will be required to provide additional oversight to both. While this oversight *could* be minimal, a review of the current workloads and a determination of shifting work may be required. And, as there is no current renewable, dedicated funding for these programs, such funding will need to be re-applied for on a yearly basis.

Additionally, funds must be secured to partially fund two part-time positions (in fundraising and in front desk services). These positions will increase the ability of CMAA staff who are covering the desk on a rotating basis to focus on their programmatic goals. With paid fundraising staff, there will be increased capacity to fundraise for CMAA's current and potential new programs.

Strategic Direction, 2016-2018

While CMAA will continue its current activities, the next part of the plan is dedicated to the three major areas that CMAA wishes to emphasize its work on in the future. For each strategic direction listed, there will be a section on why it is important to CMAA's mission, as well as the activities (current, expanding and new) to be used to achieve the goal. The "measures" section provides metrics to indicate success, while the "resource implications" section will outline how the strategies are currently supported, or will be supported through additional staffing and funding.

In the next three years, the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association will:



1. Increase Cambodians' civic engagement in city, state and national politics, while remaining politically neutral.
2. Continue to support all generations of Cambodians while concentrating on new initiatives to not only help Cambodians preserve and celebrate their culture, but also provide the tools to help Cambodians succeed in America.
3. Innovate and execute new leadership development opportunities for upcoming generations of Cambodian youth in Lowell.

Goal 1: Increase Cambodians' civic engagement in city, state and national politics, while remaining politically neutral.

Importance: In November 2014, Lowell made history by electing Rady Mom as the first Cambodian-American state representative in the U.S. Yet, despite this source of pride for the community, Cambodians in Lowell suffer from political disenfranchisement to a great degree. Even those who are registered to vote turn out to vote at a much lower rate than the city average, and census tract information demonstrates that predominantly-Cambodian neighborhoods have some of the lowest voter turnout in Lowell. There are many reasons for lower turnout, but some reasons could include language barriers, memories of negative consequences from political involvement in Cambodia, and disengagement. Because voting is a vital component to personal empowerment and citizenship in the United States, CMAA works to increase voting by Cambodians in Lowell. At the same time, CMAA will strive to maintain its political neutrality and avoid becoming wrapped up in contentious political feuds, both in Lowell and within the Cambodian community. This neutrality is crucial to not only maintaining CMAA's nonprofit status, but for it to continue to be a trusted representative for all clients and community members, regardless of political affiliation.

Continuing Activities:

- Register people who come to CMAA for our other programs and services.
- Civic engagement efforts by having summer youth workers canvass neighborhoods where turnout is low to register voters and remind them of where and when to vote;
- Offer voter education by hosting events at CMAA and providing information through TV and radio shows.
- Host state representative open office hours, regardless of officeholder.
- Work with community partners to develop further strategies and activities intended to increase voter registration and turnout.
- Host community events and candidate forums at CMAA and on CMAA's TV show, to further engage potential voters and demystify the political process.



- Other GOTV efforts on Election Day, including providing transportation to the polls and reminder calls to encourage registered voters to vote.

Expanding Activities:

- Citizenship classes.
- Providing up-to-date information about correct precincts and voting locations, including recent changes to polling locations.

New Activities:

- Work to have staff members become certified by the Bureau of Immigration Affairs (BIA); such certification will allow CMAA to process citizenship forms for clients on the premises.
- Conduct “town halls” for elected officials, with a particular focus on local elected, on a quarterly basis. (Except for during the period leading up to an election that such activities could be considered campaigning).
- Themes for the town halls will be generated by the community, CMAA’s board, and other stakeholders. This new activity will have a specific two-fold goal: increasing civic participation/ having their voices heard and having elected officials understand and respond to the concerns of the community.

Measures:

- Work to have staff members become certified by the Bureau of Immigration Affairs (BIA); such certification will allow CMAA to process citizenship forms for clients on the premises and add to CMAA’s revenue.
- Conduct “town halls” for elected officials, with a particular focus on local elected, on a quarterly basis. (Except for during the period leading up to an election that such activities could be considered campaigning) Themes for the town halls will be generated by the community, CMAA’s board, and other stakeholders. This new activity will have a specific two-fold goal: increasing civic participation/ having their voices heard and having elected officials understand and respond to the concerns of the community.
- Increase the percent of voter turnout in underrepresented communities of Lowell by 3 percent in 2016; 5 percent in 2017 and 7 percent in 2019.
 - Precinct-level data will be used. Since there are years that, in general, have greater voter turnout than others the review will be based on similar election years (i.e. 2016 will be compared to 2008 and 2012, etc.)



- Increase the people's awareness of a) who represents them at all levels of government, with a particular focus at the local level and b) how to contact elected individuals regarding a concern.
 - Quick surveys will be provided to individuals at events on an annual basis so data can be compared
- Regular attendance of at least 50 people at Town Halls.

Resource Implications:

In most instances, there are no new resource implications because services are continuing. However, resources will be needed for the new activities and to implement evaluation methods to review measures. This includes staff time and additional resources for BIA certification and staff time to plan and implement town halls. While this is new, there is potential for this to be held in tandem with other events. It could also be used to advertise for other CMAA events or vice versa, where those events will advertise the town halls.

Goal 2: Continue to support all generations of Cambodians while concentrating on new initiatives to not only help Cambodians preserve and celebrate their culture, but also provide the tools to help Cambodians succeed in America.

Importance: CMAA has, in the past, concentrated its programming on the very young and the elderly, but now strives to serve all generations. Some elderly Cambodians still suffer linguistic and technological gaps which can impede progress, prevent them from getting assistance, and keep them isolated with poorer health outcomes. Younger Cambodians have low comparative rates of high-school and college graduation, leading to lessened lifetime earnings and financial stability. In order to begin to address these issues, CMAA plans to provide opportunities for Cambodians to learn the language and cultural skills necessary for success in America, while also helping them retain the cultural identity that is central to who they are.

Continuing Activities:

- Offer ESOL and First Time Homebuyer classes, which improve Cambodians' earning potential, decrease linguistic and cultural gaps and add to economic security.
- Offer a computer lab at least once per week, with more emphasis on curriculum.
- Host or co-host community events which preserve and celebrate Cambodian culture, such as **Cambodian New Year**.



Expanding Activities:

- Expand the Monorom Family Services Program, which assists developmentally-disabled youth and their families in navigating complex educational and health-care systems and provides crucial transportation and other services.

New Activities:

- Re-start Khmer classes on weekends for both adults and children.
- Conduct needs assessment to thoughtfully plan future programs and activities (such as after-school tutoring for college prep and health care programs which specifically address health problems like depression and Hepatitis B that are prevalent in the Cambodian community)

Measures:

- Program data from ESOL and First Time Home Buyer classes will be obtained to indicate increase or decrease in program attendance.
- Needs assessment will be conducted by UMass Lowell by May 2016.

Resource Implications:

Many of the activities are currently in place and, as such, there should be no new resource needs. However, a review of the age of the computers in the computer lab should be conducted, as new software versions or donated (newer) computers may be needed. While the Monorom Family Services Program is set to expand as part of a pilot program, funding (either from the Department of Developmental Services or from other sources) will need to be secured in the future if CMAA wishes to retain the part-time position. And, re-Starting the Khmer class will entail hiring a teacher and advertising the classes. (Since CMAA owns the space, the cost should be lower. However, since the space is not used on the weekends, the cost of heat/ AC, and other utilities may need to be considered.)

Goal 3: Innovate and promote new leadership development opportunities for upcoming generations of Cambodian youth in Lowell.

Importance: Many Cambodian youth in Lowell may lack positive role models and mentors who can help them to overcome some serious disadvantages. While CMAA's current programs help developmentally-disabled youth and adults of a more advanced age, CMAA does not have many services specifically tailored for at-potential youth, or for those on the cusp of adulthood and professional lives. CMAA's staff and board believe in creating more opportunities for these youth and young adults to ensure greater success: not only through mentoring at-risk youth from heavily gang-involved neighborhoods, but also providing coaching for college-age youth to



help them prepare for office culture, learn soft skills and benefit from the perspective of professional mentors. After participating, youth will be better prepared to succeed, and able to develop as leaders who can someday contribute to the betterment of their own communities, whether they remain in Lowell or not.

Continuing Activities:

- Continue the Young Professionals Program and obtain feedback from participants.
- Continue offering summer youth part-time jobs in civic engagement.
- Continue to offer volunteer opportunities to Lowell youth and community members.

New Activities:

- Offer Rising Stars Program with grant money and in-kind assistance from Lowell Public Schools and the City of Lowell.
- Plan to develop other programs through working with statewide and community partners, like Lowell Votes, Nonprofit Vote and MassVote

Measures:

- Data from Young Professionals Program and Rising Stars Program to be collected and reported to show impact to funders and community.
- Summer youth collect information on at least 50 registered voters and send to Nonprofit Vote in order to track voting rate among CMAA-registered voters.
- Volunteer time tracked in Apricot and reported as part of annual report and other CMAA communications, to indicate a total of at least 1,000 volunteer hours per fiscal year.

Resource Implications:

- Director of Programs will continue to manage Young Professional Program-funding secured from Saab Family Foundation.
- Rising Stars Program contingent on receiving funding; Shannon Grant already applied for and United Way funding will be sought; \$3,500 is secured from UMass Lowell Giver Hawks.
- Funding will be re-applied for to fund summer youth civic engagement contracting in 2016.
- Volunteer opportunities continue to be available; intention is to develop leadership and work-related skills and increased awareness of nonprofit work for participants.