

# MN Biz Vision: Asian Kaleidoscope



## Features:

**Gary Mao's Global Trade  
Success: Turning  
Challenges into  
Opportunities**

Creating Spaces of  
Belonging: AIA  
Minnesota's Vision for  
Asian Senior Housing

**This monthly E-Magazine is published by the Asian American Business Resilience Network to highlight Asian American small businesses' accomplishments.**

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## Asian American Business Resilience Network

### VISION

Envision a new reality that addressing historic inequities, and enhancing culturally/linguistically appropriate ways to thrive through resilience, sustainability, and inclusive growth for all members and the communities where they learn, live, play, and work.

### MISSION

AABRN radically accelerates the pace of change by disrupting the status quo; providing resources, training, and support; building bridges across diverse ecosystems; and bringing together public health and business networks, in order to achieve sustainable growth along with an equitable future.

### PROGRAMS

- Community Engagement and Translation Assistance, especially public health in nature
- Navigate local, state and national resources
- Access digital tools in advancing members' wellbeing
- Provide training to retain a healthy workforce
- Provide technical assistance in business operation and IT needs



Governor Mark Dayton presents the 2012 Governor's International Trade Award in Agriculture to NWGI President Gary Mao, recognizing Northwest Grains International, LLC, for its excellence in global trade.

## **GARY MAO'S GLOBAL TRADE SUCCESS: TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES**

*Interviewed By Meejoo Choi*

Gary Mao's journey is one of transformation and opportunity. Originally a veterinarian in China, he moved to the U.S. in 2003 with his partner in pursuit of a new future. Like many newcomers, he started with a corporate job, but his entrepreneurial spirit led him to something bigger. He noticed that import cargo returning to Asia often traveled empty and saw a chance to fill those shipments with U.S. grains and agricultural products in high demand. In 2007, he took a leap and started his own commodity trading and export business, turning a simple idea into a thriving global enterprise.

### **Connecting U.S. Agriculture and Farms to Markets in Asia**

Northwest Grains International, LLC specializes in export sales, catering primarily to key markets in China, Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Philippines. The company is dedicated to high-volume bulk agricultural exports, including Dried Distillers Grains (DDGS), corn, soybeans, cotton seeds, protein, and soybean meal. These commodities require specific distribution channels to ensure efficient and reliable delivery to international buyers. By leveraging strong industry relationships and expertise in global trade logistics, Northwest Grains International plays a crucial role in connecting U.S. agricultural producers with overseas markets, supporting sustainable and mutually beneficial commerce.

## How Cultural Values Drive Northwest Grains International

Chinese culture has played a significant role in shaping both the professional and personal journey of Gary. Deep-rooted values of family connections and strong business relationships have influenced how they navigate the global trade industry. Having built a career through long-standing connections, they credit much of their success to these cultural principles. A large portion of their clientele comes from Chinese communities, particularly in South Asia, where many business owners share similar backgrounds and expectations. This cultural alignment has helped Northwest Grains International establish trust and credibility in the market. Additionally, working with Chinese business partners, who tend to be highly selective and detail-oriented, has refined the company's approach to quality control and customer service, ensuring that every transaction meets the highest standards.

## Turning Challenges into Opportunities: Gary Mao's Entrepreneurial Leap

Gary's path to launching his business was driven by vision and determination rather than prior experience. While working for Northwest Protein, he built a reputation for integrity, reliable shipping, and excellent service with customers in China and other countries. During this time, his supplier, Northwest Grains International, faced financial struggles. At first, Gary worked alongside them to find a solution, but as their situation worsened, they asked him to take over. Seeing an opportunity, he stepped in. Although he didn't start with experience in commodity trading, he recognized a gap in the market—cargo shipments returning to Asia were often empty despite the high demand for U.S. agricultural products. Relying on his strong connections in China, he took a leap, reached out to buyers, and learned the trade as he built his business from the ground up.

### GLOBAL STRATEGY

Northwest Grains International has successfully built a comprehensive worldwide network of suppliers including numerous partnerships within North America. Our sources are more than simply suppliers, they are our partners. These relationships give Northwest Grains International and in turn its customers, unparalleled access to the highest quality grains and grain products available in the world.

[LEARN MORE](#)

[GLOBAL STRATEGY](#)
[VISION FOR THE FUTURE](#)
[IT'S STILL ALL ABOUT SERVING](#)


## From Struggles to Strength: Gary's Journey in Managing Cross-Cultural Teams

Starting and running a successful business came with its fair share of challenges for him, particularly as someone with a Chinese cultural background adapting to the American business landscape. One of the biggest hurdles was managing a team in an environment where workplace expectations and communication styles differed significantly from what he was accustomed to. Additionally, language barriers posed difficulties—some partners or employees found it hard to understand his accent, making negotiations and relationship-building more challenging.

To overcome these obstacles, he took it upon himself to first understand American business culture, learning how to navigate conversations and leadership dynamics. Over time, he also brought in an HR manager to help bridge communication gaps and provide guidance on best practices for team management. Looking back, he acknowledges that having access to mentorship and practical advice on leadership and communication would have made the transition smoother, but through perseverance and adaptability, he was able to establish a thriving business.

## Tips for Asian Entrepreneurs: Exploring Opportunities in Exports and Beyond

For aspiring entrepreneurs looking to break into the agricultural export industry, Gary emphasizes that opportunities abound, especially for Asian entrepreneurs. With global demand for agricultural commodities constantly growing, those who remain proactive and continuously seek new opportunities can carve out a successful path. Hard work is the key to success in this industry—putting in the effort and staying persistent can yield significant rewards. The American Dream is within reach for those willing to dedicate themselves, build strong relationships, and adapt to the ever-changing market. By staying resilient and forward-thinking, aspiring business owners can establish themselves in the competitive world of international trade.





**Preface:** The Asian American Business Resilience Network has teamed up with Asian Media Access to co-develop the St. Paul Sears Site, we will publicize a series of articles to highlight our progress.

#### Series of SEARS Redevelopment - Article #14

## CREATING SPACES OF BELONGING: AIA MINNESOTA'S VISION FOR ASIAN SENIOR HOUSING

AIA Minnesota members volunteered their time from February 1–8 to develop a draft design for Asian senior housing as part of the Sears site redevelopment. The American Institute of Architects (AIA) Minnesota, a professional association representing architects across the state, is collaborating with the Sears redevelopment project to ensure the voices of community members are heard. Through brainstorming sessions, AIA members are working on a plan that reflects the cultural and living needs of Asian elders. This effort is part of the larger initiative to engage architects and the community in shaping a thoughtful and inclusive redevelopment. By actively listening to ideas and feedback, the project aims to create a senior living space that truly serves the community. This article explores the initial concepts behind the Asian senior housing design and highlights the ongoing collaboration between architects, community members, and the Sears redevelopment team.

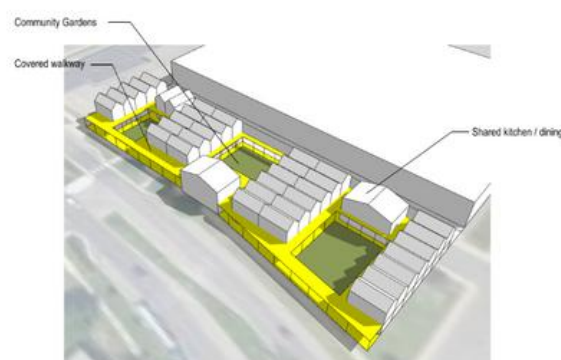
## Blending Tradition and Sustainability

During the brainstorming sessions, AIA Minnesota members explored design principles to create a culturally responsive and sustainable senior housing development at the Sears site. A key idea was to establish a World Heritage Cultural Hub, transforming the space into a landmark that celebrates Asian heritage, fosters cross-cultural connections, and provides a strong sense of belonging for Asian seniors.

Sustainability was another major focus, with proposals to reduce urban heat effects by incorporating green spaces, tree planting, and a rooftop community garden. In addition to housing, the design includes cultural and recreational spaces that promote both community engagement and well-being, such as:

- Courtyards inspired by Asian landscaping traditions for peaceful gatherings
- Cultural and recreational areas for heritage-language movies and music
- A Community Technology Hub where seniors can build digital skills and stay connected with family

**Concept B: Mini Courtyards**



**Precedents:**



Theater space render

## Inspiration Meets Purpose: Designing Culturally Rooted Senior Housing

AIA Minnesota members developed several design concepts and visual representations to illustrate their ideas for the Asian senior housing project. The concepts focus on creating a culturally familiar and functional living environment, incorporating spaces such as:

- Multi-use room/prayer room for spiritual and communal activities
- Theater space for entertainment and cultural programming
- Lobby collage to create a welcoming entrance
- Community garden to promote outdoor relaxation and social interaction
- Dining room designed for shared meals and gatherings
- Living room as a central space for comfort and connection



Multi-use room/prayer room collage



Lobby collage render



Community garden collage



Dining room render



Dining room render



Living room render

The design approach draws inspiration from traditional Asian homes, emphasizing cultural preferences, accessibility, and wellness. Spatial planning prioritizes natural light in all rooms and ensures smooth transitions between key areas, such as the kitchen, dining room, and living room. Research into traditional layouts highlighted the preference for enclosed kitchens, in contrast to open American designs. To enhance comfort and familiarity, the design incorporates natural materials like wood and stone, along with soft lighting to create a warm and inviting atmosphere. Additionally, small shrine spaces are designed with feng shui ("wind and water") or wabi-sabi (a Japanese aesthetic that embraces imperfection, transience, and simplicity) principles, further reinforcing a sense of harmony and cultural connection.

## Thoughtful Features for Senior Well-being

Additionally, the design carefully considers the lifestyle and needs of Asian elders by including:

- **Entryways with space for changing shoes**, respecting cultural traditions and hygiene practices
- **Community-focused spaces** that encourage social interaction and prevent isolation
- **Larger kitchens** for multi-generational gatherings
- **Thoughtful counter heights** to improve accessibility and support independent living

By integrating these culturally responsive features, the AIA Minnesota team aims to create a senior housing environment that not only meets practical needs but also fosters a deep sense of belonging and well-being.

The Sears redevelopment project's collaboration with AIA Minnesota highlights the power of thoughtful design in creating a senior housing space that truly reflects the needs of Asian elders. By working closely with architects, community members, and cultural experts, the project is shaping a living environment that blends tradition, accessibility, and sustainability. This initiative is more than just a housing plan—it is a commitment to honoring cultural heritage while fostering a connected and supportive community. As the redevelopment continues, this collaborative approach will ensure that the voices of those it serves remain at the heart of the design process.



Building massing diagram



Photo Courtesy: [This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](#)

## INNOVATION: A SHARED LEGACY

*By SK Lo, Founding President & Board Chair of AAUC*

Innovation is often associated with the Western world, its democracy, and its liberal policy. But innovation thrives globally and is not limited to the West. It is driven by diverse cultures, histories, and needs, proving that creativity and problem-solving are not confined to any single region.

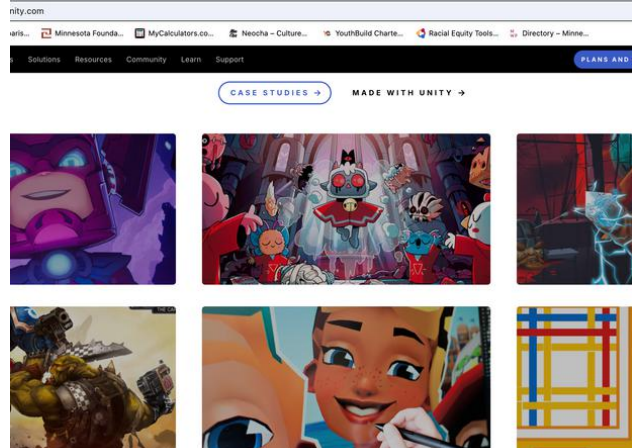
At its core, innovation requires more than just ideas — it demands strong training, education, and a supportive environment. A solid foundation in STEM fields, coupled with cultural values like perseverance and resourcefulness, enables individuals and communities to tackle challenges and create groundbreaking solutions. For instance, many Asian countries' emphasis on STEM education has produced world-class engineers, while Indigenous knowledge has inspired sustainable practices worldwide. Historically, non-Western societies have been pioneers in fields like mathematics, medicine, and engineering. The Islamic Golden Age contributed to algebra and optics, China invented paper and the compass, and Indigenous communities developed sustainable agriculture and medicine. These achievements remind us that innovation is a shared human legacy, not a Western monopoly.

More recently, the burst of innovations from China just stunned the world. The release of the open AI Deepseek, the blockbuster animation movie NeZha2 in 2025, and the video game Black Myth: WuKong in late 2024 with young talents never trained in the West, further underscored that innovation is not limited to democratic society only. In today's interconnected world, collaboration is key to addressing global challenges like climate change and healthcare. By fostering partnerships across borders and cultures, we can unlock new possibilities and drive progress on a larger scale. Innovation is not limited by geography or political orientation — it is fueled by curiosity, determination, and the right foundation. By celebrating contributions from all corners of the world, we can build a more inclusive and collaborative future, where creativity and ingenuity know no borders.

January ~ March

## AI/AR/VR APPLICATION TRAINING COURSE

Our AI/AR/VR Training Cohort enabled participants to explore AR/VR history, technology, and industry applications, gain practical experience with hardware and software, and build valuable skills in 3D modeling, UX/UI design, and programming languages such as Unity and Unreal Engine, among other areas.



February 15 ~ March 29

## THE SERPENT'S CHARM: FASHION SHOW

A group of talented Asian American entrepreneurs (event designers, fashion designers, make-up artists, hair stylists, photographers, multimedia artists, models, etc.) coming together to host a series of creative events to celebrate the Year of Snake. The Serpent's Charm - a fashion show and photography exhibition project that commemorates the Lunar New Year through fashion and cultural inspiration. Learn more at: <https://www.facebook.com/theserpentscharm> Photo Courtesy: The Serpent's Charm



March 06

## SOUTHEAST ASIAN VETERANS COMMEMORATION AT THE 133RD AIRLIFT WING

The 133rd Airlift Wing hosted an event to honor Southeast Asian veterans and mark 50 years since the Vietnam War's end. Veterans shared their experiences, enjoyed a meal, and toured a C-130 Hercules aircraft, fostering reflection and camaraderie while ensuring their sacrifices are remembered.



March 09

## HOLI CELEBRATION AT THE HINDU SOCIETY OF MINNESOTA

The Hindu Society of Minnesota hosted a joyful Holi Celebration, bringing together friends and family to embrace the vibrant spirit of Vrindavan. The event was filled with colors, laughter, and love, fostering unity and unforgettable memories. With an atmosphere of joy and devotion, the festival painted both hearts and faces, marking a beautiful celebration of love, light, and new beginnings.

Photo Courtesy: Hindu Society of Minnesota





**HINDU TEMPLE OF MINNESOTA**  
10530 Temple dr. Maple Grove, MN 55311  
Tel: 952-657-8241; Web site: www.hmn.org

**INVITES YOU TO**  
**VRINDAVAN HOLI**



**Sunday, March 9— 2025, 11:00 AM**

Hindu Temple of Minnesota is planning to conduct Holi like in Vrindavan. All Devotees are requested to come and take part in the Vrindavan Dham Holi and receive Radha Krishna's Blessings

<b>FHOOL (Flowers):</b> Different colors of flowers will be showered on Radha Krishna. <b>DANDIYA HOLI:</b> Dandiya Raas with Radha Krishna Idol in the middle. <b>LADDU HOLI:</b> (Pheda) Laddu and Pheda offered to Sri Radha Krishna and then distributed to the devotees. (Absolutely no colors played inside the temple. Priest will bless with Holi Tilak to all devotees.)	
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**SPONSORSHIP: \$51.00**

COORDINATORS			
Pandit Balkrishna: 763 952 5488 Sachin Khanna: 613 735 2210 Kanak Dutt: 651 226 9962 (Flowers)	Pandit Jigenth Joshi: 952 847 3922 Ishita Cavade: 952 201 1022		



March 15

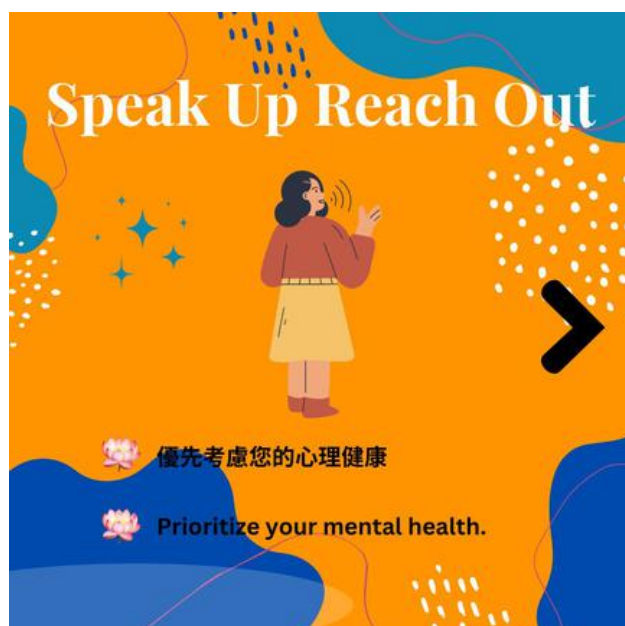
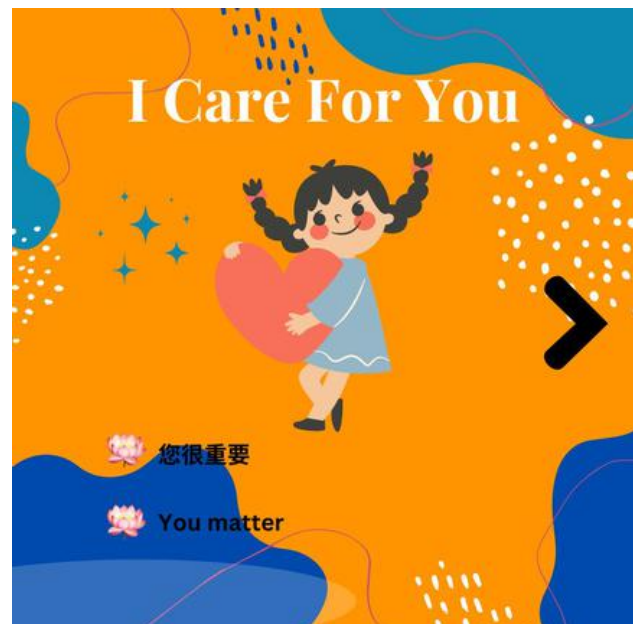
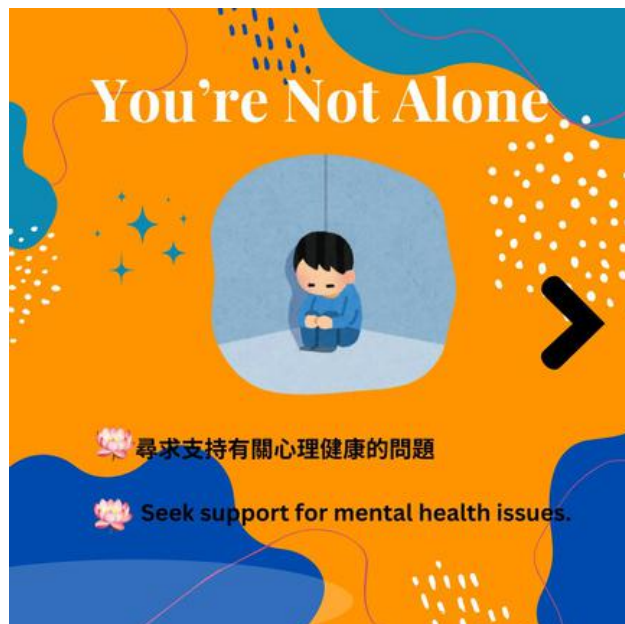
# TAIWANESE CULTURAL FESTIVAL

A carnival event with interactive performances and booths to explore authentic Taiwanese culture, including traditional Han character writing, dancing with calligraphy imagery, Taiwanese tea ceremony, Taiwanese aboriginal dancing, musical folk songs + more hands-on activities.



## MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS FLYERS

Asian Media Access has created a set of mental health heritage story cards. If you are in need of crisis support contact the text line by texting MN to 741741.







## Thinking about starting your business?

Sign up today for the **FREE** 4 two-hour weekly classes.  
 Cohort 3 will take place at: **North Regional Library**  
 1315 Lowry Ave N  
 Minneapolis, MN 55411

**INCENTIVE \$200**

Get \$100 on the first day and \$100 for completing the class.  
 \*Get \$1000 support when you develop a business plan.

**Lead Instructor: Poh Lin Khoo, CEO, Khoo Consulting LLC**

### Cohort #3 Schedule:

April 3, 2025	5:30 PM - 7:30 PM	Orientation with \$100 sign up bonus
April 10, 2025	5:30 PM - 7:30 PM	Entrepreneurship 101
April 17, 2025	5:30 PM - 7:30 PM	Entrepreneurship 101
April 24, 2025	5:30 PM - 7:30 PM	Entrepreneurship 101 with \$100 completion bonus

**Future Cohort Schedules with dates TBD:**

Cohort #4 - May/Jun (Online)

Cohort #5 - Jul/Aug (St Paul location TBD)

Cohort #6 - Sep/Oct (Online)

SIGN UP NOW!



<https://forms.gle/JyhCTE4fXaqBESRA6>

\*Visit website for details about eligibility and business plan criteria.

For more info:    [info@aabrn.org](mailto:info@aabrn.org)    [www.aabrn.org](http://www.aabrn.org)

The State of Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) funded (or funded in part) this training through a grant. The grant recipient created this training. DEED does not endorse this publicity or training or make guarantees, warranties, or assurances of any kind, express or implied, regarding the accuracy, completeness, timeliness, usefulness, adequacy, continued availability or ownership of the information herein or elsewhere.

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP 101

Sign up today for the **FREE** Entrepreneurship 101 classes at the North Regional Library, consisting of four 2 hours sessions.

The cohort begins on April 3rd. \$200 Incentive to sign up and complete the 4 weeks cohort. \$1000 in support for developing a business plan.

Sign up today at: <https://aabrn.org/entrepreneurship-101/>



## We can help you find your focus

Building a budget that actually works.  
Growing your network organically.  
Mastering work/life balance. All this  
and more with Digital Ready. What will  
your focus be?

Check it out



## BUDGETING TIPS AND NETWORKING KNOW-HOW

Struggling with budgeting, networking, or work-life balance? Digital Ready can help you find your focus and achieve your goals. Discover expert insights and practical tools to streamline your success at:

[https://link.digitalready.verizonwireless.com/OTk2LUtXQy0zNzcAAAGZKn5A0-kz96GrTzwrOAAOnZ\\_2TNNWrU\\_BQXIGWbjvQHw\\_pjs1hSTgctExNiFQleIF4R3PHE=](https://link.digitalready.verizonwireless.com/OTk2LUtXQy0zNzcAAAGZKn5A0-kz96GrTzwrOAAOnZ_2TNNWrU_BQXIGWbjvQHw_pjs1hSTgctExNiFQleIF4R3PHE=)

Find the event that fits your goals:

<https://digitalready.verizonwireless.com/category/events>



Event

Safe capital to keep  
your business secure

Mar 31, 12:00 pm-6:00 pm



Event • Ask the Expert

From creating  
personas to using them  
(part 3 of 4: Crafting...

Mar 31, 2:00 pm-4:00 pm



Just added

Event • Ask the Expert

Growing your profit  
margins

Apr 1, 11:00 am-1:00 pm



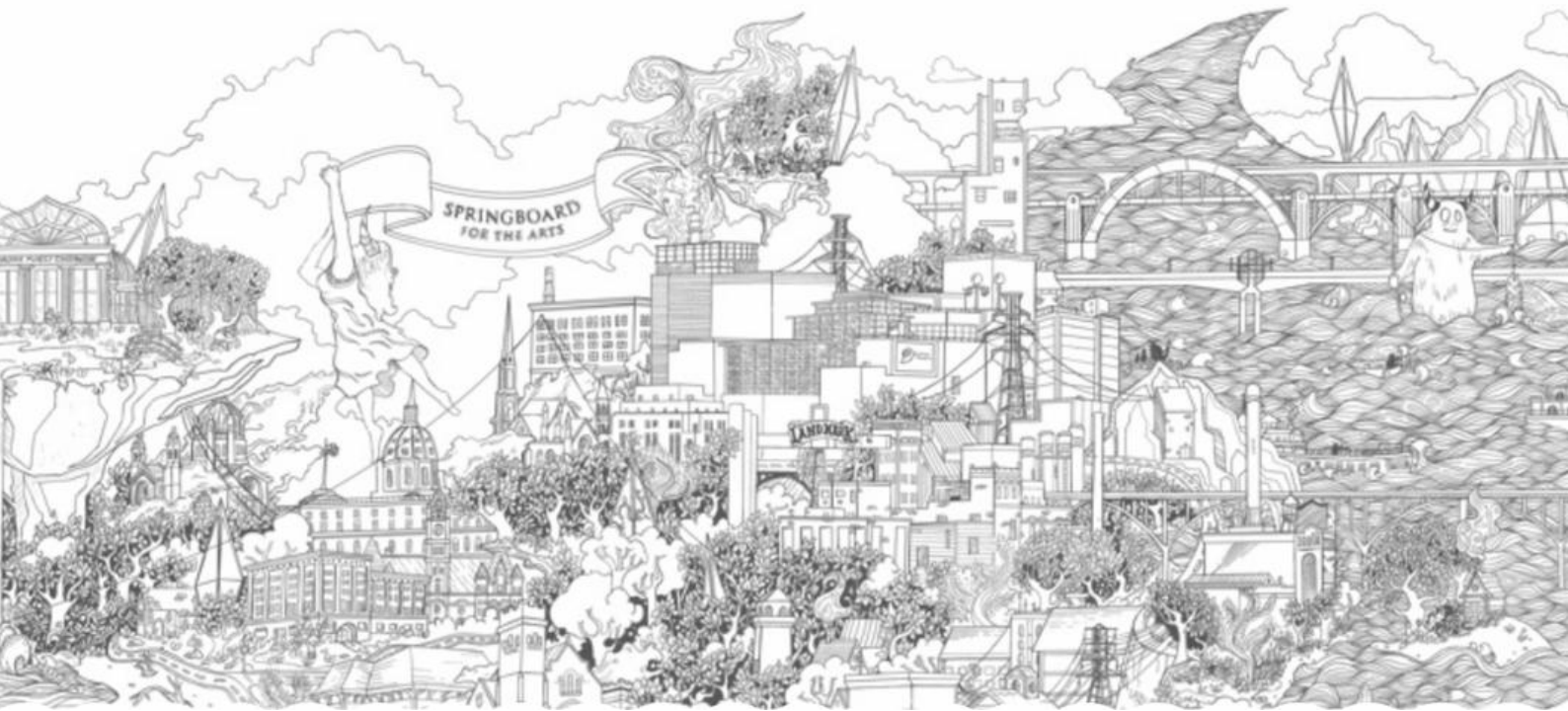
Just added

Event

Digital growth  
essentials: transform  
your brand & website...

Apr 4, 1:00 pm-2:00 pm





## Springboard for the Arts Calendar of Events - Professional Development

- March 22, 2025 11:30 am to 1:30 pm - Carbon Sound Music Career & Collab Workshop
- March 26, 2025 2:00 pm to 3:30 pm - Creative Change Coalition, Technical Assistance Workshop: Framing and Storytelling for Organizations
- April 1, 2025 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm - Work of Art: Recordkeeping
- April 5, 2025 10:00 am to 12:30 pm - Photographing Your Artwork

Learn more and register at: <https://springboardforthearts.org/events/>

## Additional Resources

- Get connected to Artist Career Consultants here:  
<https://springboardforthearts.org/professional-growth/career-consultations/artist-career-consultants/>
- Work of Art Toolkit: <https://springboardforthearts.org/woa>
- Handbook for Artists Working in Community:  
<https://springboardforthearts.org/artists-working-in-community/>

## Tax Tips from the IRS



- [Here's what taxpayers need to know about business related travel deductions](#)
- [Companies who promise to eliminate tax debt sometimes leave taxpayers high and dry](#)
- [Get an Identity Protection PIN.](#)
- [Tax Resources for Members of the Military](#)



MAR  
**20**

12pm~1pm

## How to Start and Run a Franchise Business That Works for You

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

MAR  
**26**

9am~11am

## Buying a Business

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

MAR  
**26**

1030am~2pm

## Accelerating Entrepreneurs in Utah with the Nasdaq Entrepreneurial Center

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

MAR  
**27**

1pm~2pm

## Become the Obvious Choice: Success, Profitability, and Finding Your Way

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)



APR

1

9am~10am

## SBA Mentor Protégé Program

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

APR

1

12pm~130pm

## Power of Capital

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

APR

8

12pm~1pm

## Master B2B Sales: GTM Strategy & Deal Execution for High-Growth Startups

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

APR

24

11am~1230pm

## Start with Brand 3: Design Basics

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)



Visit Our Website for More Upcoming Events

[OFFICIAL WEBSITE >>](#)

# Contact Us

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## Partnering with



Asian Media Access



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