



# **Speak Up: A Dialogue on the Status of Asian Pacific Islanders in Fresno & Madera Counties**

## **Executive Summary and Recommendations**

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## Executive Summary

On Saturday, May 11, more than 100 community members concerned and invested in the Asian-American community gathered at Willow International Community College to hear about the latest report on the status of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (API) in the San Joaquin Valley. This group also provided feedback through focus groups on how to best serve this diverse, dynamic population.

Joanna Lee, Senior Research Analyst at the Asian Pacific American Legal Center and co-author of the 2013 report, ***A Community of Contrasts: Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in California***, shared concrete data to support what many of our communities have experienced and already know: Asians in America are not universally successful as the “model minority” myth would have us believe.

Many still struggle with language barriers, poverty, employment and education. In particular, Fresno is home to the second largest Hmong-American population in the United States, numbering more than 31,000. Hmong Americans also endure the highest level of poverty of all ethnic groups in Fresno.

The pages that follow contain our best summarization of the contributions shared at “Speak Up” event in the areas of education, health and workforce development. Several small focus groups were asked to identify the most effective services addressing the needs of the Asian American community in those three areas, and as well identify the three greatest needs they see in the community.

Key ideas came up again and again: access, empowerment, and trust. If government, institutions, and Central Valley APIs (Asian Pacific Islanders) are to successfully work together, these three ideas must be fundamental parts of our collaborative work.

We hope that the information will help decision-makers like you further engage on pressing issues affecting the API community and inform important policy around these areas. We expect to hold a similar gathering annually, and look forward to continuing the dialogue on how to best serve API communities in the San Joaquin Valley.

Respectfully submitted,

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# Summary of Recommendations

## I. EDUCATION | Effective Services

- 1. COLLEGE OUTREACH PROGRAMS** | All three education focus groups identified college outreach programs targeting Southeast Asian students as an effective service. Several participants shared about programs offered through California State University, Fresno and Fresno City College. These programs were described as successful because students are able to learn about college from professionals who understand their home culture and are familiar with the barriers that many students from this group face.
- 2. PARENT EDUCATION** | Parent education and engagement programs, such as Parent University offered by the Fresno Unified School District and the Parent Institute for Quality Education, a California-based nonprofit organization, were recognized as effective services to the community. Staff members from both programs reflect the cultural backgrounds of the parents they serve and maintain high standards for programming.
- 3. PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS** | Participants identified two preschools that focus on Southeast Asian populations, Stone Soup Fresno and Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries, as effective programs. Both of these nonprofit organizations are located in parts of Fresno with high Southeast Asian populations, and their staff reflects the communities they serve.

## EDUCATION | Service Needs

- 1. BILINGUAL/CULTURALLY COMPETENT EDUCATORS** | All groups shared a need for high-quality bilingual and culturally competent educators at all levels: administrators, principals, teachers, and paraprofessionals.
- 2. DISAGGREGATED DATA** | How the California Department of Education classifies Asian Americans masks significant achievement and socio-economic needs of significant sub-populations. In the San Joaquin Valley, the groups most negatively affected by a lack of disaggregated data are predominantly Southeast Asian.
- 3. PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION** | Several groups expressed a great need for more parent education and engagement from the school system. These services need to be linguistically accessible and culturally competent. One group specified that parents could benefit from more information on the importance of early education and development (0-5) and college preparedness and requirements.
- 4. ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER (ELL) CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM** | Participants shared that systemic changes and parent education were needed in the area of English Language Learner classification. Many parents are not aware that if their

child is classified as an English Language Learner (ELL) they are put on an alternate course of classes that does not enroll them in college preparation courses. Participants would like more parent education on ELL classification and what it means for preparation for college attendance, as well as increased school accountability to periodically test and reclassify students when appropriate.

Participants did note that the California English Language Development Test, or CELDT, administered by schools for students whose primary language is not English, is a helpful tool to help identify the level of support needed for English Learners.

## II. HEALTH | Effective Services

1. **COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS** | Past and existing CBOs, such as Hmong Health Collaborative, Center for New Americans, Lao Family, and Stone Soup, to name a few, are currently providing a beginning support network for advocacy and support access to health care. One clinic, Clinica Sierra Vista, offers primary and preventative care for low-income Valley residents. More capacity development, funding, and coalition work between various Asian Pacific Islander American community groups is needed.
2. **BURGEONING AWARENESS OF BARRIERS ON BEHALF OF PROVIDERS** | Participants acknowledged an increase in awareness of the specific cultural and language barriers in effective health care. Though more work needs to be done, the general consensus was that health care providers are now acknowledging the importance of recognizing different cultural approaches to health and providing language translation and interpretation to deliver effective care.

### HEALTH | Service Needs

1. **INCREASED ACCESS TO EXISTING SERVICES** | Currently, many APIs (especially those who are low-income) lack information about and access to existing health services. As the Affordable Care Act comes into effect, there is an especially urgent need to connect the API community with the institutions and programs that could provide health care to these populations.
2. **LANGUAGE** | Not only do providers and Central Valley API patients often not speak the same language, cultural concepts embedded in language are not always easily translated. Accurate interpretation and translation of documents, advertisements, and public service announcements about health are needed, along with adequate resources to create these materials.
3. **CULTURAL COMPETENCY** | Distinct approaches to medicine create a particular challenge for Central Valley API communities and providers. A health dialogue needs to be built. Patients need to be empowered with knowledge of how health care systems work, their rights, and also their options. Providers need increased

training and resources to understand and communicate with API patients. The foundation of this work must be trust.

### **III. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT | Effective Services**

#### **1. GOVERNMENT FUNDED SERVICES**

- i. **FRESNO REGIONAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD** | Currently, this agency is a great source of workforce development funding for the San Joaquin Valley.
- ii. **SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER** | This organization is scaled exists in many communities. They provide business counseling and receive match funds from the SBA.
- iii. **SCORE** | This organization is the retired executives service arm of the SBA and provides free business counseling to start up and existing businesses.

#### **2. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOCUSED ORGANIZATIONS**

- i. **ASIAN BUSINESS INSTITUTE AND RESOURCE CENTER (ABIRC)** | Formed in 2008, ABIRC works with minority, women, disabled and veteran-owned businesses to help them becoming state certified as Minority Business Enterprises (MBEs) so they can compete for government and private contracts with agencies that require some contracts with MBEs. Locally, many agencies struggle to find MBEs to contract with. An example of an emerging opportunity to capitalize on is high-speed rail. Additional resources to certify businesses as MBEs can help local small business compete for these lucrative contracts.

#### **3. COMMUNITY BENEFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

- i. **API-SERVING COMMUNITY BENEFIT ORGANIZATIONS** | Organizations such as Fresno Center for New Americans have provide culturally and linguistically informed support to many immigrant and refugee Asian communities in the Valley. They serve a specific segment in the community to provide Human Services but have expanded programming to include workforce development.

### **IV. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT | Service Needs**

1. **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT** | More resources to support training and time to advocate for funding on behalf of API businesses are needed. Additional resources and funding to help build the leadership and organization capacity will be significant in ensuring that the API communities have opportunity to access workforce training programs and job placement services.
2. **SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT** | Resources to support small business owners to help them create business plans, access credit and capital and technical assistance are needed. Hmong farmers are an example of one group who would benefit from these services.

- 3. LANGUAGE** | Services for API businesses need to be linguistically and culturally appropriate for the numerous API communities in the Valley, with a particular emphasis on Southeast Asian communities such as Hmong, Laotian and Cambodian. It is important that existing service providers of workforce development programs and small business development programs are reaching out to engage the API communities in language and culturally competent ways. Otherwise, this further widens the gap in service and API serving CBO's are compelled to create duplicating services to linguistically and culturally serve their communities.