

MN Biz Vision: Asian Kaleidoscope



Features:

Turning a Passion into a Bakery Dream: How Yen Fang Brings Love and Flavor to Minnesota

Community Insights from the Second Sear's Walk Audit

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

Table of Contents

01~02	Introduction
02~04	Featured Interview - Yen Fang
05~07	Featured Articles
08~16	Updates
17	Wellness Corner
18~19	Business Resources
20~21	Upcoming Events
22	Contact



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



TURNING A PASSION INTO A BAKERY DREAM: HOW YEN FANG BRINGS LOVE AND FLAVOR TO MINNESOTA

Interviewed By Meejoo Choi

Meet Yen Fang, the owner of So Yen Bakery, a small-batch bakery tucked in the heart of St. Paul's downtown. So Yen has quickly become a local favorite, known for its fresh, hand-rolled brioche donuts, including sweet cream-filled varieties. Yen began baking during the 2019 pandemic to keep herself busy, and from there, she focused on bringing flavors and baked goods she loved from her travels—treats that were hard to find in Minnesota. Named after the combination of her own name and her daughter's, So Yen offers brioche donuts, amazing drinks, and other treats, all made with care, quality, and heart.

Doing Hard Things and the Right things

For Yen, Hmong culture is at the heart of everything she creates. As part of her heritage, it shapes not only the flavors she chooses but also the way she approaches baking and connecting with others. Many of her treats are inspired by the tastes she grew up with or by flavors she discovered during her travels—unique combinations she couldn't easily find in Minnesota. To her, each recipe is a way to share a piece of her background and offer something exciting for others to experience. In Hmong culture, food is more than nourishment—it's a way to bring people together and share

love. That same spirit lives in So Yen, where every bite carries both warmth and a story.



Turning a Hobby into the Dream Bakery

So Yen came to life through Yen's food-loving family background, where she learned early on how food brings people together—her parents once owned a pretzel shop and hosted pop-ups. She took her first baking class, cake decorating, in 2014 but didn't pursue it seriously until 2019. During the pandemic, she began baking and sharing her creations on Facebook for record. And unexpectedly it sparked requests from friends and family, and soon, even strangers were lining up at her home to buy her baking goods. The overwhelming demand led to licensed pop-ups at her in-laws' North St. Paul restaurant, which was so successful that her husband encouraged her to leave her decade-long career in the corporate job. Though nervous, Yen took the leap, inspired by a trip to Europe where she fell in love with brioche donuts. Months of recipe testing with her husband's help eventually led her to open So Yen in downtown St. Paul's Lowertown in late 2023, backed by a devoted following and industry friends.

Throughout her journey, Yen tapped into valuable resources to navigate the business side of baking. She learned about licensing and regulations through her own research and leaned on guidance from experienced friends in the baking and restaurant community, many of whom she connected with during her early pop-ups. Their advice helped her understand what steps to take to operate legally and sustainably. Even in her second year of running So Yen, she says that she's still learning something new every day.

Making Each Bite Meaningful

One thing Yen wishes more people knew is how much care goes into every donut. Each batch is made entirely by hand, with the dough rolled and shaped as early as 4:30 a.m. Because the process is so time-intensive, her shop is only open for limited hours—Fridays from 10 a.m.–2 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays from 8:30 a.m.–1 p.m.—and the number of donuts available each day is intentionally capped to maintain quality. This means they often sell out quickly—and can’t simply be made on the spot once they’re gone. For Yen, it’s not about volume; it’s about crafting flavors she loves and creating meaningful experiences for her customers.

Overcoming Challenges and Building a Bakery Dream Through Community Support

Starting and running her own business has been far from the picture-perfect dream. The business side brought challenges Yen hadn’t anticipated—navigating sales and use tax, keeping track of costs, and learning complicated regulations. Time and energy management was another hurdle; leaving her corporate job didn’t mean more free time. Despite being her own boss, she works well over 40 hours a week—shopping for ingredients, prepping dough, handling paperwork, and managing HR tasks—long before and after the shop’s Friday-to-Sunday hours. Balancing the demands of the bakery with family life is an ongoing struggle, and much of her learning has come through trial and error. She has leaned on experienced friends in the baking and restaurant world for guidance on licensing, regulations, and even kitchen space to test her products. Networking, especially through Asian community events, has connected her with people whose advice and support have been invaluable along the way.



Tips from Yen: Courage, Community, and Small Steps

For those hoping to start a business in the same industry, she advises starting small and focusing on quality—perfect your recipes before thinking about scaling up. Be ready for early mornings, long hours, and the emotional ups and downs that come with the journey. Most importantly, don’t underestimate the power of community. “You can’t

be successful without support from the community,” she says, emphasizing the value of building relationships with other bakers, suppliers, and local networks. She also encourages aspiring entrepreneurs not to let fear hold them back. She nearly walked away from signing her lease but is now grateful she pushed through. Looking back, she realizes fear has stopped her from pursuing many things in life, and she hopes others will take that leap sooner rather than later.



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 #19

STEPS TOWARD CHANGE: COMMUNITY INSIGHTS FROM THE SECOND SEARS WALK AUDIT

Asian Media Access (AMA), the Asian American Business Resilience Network (AABRN), and the Frogtown-Rondo Business and Cultural Alliance (FRBCA), in collaboration with REACH and other community partners, have successfully completed the second day of Walk Audits.



This initiative is designed to assess walkability and active transportation by having volunteers explore the areas surrounding the site—sidewalks, crossings, bike routes, and transit access—to identify what's working well and where improvements are needed. At the same time, it aims to gather community insight. The audits serve as a tool for

engaging local residents—especially youth, elders, and people with mobility challenges—who share their perspectives through photos, videos, and form-based feedback. Community engagement goals focus on empowering residents from Rondo and Frogtown to voice concerns, documenting input from youth, seniors, and mobility-impaired participants, and using the AARP/Safe Routes Walk Audit Toolkit to guide evaluations. This community-driven input will inform both immediate improvements, such as pop-up crosswalks and protected bike lanes, and long-term infrastructure planning that reflects the community’s priorities.

Why Walk the South and West Routes—and What Did We Learn?

The July 10 Walk Audit examined the South and West Routes surrounding University Avenue and the Capitol area, with a focus on how residents and visitors move through these busy corridors. Along the South Route, participants explored pedestrian flow and safety around the Capitol Rice Transit Station, walking through Rice Street, Aurora Avenue, Fuller Avenue, and University Avenue toward the Capitol Campus. Observers noted signage, crossings, and overall amenities, while also assessing the business corridor for issues such as commercial viability and crosswalk conditions. The West Route centered on Rice Street and its connections to the Capitol Campus, where the group observed midblock crossings and bus stop safety near MnDOT facilities. Additional concerns included the lack of bike lanes, boulevard maintenance, signage, and the accessibility of curb cuts. Together, these findings highlight opportunities to improve safety, mobility, and vibrancy across key routes to the Capitol.

The second day audit also explored ideas for long-term improvements, including the potential for a future lid park or reconnection plan to help repair the neighborhood fabric disrupted by the freeway.



Exploring the Site: What Participants Were Asked to Consider

A total of twenty-one St. Paul neighbors joined the Walk Audit, bringing a range of perspectives and experiences to the discussion. Building on Day 1, participants

reflected on mobility, safety, and the overall sense of welcome in the area. To guide the conversation, they were asked three key questions:

- How easy is it to get around? Are sidewalks clear and connected? Are crossings safe and visible?
- Does the space feel welcoming?: Are there places to rest, signs to help people navigate, or shade from the sun?
- Who is this place working for—and who is it leaving out?

Listening to the Community: Key Takeaways on Connectivity and Safety

Survey feedback was collected from 18 participants, offering insights into transportation and equitable access. Walking and driving were the most preferred modes (each mentioned by 13 participants), followed by bicycling (10), bus (8), and light rail (6). This highlights the need for a multi-modal approach, with particular attention to safe walking routes and accessible driving options. To improve equitable access, the top priorities included safer street crossings (13 mentions) and better lighting at night. Other suggestions included wider sidewalks, marked bike lanes, shaded rest areas, and slower traffic speeds.

In terms of desired services and amenities, participants highlighted grocery stores (7 mentions), healthcare services, pharmacies, and other everyday needs. There was also strong interest in restaurants, coffee and boba shops, parks, event spaces, and youth-friendly gathering areas. Across all responses, participants emphasized safety, lighting, and inclusive infrastructure—especially for seniors and people with disabilities—along with support for cultural businesses and community spaces.

Upcoming Plans for Inclusive Redevelopment

The Second Walk Audit highlighted strong community support for multi-modal transportation, with walking and driving as top priorities, alongside calls for safer crossings, better lighting, and improved pedestrian and bike infrastructure. Participants also expressed interest in essential retail, food options, and community spaces that foster inclusivity, cultural diversity, and accessibility for all.

With both Walk Audits now complete, the collected community feedback will help inform and shape future plans for the Sears redevelopment project—building a safer, healthier environment for all. To learn more about the project and stay updated, please visit:

<https://searsstpaul.info/>



July 19

UTSAV 2025 FESTIVAL OF COLORS

The Indian Cultural Association of Minnesota (ICAM) hosted the Festival of Colors 5K in downtown Rochester, filling Peace Plaza with color, culture, and community. This summer Holi event allowed ICAM to connect with the broader public while supporting the cultural and educational needs of the Asian Indian community. Photo Courtesy: KTTC News and Indian Cultural Association of Minnesota



INDIAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA (ICAM) PRESENTS...

UTSAV 2025

FESTIVAL OF COLORS

JULY 19TH | SATURDAY | 4:30 - 8:30
PEACE PLAZA | DOWNTOWN ROCHESTER

5K ENTRY FEE: \$20 (\$5 OFF FOR MEMBERS AND STUDENTS)
GENERAL FEE: \$5 (FREE FOR MEMBERS)
TICKET INCLUDES COLORS AND PHOTO BOOTH
VENDORS, SPONSORS, AND 5K REGISTRATION DETAILS AT ICAMN.ORG

5K RUN / WALK
DJ MUSIC / DANCE
FOOD MELA
COLOR SPLASH
...AND MORE!

DMC Destination Medical Center

ICAM Culture, Education Collaboration

DOWNTOWN Rochester, MN

SUPPORTED BY ROCHESTER DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE & DESTINATION MEDICAL CENTER

CONTACT@ICAMN.ORG

July 26

PROJECT HOPE MUSIC FESTIVAL & AR/VR EXHIBITION

We had a fantastic time at the Project HOPE Music Festival and AR/VR Exhibition, where community, culture, and creativity came together in a powerful way. The event featured the immersive 360° Rondo VR experience, live performances from local artists, cultural dance and storytelling, free food samples from community vendors, and vibrant family-friendly activities that made the day truly special.



July 26 & 27

NOVITIATE CEREMONY

The Novitiate Ceremony was a meaningful two-day gathering rooted in tradition, blessings, and community celebration. The family-friendly event welcomed guests to take part in the spiritual atmosphere while honoring cultural values. Photo Courtesy: Karen Culture Organization of Minnesota



August 3

CULTURAL HERITAGE DAY

Cultural Heritage Day hosted by Hindu Society of Minnesota was a true feast for the senses, filled with flavorful dishes and warm community spirit. From the smiles of our food volunteers to the joy of those who came ready to enjoy a good meal, every bite was made with love. Photo Courtesy: Hindu Society of Minnesota



August 5

NEIGHBORHOOD NIGHT OUT AT SEARS

We hosted a wonderful community event at the Sears Parking Lot in collaboration with Asian Media Access and the Frogtown/Rondo Black Church Alliance. The event brought together families from the surrounding area, creating space for meaningful engagement, connection, and community building in a welcoming and inclusive environment.



August 8 & 9

INAUGURATION OF THE GREAT GATE

Wattanak Dance Troupe hosted a two-day celebration at Watt Munisotaram to mark the inauguration of the new great gate. Held over the weekend, the event featured traditional Cambodian dance performances each day, bringing together community members to honor the occasion and celebrate cultural heritage through vibrant expression and ceremony. Photo Courtesy: Wattanak Dance Troupe



August 9

LAO ARTS AND CULTURE SUMMER CAMP SHOWCASE

Lao Arts & Culture hosted a student showcase at the Pan Asian Center in Maplewood, where youth from the summer camp shared their learning and celebrated Lao culture through performances and activities. Photo Courtesy: Lao Arts & Culture



August 10

ASIAN STREET MARKET

We hosted the Asian Street Market Event at the Sears parking lot in Saint Paul, alongside Asian Media Access and the Frogtown/Rondo Black Church Alliance. The celebration featured cultural performances, food vendors, interactive booths, and community engagement, bringing people together to highlight the vision of the future World Cultural Heritage Corridor.



August 16

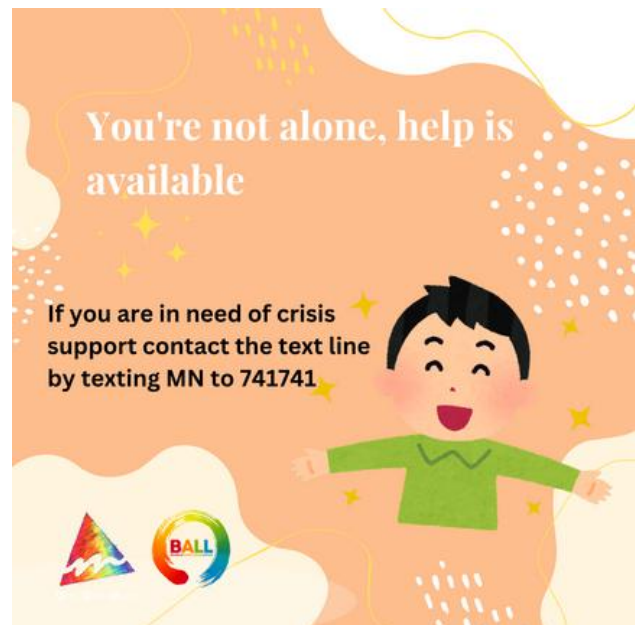
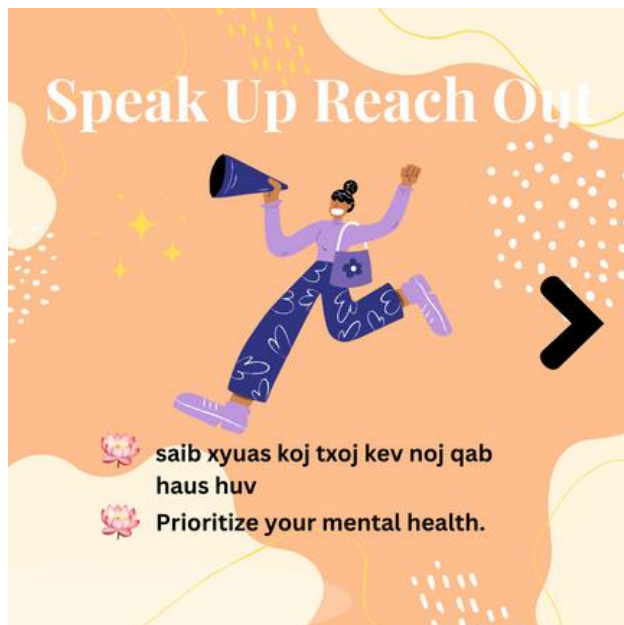
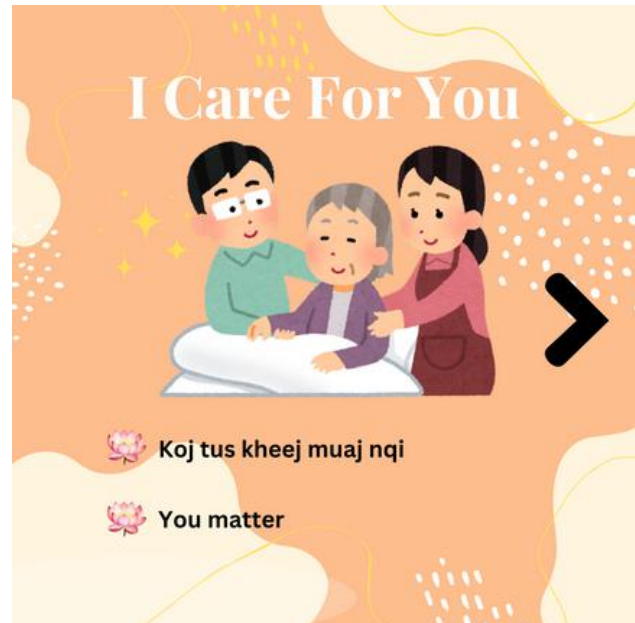
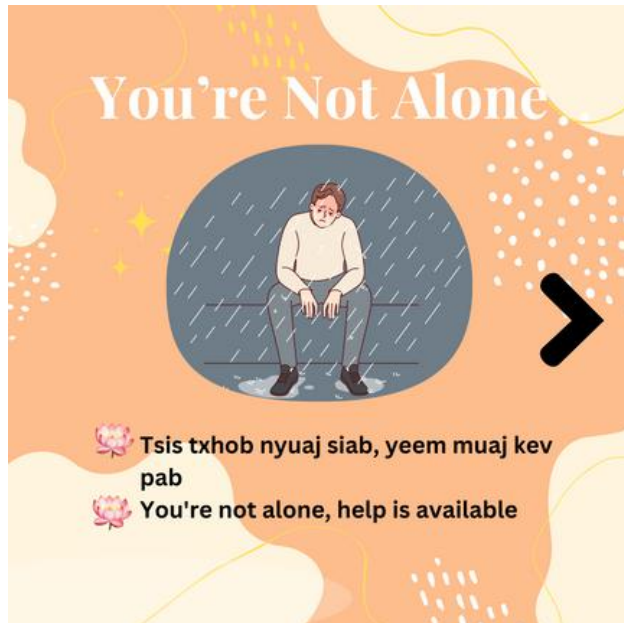
INDIAFEST 2025

IndiaFest, hosted by the India Association of Minnesota, is a free outdoor celebration of Indian Independence Day, recognized in Minnesota as India Day. The event features cultural performances, activities for all ages, and a lively evening concert with renowned artist Ananth Vikram and local talent, offering a chance to experience India in a day. Photo Courtesy: India Association of Minnesota and Asmita Satyarthi



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.

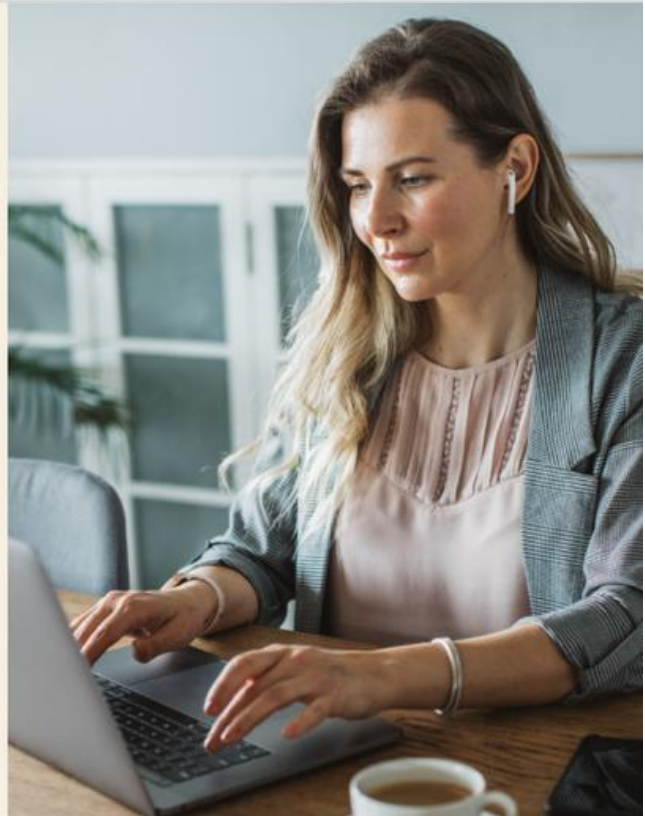




We can help you find your focus

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=

Find the event that fits your goals:

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



Event • Ask the Expert

Impactful presentations

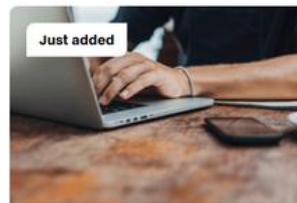
Aug 26, 11:00 am-1:00 pm



Event • Ask the Expert

Driving more traffic to
your website

Aug 28, 2:00 pm-4:00 pm



Just added

Event • Ask the Expert

What can a CRM do for
your business?

Sep 15, 2:00 pm-4:00 pm



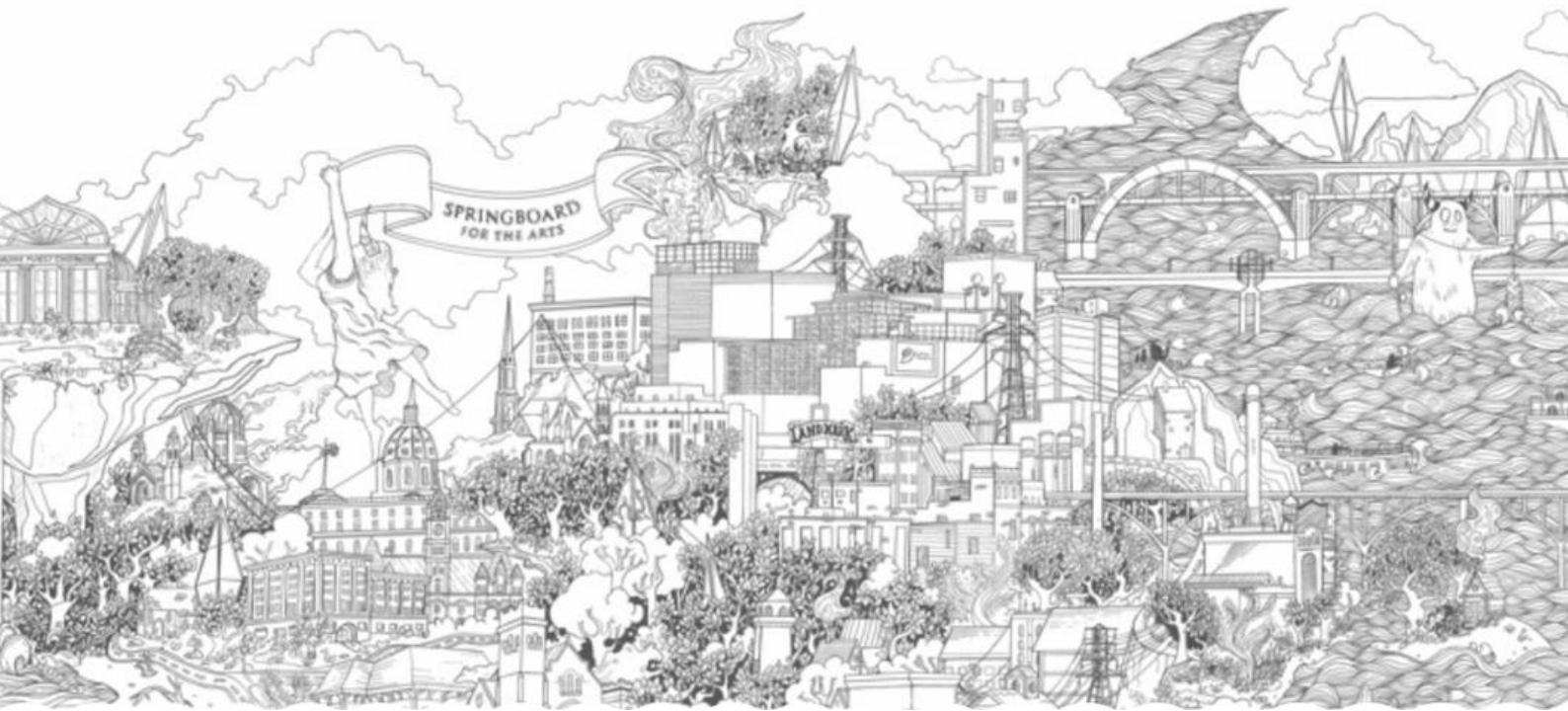
Just added

Event

Using SWOT analysis to
find your sweet spot

Sep 16, 11:00 am-1:00 pm





Springboard for the Arts Calendar of Events - Professional Development

- August 28, 2025 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm - Ask Me Anything: Navigating Big Career Opportunities as an Artist
- September 3, 2025 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm - Work of Art: Career Planning – SEMAC
- September 9, 2025 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm - Work of Art: Time Management
- September 13, 2025 1:00 pm to 3:30 pm - Work of Art: Career Planning
- September 17, 2025 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm - The Writer's Guide to Sourcing Images

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](#)



AUG
22
12pm~1pm

The Power of Brand Consistency and Its Impact on Your Bottom Line

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

AUG
26
2pm~3pm

Deep Dive into Entity-Owned/8(a) and HubZone Applications

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

AUG
28
2pm~3pm

Interpreting Financial Statements: CFO Strategies for CEOs

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

AUG
29
11am~12pm

Activating Partnerships for Product-Based Founders

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)



SEP

3

11am~12pm

Brand Clarity & Ecommerce Conversion

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

SEP

4

11am~12pm

Financial Forecasting Made Simple

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

SEP

9

2pm~3pm

Mentor Protégé & Empower to Grow Programs

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

SEP

11

2pm~3pm

Certification Eligibility Requirements

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)



Visit Our Website for More Upcoming Events

[OFFICIAL WEBSITE >>](#)

Contact Us

Email

aabrn@amamedia.org

Telephone

(612) 376-7715

Address

2418 Plymouth Ave N, Room 105,
Minneapolis, MN 55411



Partnering with



Asian Media Access



Asian American Business Resilience Network