BICULTURAL ACTIVE LIVING LIFESTYLE E-MAGAZINE

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Features:

Cultural Congregated Dining In Asian Temples

Project SUPPORT

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INTRODUCATION

Project SUPPORT (Supporting Under-served through Produce Prescription, and Opportunities to Recreation-activity & Technical-assistance), is led by Asian Media Access (AMA), collaborated with Multi Cultural Community Alliance (MCCA), Project SUPPORT is a cross-cultural, cross-generational, and cross-sectoral initiative, aims to improve health, prevent chronic disease, and reduce health disparities among all members, with a special focus on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOCs) who face the highest risk, and bear the highest burden of chronic disease, named: African American/Black, Asian American and will put a special focus on young people from the two poorest but most diverse neighborhoods in MN – North Minneapolis, and Midway St. Paul.

Supported by CDC's REACH funding, AMA will leverage our extensive network of trusted community partners who provide subject matter expertise and have a history of successful engagement with the respective cultural and geographic communities. All partners have been involved in co-designing this Initiative – Project SUPPORT through below 2 culturally tailored strategies to promote Bicultural Healthy Living, especially for immigrant and refugee communities:

- **Nutrition:** Increase healthy cultural food access by implementing Food Service Guidelines (FSG) at area Asian Temples and Black Churches, and establishing Produce Rx at area clinics/hospitals.
- **Physical Activity:** Increase policies, plans and community designs through North Minneapolis Blue Line and St. Paul Sears Redevelopment to better connect residents with activity friendly routes to everyday destination to live/learn/work/play, and provide safe, culturally based places for increasing physical activities.

Please check the Project SUPPORT updates through our Bicultural Active Living Lifestyle (BALL) website, weblog, Facebook, and e-Magazine:

- BALL Facebook at – https://www.facebook.com/ballequity/
- BALL Monthly eMagazines: https://ballequity.amamedia.org/project-support/
- BALL Website: https://ballequity.amamedia.org/
- BALL Web Blog: https://www.behavioralhealthequityproject.org/

For More Information: 612-376-7715 or amamedia@amamedia.org

STRATEGY INTRO: Increase healthy cultural food access by implementing Food Service Guidelines (FSG) at least one Asian Temple, establishing Produce Rx at three clinics/hospitals.

THE UNSEEN TOLL OF OPERATION METRO SURGE: FEAR AND THE COLLAPSE OF FRESH PRODUCE ACCESS

During the winter of 2025–2026, as up to 3,000 federal immigration agents deployed across Minneapolis under Operation Metro Surge. Fear spread rapidly, disrupting daily life and effectively shutting down access to fresh produce for many low-income residents. The result was not just economic strain, but a breakdown of the city's fresh fruits and vegetable safety net.

THE IMPACTS OF OPERATION METRO SURGE

Two fatal encounters intensified public fear. On January 7, 37-year-old mother Renee Good was shot by federal agents. Weeks later, ICU nurse Alex Pretti was also killed following a confrontation. These incidents triggered widespread anxiety, making routine activities—like grocery shopping or visiting farmers markets—feel dangerous, especially among immigrants and refugees.

According to the City of Minneapolis' Preliminary Impact Assessment & Relief Needs Overview (dated Feb 13, 2026), the surge caused an estimated $203.1 million in total community impact. Approximately 76,000 residents—primarily immigrants, refugees, Native American, Black, and other communities of color—now require urgent

assistance. Food insecurity alone affects over 76,200 people, with the city estimating $2.4 million per week needed to meet demand.

THE CRITICAL MISSING LINK: NO DIRECT F&V VOUCHER DATA

Minneapolis does maintain winter farmers markets, including indoor options like Mill City Farmers Market, Neighborhood Roots at Bachman's greenhouse, and others. These markets accept SNAP/EBT and offer incentives such as Market Bucks, which can triple purchasing power for fresh produce. Despite this infrastructure, attendance and usage dropped sharply during the Surge.

A critical gap in the City's report is the absence of data on fresh produce access. It does not track redemption rates for programs like Market Bucks, WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), or Senior FMNP, nor does it analyze shifts from fresh to processed food consumption. However, one key statistic helps explain what happened: service providers reported a 50% reduction in client contact as families avoided public systems.

This decline likely extended to farmers markets and voucher programs, all of which depend on in-person participation, and people are afraid to leave homes. SNAP users must visit market booths to access matching funds. WIC participants and seniors must redeem vouchers directly with vendors. When half of all client engagement disappears, these systems effectively stop functioning. The consequences were immediate. Winter farmers markets—designed to address seasonal food gaps—became inaccessible to those who needed them most. Even well-funded programs and emergency incentives went largely unused because residents were too afraid to appear in public spaces.

AGRICULTURAL IMPACTS COMPOUNDED THE CRISIS.

Increased immigration enforcement created fear among immigrant farmworkers, contributing to labor shortages across winter-dependent operations such as dairy,

livestock, and greenhouse production. Workers hesitated to travel, disrupting essential tasks like milking, animal care, and early planting preparation. These labor gaps likely reduced supply and increased costs, further straining already fragile food access systems.

Meanwhile, SNAP Produce Match programs at grocery stores also went underutilized due to the same fear-driven avoidance. With both access points (markets) and supply chains (farms) disrupted, families turned to shelf-stable foods. Canned goods became survival staples, often high in sodium and lacking fresh nutritional value. National data shows that a single cup of canned soup can contain over 800 milligrams of sodium—more than one-third of the daily recommended limit. For families eating multiple canned meals per day, daily sodium intake frequently exceeds 4,000 to 5,000 milligrams, well above the recommended 2,300-milligram ceiling.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE: MUTUAL AID DELIVERS

In response, community-based mutual aid networks stepped in. Organizations like the Center for Victims of Torture, and faith-based groups mobilized to deliver groceries directly to homes. These efforts replaced public-facing systems with low-contact, trust-based distribution, becoming the primary source of fresh produces for many households.

While the City has documented the broad economic and social impacts of Operation Metro Surge, the full nutritional consequences remain unclear. Without tracking voucher usage, market attendance, or dietary shifts, a key dimension of the crisis is missing.

Please Note: These drawings were created using NightCafe.AI to illustrate the impacts of Operation Metro Surge across Minnesota on people of all ages, cultures, and families.

CONCLUSION: THE DATA GAP AND THE PATH FORWARD

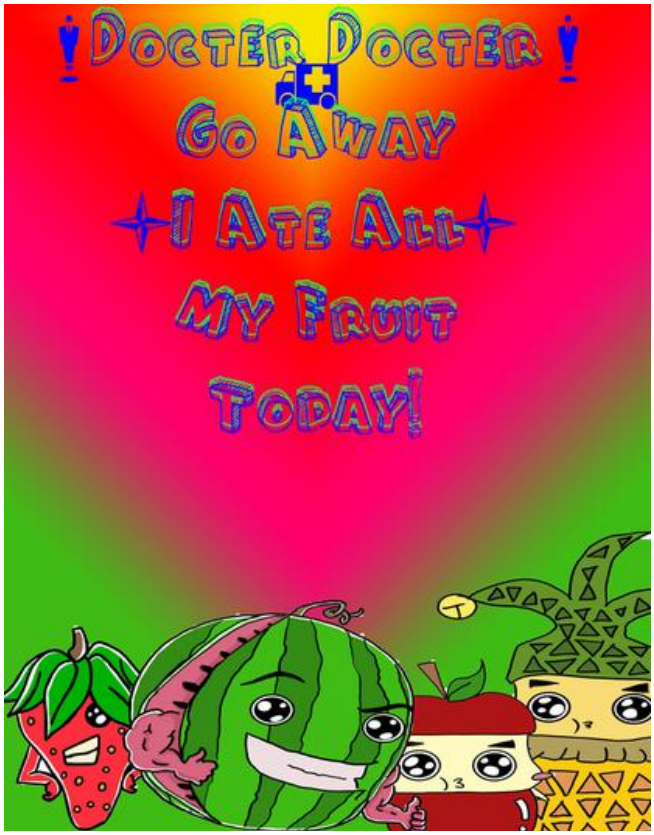
As Operation Metro Surge concluded in mid-February 2026, the physical agents left, but the behavioral scars remained. The incident proved that food security is not just

about supply, but about the freedom to move. The $203 million impact on the city included not just broken windows and legal fees, but the silent rotting of healthy food that no one dared to pick up.

More troubling still was the invisible health crisis—rising blood pressure, dietary fatigue, and the normalization of heavy salt consumption—that would linger long after the agents departed. Without tracking voucher redemption rates, winter farmers market attendance, or the shift from fresh to processed foods, the full dietary cost of the Surge remains invisible. The 50% reduction in client contact is a warning. If families will not engage with public systems, then programs designed to deliver fresh produce through public-facing farmers markets—even warm, indoor winter markets with generous SNAP matching—will fail.

For Minneapolis to truly rebuild, it must not only restore its food assistance infrastructure but also find ways to decouple fresh produce access from public presence. Not until the data on fresh produce vouchers is collected and analyzed, the true scale of the nutritional crisis will remain unknown.

Please Note: Asian Media Access' Youth Team has creatively developed a series of fruit and vegetable characters designed to inspire children to enjoy more fresh produce. Below are their imaginative creations = each serving as a fun and engaging reminder to eat more delicious fruits and vegetables.



CULTURAL CONGREGATED DINING IN ASIAN TEMPLES

Preface: Below article is written by Asian Media Access, and is based on Dr. Jenyu Lai's Food Service Guideline (FSG) Assessment Reports for area Asian temples, and *Field Research Report: Cultural Congregated Dining Improvement* by Hongli Yu, MPH, at Walden University. The article is not indented to recreate previous reports, but instead of taking the opportunity to share observations of the process, and how to improve the assessment using FSG guideline to better approach the cultural congregated dining settings.

PART I. THE SACRED TABLE: UNDERSTANDING TEMPLE CONGREGATE DINING

Walk into Watt Dhamma Visudhikaram on a Sunday morning, or the Hindu Temple of Minnesota during Brahmotsavam, and what you encounter is far more than a meal. Families arrive carrying carefully prepared dishes — the best of what their kitchen produced that week. Elders set out steaming bowls of soup, handmade desserts, and slow-cooked curries. Younger members arrange offerings on shared tables. Monks take their seats first, receiving food as a spiritual act. Then the community gathers together, sitting as one large family, sharing everything that everyone brought.

This is Asian temple congregate dining in its truest form: a practice rooted in centuries of tradition, where the act of preparing, offering, and sharing food is inseparable from religious devotion, community solidarity, and cultural identity. Before any discussion of nutrition standards or food safety protocols, this context must be honored and understood.

> *"Temple congregate dining is not simply a meal program. It is a living cultural practice where food functions simultaneously as devotion, generosity, connection, and care."*

THE OFFERING: A SACRED ACT OF GENEROSITY

In Buddhist temple practice documented in this research — particularly at Watt Dhamma Visudhikaram — the act of bringing food to offer monks is among the most spiritually significant gestures a layperson can make. As described in Buddhist teaching, the giving and receiving of food offerings creates a spiritual bond between the monastic and lay communities: laypeople support the monks physically, and monks support the community spiritually. There is, as tradition holds, "no giver and no receiver — just giving and receiving."

This means that the food brought to the temple represents a family's very best effort — their most carefully prepared dishes, their most prized ingredients, their deepest expression of gratitude and faith. The offering is not catered. It is not standardized. It is personal, seasonal, culturally specific, and spiritually intentional. Across the temples observed in this study — Cambodian, South Indian, Hindu, and Sikh — this foundational offering structure held constant, even as the specific foods, rituals, and dietary traditions varied.

THE COMMUNAL MEAL: ONE LARGE FAMILY AT ONE TABLE

Once the monks have been served, community members eat together. What the report observed across sites was not simply a cafeteria setting but a communal experience that mirrors extended family dining at its most generous scale. At the Hindu Temple of Minnesota's Brahmotsavam event, 1,500 to 2,000 community members were served across a single continuous meal. At Watt Dhamma Visudhikaram, six monks and ten community members shared hot pot together. At the Sikh Society of Minnesota, 200 people sat together for the langar — the community meal where all eat the same food as equals, a practice with deep roots in

the Sikh tradition of dissolving caste and social hierarchy through shared nourishment.

The result of this model is a dining experience that is profoundly communal, emotionally rich, and deeply tied to cultural belonging. Participants do not eat in isolation; they eat as a collective. The meal is an extension of the religious service. The shared table is itself a form of care. It is at such basis, we came in to evaluate the nutrition balance using the Federal endorsed Food Service Guideline (FSG) Tool kits.

PART II. WHAT THE ASSESSMENT TOOLS MISS: SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND HOLISTIC WELLBEING

The Food Service Guidelines — the primary assessment framework applied in this research — were designed with institutional food service environments in mind: federal cafeterias, hospital systems, workplace vending operations. The nine criteria categories address fruits and vegetables, grains, dairy, protein foods, desserts, sodium, trans fats, calorie labeling, and other food safety considerations. These are important dimensions of nutritional quality. But they are entirely silent on something that temple dining delivers with remarkable consistency: social connection.

> *"Not one element of the CDC Food Service Guidelines assessment addresses social connectedness, emotional wellbeing, spiritual nourishment, or the community-building function of shared meals — dimensions of health that are well-documented in public health literature and that lie at the very heart of temple congregate dining."*

This is a significant gap — not just methodologically, but conceptually. Public health research has established strong links between social connectedness and health outcomes: loneliness and social isolation are associated with increased risk of

cardiovascular disease, depression, cognitive decline, and premature mortality. For immigrant and refugee communities in particular — many of whom face language barriers, cultural isolation, and limited access to mainstream social support — the weekly communal meal at a temple may represent one of the most consistent sources of belonging, recognition, and community they have.

A recent phenomenological study of temple food practices found three overarching themes emerging from the experience of communal temple dining: Spiritual Upliftment, Community Bonding, and Physical and Mental Wellbeing. These themes are interconnected and mutually reinforcing — the spiritual act of offering food produces emotional peace; the communal act of sharing dissolves social hierarchies and fosters inclusion; the physical nourishment is amplified by the relational context in which it occurs. Temple food, as the study concluded, functions not merely as nutrition but as "a sacred medium for holistic wellbeing and cultural sustainability."

For example, for Korean temple food — recently designated a National Intangible Cultural Heritage by the Korean government and under consideration for UNESCO inscription — embodies this integration explicitly. It reflects a philosophy centered on respect for all life, moderation, gratitude, and harmony between humans and nature. These values are not incidental to the food; they are expressed through it. The act of preparing and sharing temple food is itself a spiritual practice.

When the FSG checklist is applied to a Cambodian Buddhist temple or a Hindu community kitchen without accounting for these dimensions, the resulting assessment captures only a fraction of what is actually happening — and risks framing a culturally rich and health-promoting practice primarily as a series of deficiencies against a Western institutional food service standard.

PART III. WHERE THE ASSESSMENT TOOLS FALL SHORT: CULTURAL DIETARY COMPLEXITY

THE SINGLE-DISH FRAMEWORK VS. INTEGRATED ASIAN COOKING

The Food Service Guidelines Checklist for Prepared Foods evaluates food in discrete Western-style categories: a salad is one dish, a protein is another, a grain side is a third. This structure maps naturally onto institutional menus where a chef plans individual components that are portioned and served separately. It maps very poorly onto Asian communal cooking.

Across the temple observations documented in previous reports, the predominant dishes were mixed preparations: beef bone and pork soup with vegetables at Watt Dhamma Visudhikaram; Aloo Kurma combining potatoes, tomatoes, and coconut sauce at SV Temple; Navratan Korma containing nine types of fruits, vegetables, and nuts in a yogurt-and-cream base at the Hindu Temple; vegetable curries, lentil dal, and flatbreads at the Sikh langar. In these preparations, protein, vegetables, carbohydrates, fats, and seasonings are integrated into a single dish, not separated into components.

This creates a fundamental measurement challenge. How does one assess the sodium content of a family-prepared hot pot brought to a temple by a community member? How does one count the vegetable servings in a dish where meat, legumes, and three types of vegetables are slow-cooked together in broth? The checklist's category of "offer at least 3 non-fried vegetable options daily" was not designed for a setting where a single dish might contain five vegetables that the tool cannot disaggregate.

The result is that temples like Watt Dhamma Visudhikaram appear to "fail" categories — such as whole grain requirements, sodium limits, and plant-based protein frequency — that were written for a food environment with entirely different structural assumptions. The assessment produces data, but that data does not accurately reflect the nutritional reality of what participants are eating.

During Dr. Lai's discussion of these components with the Temple Advisory Committee, and developing reports, many questions remained unanswered. This was not due to

ignorance on the committee's part, but because the questions were not designed to capture the full depth of their cultural dietary practices.

THE POTLUCK STRUCTURE AND VARIABLE QUALITY

A second fundamental mismatch arises from the community-contribution model itself. Neither Watt Dhamma Visudhikaram nor the Hindu Society of Minnesota follows any formal food service guidelines or nutrition standards — a finding the assessment tool treats as a deficit. But in the context of community potluck-style offering, the absence of centralized menu planning is not an oversight; it is the cultural feature that makes the offering spiritually meaningful. Each family prepares what they know how to make, what their tradition calls for, and what they believe honors the monks and their community.

The practical consequence is genuine variability in nutritional quality and food safety across events and across contributing households. As observed at the July/August 2025 events documented by Asian Media Access colleagues, what appeared on the temple tables reflected the full range of what community members cook at home: high-sodium dishes prepared according to traditional recipes, deep-fried items that are culturally celebratory, desserts made with sweet rice and ghee that exceed Western calorie thresholds, and dishes made without attention to cross-contamination protocols that are not part of home cooking culture. None of this is negligence. It is the honest expression of a food tradition that was not designed to comply with institutional nutrition standards.

The challenge is not that the community is doing something wrong. The challenge is that public health tools need to meet the community where it is — honoring the cultural structure of the practice while identifying gentle, feasible pathways toward improvement that do not require dismantling the tradition to implement.

For examples, recommend serving chopsticks with hot pot. During the observation at Watt Dhamma Visudhikaram on 06/27/2024, the observer noticed that four of the six monks used the same chopsticks to bring ingredients to the hot pot, stir the hot pot to cook, and then eat with the same chopsticks. According to Li et al. (2024), the H. pylori infection rate was higher in families that did not use serving chopsticks and spoons during family meals than in those that did.

Other safety measures for hot pot include maintaining personal, food, and

environmental hygiene, Washing hands properly before handling food, before eating, after touching raw meat or seafood, and before touching ready-to-eat food, using different sets of chopsticks and utensils to handle raw and cooked food separately, avoiding putting too many dishes on the table to minimize food-to-food cross-contamination, not overfilling the pot to prevent uneven cooking. ensuring that larger pieces of food are thoroughly cooked to a core temperature of at least 75°C before consumption, store the hot pot ingredients properly by keeping frozen products in a freezer at -18°C or below and chilled products in the chiller compartment of a refrigerator at 4°C or below and not defrosting food at room temperature (Centre For Food Safety, 2024).

PART IV. RECOMMENDATIONS: THREE AREAS FOR CULTURALLY GROUNDED IMPROVEMENT

A. Nutrition Balance

Nutritional improvements in temple congregate dining must work with the offering structure, not against it. The goal is not to medicalize or institutionalize the temple meal, but to introduce awareness and incremental practices that families can carry into their home cooking and their contributions.

- Introduce gentle nutritional guidance through culturally appropriate channels — **not as compliance requirements but as community education**. Visual materials in Khmer, Hindi, Tamil, and Punjabi displayed in temple kitchens and dining areas can offer simple guidance on balancing meals without disrupting the offering tradition.
- Address lactose intolerance, which affects nearly 100% of Asian populations, by making soy milk and almond milk available alongside traditional dairy options at temples where chai and milk-based beverages are served.
- Encourage variety in community contributions by **gently highlighting the health value of plant-based proteins — legumes, lentils, tofu** — which are already present in many South and Southeast Asian food traditions and simply need to be more consistently present.
- For hot pot settings specifically, provide community education on balancing the hot pot with more vegetables relative to meat, and on varying the protein sources across weeks rather than relying primarily on pork and beef.
- Recognize that many traditional Asian dishes — dal, vegetable curries, congee, steamed fish — are inherently nutritious and already align well with dietary health principles. The framing should begin with what is already working, not what is deficient.

B. Food Safety

Food safety improvements are among the most achievable and high-impact changes that temples can make, because they address practices that create genuine health risks — cross-contamination, unsafe utensil sharing, inadequate food storage — without requiring any change to the cultural meaning or content of the meal.

- Serving chopsticks and utensils for shared dishes: As documented in this report, four of six monks at Watt Dhamma Visudhikaram used personal chopsticks to stir, cook, and eat from the same hot pot — a practice associated with elevated H. pylori transmission. Providing dedicated serving chopsticks and ladles for shared vessels is a simple, low-cost intervention that preserves the communal experience while reducing cross-contamination risk.
- Transition from foam bowls and single-use plastic to reusable plates, bowls, cups, and utensils. Several temples observed — including the Hindu Temple of Minnesota — were already using recyclable plates and stainless steel cookware. This is both an environmental and a food safety improvement, as foam and low-quality plastics can leach chemicals into hot food. Installing a commercial dishwasher to support reusable serviceware is a recommended capital investment.
- Food temperature and storage protocols for donated foods: Community members bring prepared dishes of unknown temperature history. Brief handout materials, distributed to regular contributors, can explain safe hot and cold holding temperatures and reinforce basic food safety practices without being prescriptive or punitive.
- Handwashing infrastructure: Visible, accessible handwashing stations should be present at all serving stations. The Hindu Temple of Minnesota was observed to have these in place — a model for other sites.
- Waste management: Establish clearly labeled food waste containers separate from general garbage to enable composting and reduce contamination risks.
- Food allergy awareness: As temple dining serves large numbers of community members and guests, simple labeling of common allergens (nuts, dairy, gluten, shellfish) on dishes or serving stations can reduce risk for participants with dietary restrictions.

C. Culturally Appropriate Evaluation Frameworks

Perhaps the most important recommendation from this analysis is systemic rather than operational: the public health field needs evaluation frameworks for cultural

congregate dining that are designed for this context, not borrowed from institutional food service settings and applied by analogy.

- **Develop a Cultural Congregate Dining Assessment Tool that begins with the structural reality of community-contribution meals:** variable dish composition, mixed-ingredient preparations, spiritually-motivated food choices, and the primacy of the offering and communal sharing functions. This tool should evaluate what it actually can evaluate — food variety, presence of cross-contamination risks, availability of water, rough balance across food groups — rather than applying sodium-per-entree thresholds that cannot be measured in a home-cooked hot pot.
- Incorporate a Social Connectedness and Wellbeing dimension into any assessment of cultural congregate dining. Metrics might include: **frequency of participation, self-reported sense of belonging, intergenerational engagement, and whether the meal setting supports language maintenance and cultural transmission.** These are legitimate health outcomes that institutional food service guidelines currently ignore entirely.
- Develop mixed-methods serving size estimation guidance for integrated Asian dishes. Because many Asian preparations combine protein, vegetables, and carbohydrates inseparably, nutrient estimation tools designed for single-ingredient Western dishes are poorly suited to this context. **Culturally adapted food frequency questionnaires and portion estimation guides, developed with community members from each specific tradition, would produce far more accurate dietary data.**
- Engage temple communities as co-designers of assessment and improvement processes, not as passive subjects of external evaluation. Community health workers who share language and cultural background with temple participants are far better positioned to assess and support dietary practices than outside evaluators applying standardized checklists.
- Recognize and document the health-protective dimensions of temple congregate dining that the FSG checklist cannot capture: the mental health benefits of regular social connection, **the spiritual and emotional wellbeing produced by ritual and meaning, the intergenerational cultural transmission that preserves identity and belonging across diaspora communities.** A complete public health picture of temple dining must include these assets alongside the areas for improvement.

V. CONCLUSION: HONORING THE TRADITION WHILE SUPPORTING HEALTH

The congregate dining practices observed across Cambodian Buddhist temples,

Hindu temples, and Sikh gurdwaras in Minnesota represent something genuinely valuable from a public health perspective: consistent, voluntary, community-organized social gathering that provides nourishment, belonging, cultural continuity, and spiritual wellbeing to populations who may have limited access to these resources through other channels. The research literature is clear that social connectedness is a significant determinant of health, and temple communal dining is one of the most consistent sources of social connectedness available to many immigrant and refugee community members.

The food safety and nutritional challenges identified in the reports are real and deserve attention. Shared utensils in hot pot settings create genuine infection risk. Variable nutritional quality across community-contributed dishes means that some meals skew heavily toward sodium, oil, and sugar in ways that can affect chronic disease risk over time. These are legitimate public health concerns.

But they are best addressed through approaches that begin with respect — for the tradition, for the community, for the spiritual significance of the offering practice, and for the fact that this form of communal dining was sustaining these communities long before any assessment tool was applied to it. The path forward is partnership, not prescription: working with temple leadership and community members to introduce gentle, feasible improvements that preserve what is culturally essential while reducing what is genuinely harmful.

> *"Effective public health intervention in cultural congregate dining begins not with compliance requirements but with curiosity, cultural humility, and a genuine effort to understand what the meal means before assessing what it contains."*

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STRATEGY INTRO: Increase policies, plans and community design changes through China Garden, Minneapolis Open Streets and St. Paul Sears Redevelopment to better connect residents to everyday destination to live/work/play, and provide safe, culturally based places for increasing physical activities.

GROUNDED IN DATA AND COMMITMENT: AMA'S WORK ALONG THE BLUE LINE EXTENSION

The Blue Line Extension is not simply a transit project. It is a 13.4-mile spine running through one of the most significant concentrations of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) residents in the United States. The numbers tell a story that planners and policymakers can no longer overlook.

A CORRIDOR SHAPED BY AAPI COMMUNITIES — WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

Brooklyn Park, the northern terminus of the BLE, is home to approximately 17,000 AAPI residents — 20% of the city's entire population, ranking it among the top five cities in Minnesota by Asian share. Brooklyn Center, mid-corridor, sits at 19% Asian — a figure that has more than doubled since 2000, when it stood at just 8.8%. North Minneapolis, the southern anchor, has grown from 1% Asian in 1980 to 13% today, driven by generations of Hmong, Vietnamese, and Asian Indian families who chose this corridor as home.

Statewide, Minnesota's largest AAPI ethnic groups are Hmong (88,579), Asian Indian

(52,687), Chinese (39,622), Vietnamese (31,476), Korean (26,678), and Filipino (22,437). No other state shares the same top-three order. The Minneapolis/St. Paul metro is home to the largest Hmong population of any metropolitan area in the United States. This is not a fringe population. This is a community of tens of thousands of residents, business owners, transit riders, taxpayers, and cultural anchors who built their lives along this corridor before the train was ever proposed — and who stand to be displaced by it if intentional, durable protection is not enacted now.

AMA'S RECORD: YEARS OF WORK ACROSS DIVERSE COMMITTEES

Asian Media Access has not arrived late to this conversation. For years, AMA has been present across the policy, planning, and advocacy structures that shape what the Blue Line Extension will mean for AAPI communities — and for all communities along the corridor.

AMA has participated in the **Blue Line Extension Cohort** since 2012 and as part of the Cultural Placekeeping Initiative — a community-led program that developed cultural identity themes for each city along the route. Concluding in late 2025 after seven months of community meetings, this work grounded AMA's central principle: cultural displacement precedes physical displacement. When communities lose their visible identity — their signage, their businesses, their art, their language in public space — they lose the social infrastructure that holds them in place long before rents rise.

AMA also contributed to the **DREAM process** — the BLE's community-led transit-oriented development visioning initiative engaging residents across North Minneapolis, Brooklyn Center, Crystal, Robbinsdale, and Brooklyn Park. The DREAM Team hosted corridor-wide bus tours, city-specific visioning sessions, and a regional summit in October 2025. AMA ensured AAPI voices were present, translated, and heard throughout.

Through the **Anti-Displacement Work Group (ADWG)**, convened by the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, an 18-month community process that produced anti-displacement policy recommendations for Hennepin County, the

Metropolitan Council, and corridor cities. Those recommendations explicitly named cultural placekeeping and placemaking as anti-displacement tools. The ADWG called for keeping the corridor's rich culture in place, securing public and private funding for community prosperity, and centering communities most at risk.

AMA has also studied the AAPI census data in depth — mapping population concentrations by community and ethnicity across each station area, documenting business vulnerability, and tracking how the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruptions of Operation Metro Surge compounded existing inequities. Revenue for Asian-led small businesses fell 27% during the pandemic, more than any other demographic group nationally. Many missed PPP funding entirely due to language barriers and lack of banking relationships. Operation Metro Surge halted commercial activity across North Minneapolis, contributing to an estimated $80 million in business losses that fell disproportionately on immigrant-owned establishments. AMA served as connective tissue between those business owners and the recovery resources they needed to survive — and that experience directly informs our work today.

A CONCEPT WORTH EXPLORING: A PAN ASIAN CULTURAL DISTRICT ALONG THE NORTHERN CORRIDOR

AMA's census analysis, business mapping, and years of community engagement have led us to a question worth pursuing seriously: could the **area between the 63rd Avenue and 85th Avenue BLE stations in Brooklyn Park become the home of a Pan Asian Cultural District?**

This is not a finished statement. It is a concept grounded in evidence that AMA believes deserves community exploration, co-design, and honest evaluation. The two-mile radius around these two stations encompasses the densest concentration of Hmong, Vietnamese, and Asian Indian residents in the entire corridor. Brooklyn Park

already has organic AAPI commercial activity — grocery stores, restaurants, service businesses, and cultural institutions — that a formal district could anchor and protect rather than build from scratch. Land in this corridor has not yet been fully speculated upon, which means cooperative ownership models and community land trusts remain viable options — but that window will narrow once station-area land values begin rising.

The stations in North Minneapolis, where AAPI communities first took root in the city, would also remain a vital cultural anchor — the historic southern entry point to the corridor. The concept AMA is exploring is one of connectivity: a cultural corridor that stretches from that historic anchor northward through Brooklyn Center and into Brooklyn Park's densest AAPI neighborhoods, with the 63rd–85th Ave band as a potential primary district hub.

WHAT COULD A PAN ASIAN CULTURAL DISTRICT MEAN IN PRACTICE?

It could mean affordable, appropriately scaled commercial space for AAPI restaurants, markets, and service businesses. It could mean cooperative ownership structures that build equity for business owners rather than leaving them exposed to post-opening rent increases. It could mean multilingual wayfinding, public art commissioned from Asian and Asian American artists, interpretive panels documenting the refugee and immigrant histories of corridor families, and landscape and architectural design reflecting the cultural traditions of the communities who live there. It could also be a powerful tool for post-COVID and post-Operation Metro Surge economic recovery — channeling public transit investment into a durable commercial and cultural ecosystem for communities that bore disproportionate losses.

These are ideas AMA is bringing to the table for exploration — not conclusions. The

shape of any cultural district must emerge from community co-design, not from a single organization's vision.

THE 2026 STATION DESIGN PHASE: SEVEN TASKS, SEVEN COMMITMENTS

As the project enters its 2026 phase of station architectural design, lighting, and landscaping plans, AMA is working collaboratively with the City of Minneapolis, Metropolitan Council, and the DREAM Team to engage local residents, business owners, and cultural organizations as co-creators in the transit design process.

AMA's involvement focuses on contributing to the comprehensive seven-task planning process that will shape each station area.

- **Task 1 — On-going Community and Stakeholder Engagement.** Ensuring all voices — including immigrant and refugee communities, small business owners, cultural organizations, and multi-generational residents — actively participate in every phase, through culturally appropriate engagement activities, translation services, and community-based partnerships.
- **Task 2 — Visioning and Opportunity Mapping.** Advocating for visual materials that reflect diverse cultural aspirations, including renderings incorporating culturally relevant wayfinding, interpretive signage honoring immigrant and refugee histories, and colors, patterns, and textures that celebrate the diverse communities along the route.
- **Task 3 — Housing and Commercial Development Strategy.** Bringing perspective on market conditions for diverse businesses and housing needs within immigrant and refugee communities along BLE, with particular focus on ensuring transit-oriented development includes culturally appropriate commercial spaces suitable for ethnic restaurants, markets, and service businesses that serve as community anchors, and not being displaced.
- **Task 4 — Economic Development and Cultural District Planning.** Advocating for coordinated action that keeps the rich culture of the corridor in place while enhancing it to thrive in the post-construction environment — including strategies for affordable commercial space, cultural branding, and capacity-building for cooperative ownership within the immigrant/refugee business community. This is where AMA's Pan Asian Cultural District concept can be further explored and tested through community engagement.
- **Task 5 — Multimodal Connections and Safety Plan.** Emphasizing that safe, accessible connections to stations are essential for immigrant and refugee communities who rely on walking, biking, and transit as primary transportation,

and advocating for culturally informed safety planning that accounts for the mobility patterns of seniors and non-English-speaking residents.

- **Task 6 — Neighborhood and Corridor Resiliency Strategy.** Contributing community-led resiliency insights rooted in how immigrant and refugee communities have showcased their resiliency already and advocating for cultural design principles related to nature, harmony, and sustainability in public spaces and infrastructure.
- **Task 7 — Plan Document Production.** Ensuring the final Station Area Plan Document authentically represents local community priorities with culturally responsive language, imagery, and implementation strategies that prevent displacement while fostering cultural prosperity.

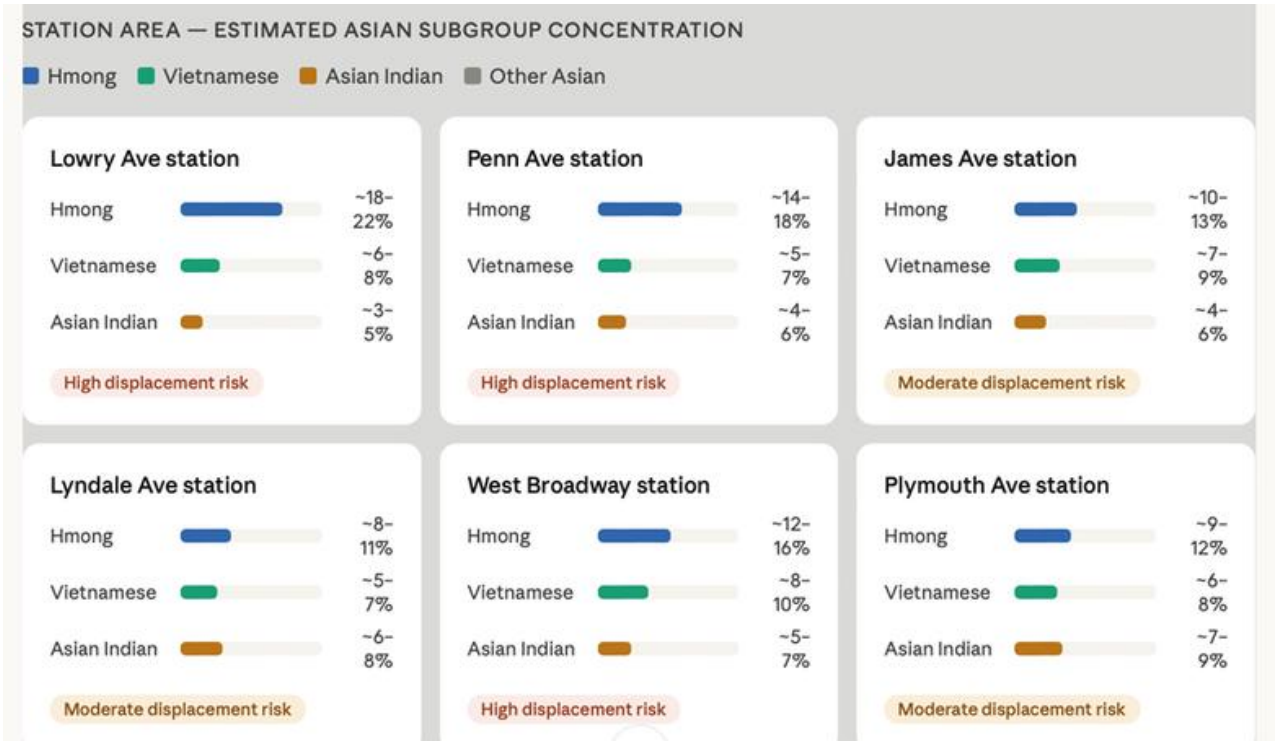
ONE VOICE IN A BROADER COALITION

AMA approaches this work as one voice within a larger coalition that includes Black, Indigenous, Latino, Somali, and many other communities who share the same foundational concern: that major infrastructure investment too often transforms neighborhoods at the expense of the people who built them. The DREAM Team, Blue Line Extension Anti-Displacement Work Group, the Blue Line Coalition, and the Cultural Placekeeping Initiative have all operated from this shared understanding - that cultural identity is authentically embedded in the design and economic development of the corridor — not as decoration, but as a durable anchor for community prosperity. The 2026 station design phase will shape this corridor for decades. AMA is at the table — with the census data, the committee experience, the community relationships, and a concept worth exploring together.

REFERENCES

- ACS 2020–2023 5-year estimates;
- APIAVOTE MN factsheet (2022);
- BLE Public Engagement Report (July–December 2025);
- BLE Station Area Housing Gaps Analysis (2017);
- CBS Minnesota AAPI history report (2023);
- CURA Blue Line Anti-Displacement Initiative;
- Minneapolis Small Business Resiliency Fund RCA-2026-00305;
- MN Compass disaggregated AAPI data;
- Sahan Journal AAPI Business Expo (2022); SoCal Grantmakers AAPI COVID Recovery Report (2022).

NORTH MINNEAPOLIS STATION AREAS:

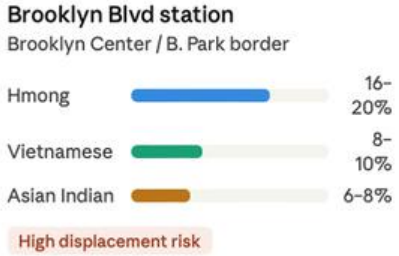


North Minneapolis / Brooklyn Center boundary

AAPI % (½-mi radius)	~18–22%
AAPI pop. served	~8,000–11,000
Asian businesses present	Moderate
Land availability	Limited / high cost
Displacement risk	Very high
Transit access	2–3 stations nearby

Good symbolic anchor given history — but land is contested and displacement pressures are severe. Better as a cultural node within a larger district.

BROOKLYN PARK STATION AREAS:



Brooklyn Park (63rd Ave – 85th Ave stations)

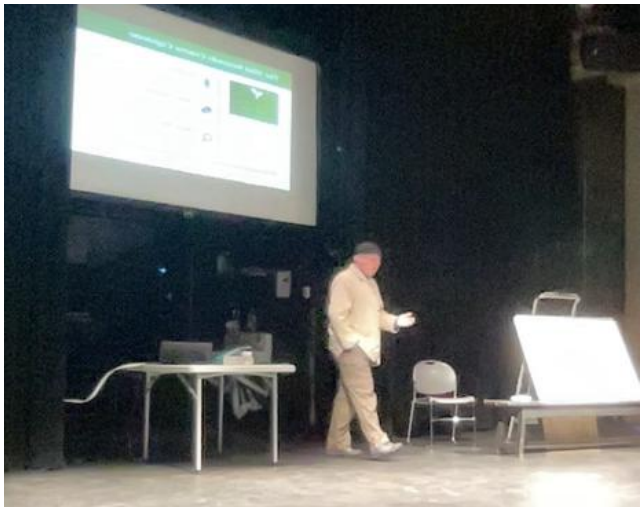
AAPI % (½-mi radius)	~20–25%
AAPI pop. served	~14,000–18,000
Asian businesses present	High concentration
Land availability	More available, lower cost
Displacement risk	Moderate (manageable)
Transit access	63rd + 85th Ave stations

Higher AAPI population density, existing cultural business cluster, more available land for cooperative ownership, and two BLE stations create strongest case for a formal cultural district.

March 07

FROGTOWN FARM MINI SUMMIT

Asian Media Access joined Frogtown neighbors to discuss how to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables, and grow produce in urban neighborhoods.



March 19

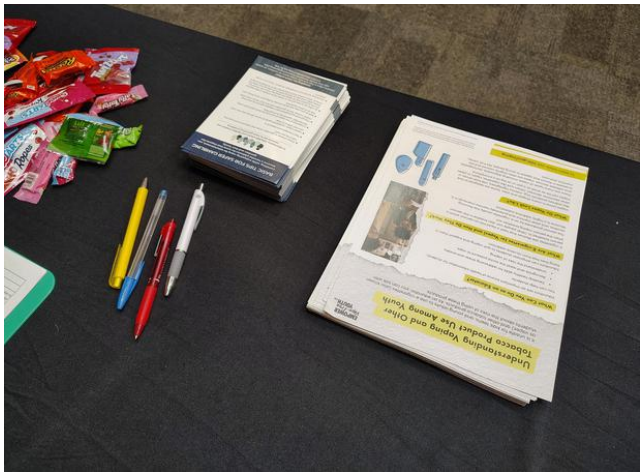
SEARS REDEVELOPMENT DISCUSSION WITH RONDO COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Asian Media Access and Frogtown/Rondo Black Church Alliance discussed with Mikeya Griffin and her staff from the Rondo Community Land Trust, about the Old Sears Building at the lot, and any possible of demolishing in order to create better connectivity in the future.

April 04

MOTHER EARTH SUMMIT

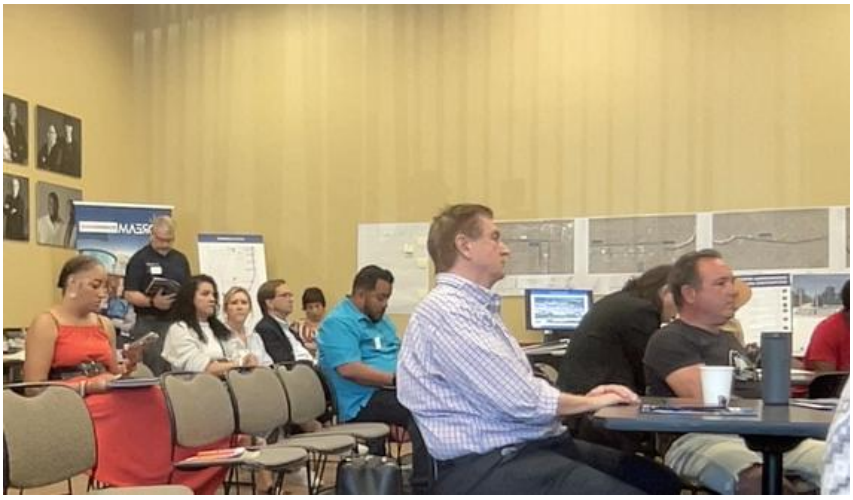
Asian Media Access participated in tabling at the April 4 Mother Earth Summit alongside more than 30 partnering agencies, led by the University of Minnesota's Institute of the Environment. The event aimed to connect university students with community members and organizations across the greater Twin Cities area focused on environmental justice and climate action, fostering learning and collaboration to build a more sustainable and just future.



April 07

BLUE LINE EXTENSION DISCUSSION MEETING

Asian Media Access, along with DREAM Team hosts monthly meetings with North Minneapolis residents to share Blue Line Extension progress and engage in deeper, community-driven planning to shape an active, transit-oriented neighborhood.



UPCOMING EVENTS

HEALTH INITIATIVES: FREE MONTHLY HEALTH CLINICS

DATE/TIME: First Saturdays of the month, 10:00am-1:00pm
PLACE: Sri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple, 7615 Metro Blvd, Edina, MN 55439

DATE/TIME: Fourth Sunday of the month, 11:00am-2:00pm
PLACE: Hindu Temple of Minnesota, 10530 Temple Dr, Maple Grove, MN 55311

DATE/TIME: Second Sunday of the month, 11:00am-2:00pm
PLACE: Sikh Society of Minnesota,9000 W Bloomington Fwy, Bloomington, MN 55431

DATE/TIME: Every Monday based on appointment, 10:00am-4:00pm
PLACE: Sewa-Aifw,6645 James Ave N, Brooklyn Center, MN 55430

LITTLE LEARNERS: CREATE-A-COSTUME

Register here

Mu is heading to Saint Paul's libraries to read Asian American storybooks and talk about the fun and importance of costumes! Join our teaching artists and become a costume designer for a day through our arts and crafts activity. Geared toward infants through preschoolers.

MINNESOTA STATE CAPITOL ROTUNDA FOR THIS YEAR'S API DAY

DATE/TIME: Monday, April 20, 2026, 10:00am
PLACE: MN State Capitol, 75 Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr Blvd, Saint Paul, MN 55155

Our chosen theme this year is "Belonging: 250 Years in America" in recognition of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. This occasion will be an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the contributions of our longstanding API communities as well as more recently arrived immigrant and refugee communities to our state and nation. During this difficult time, we plan together with a message of hope and optimism, asserting the many ways that Asian Pacific Minnesotans have made this state and nation better.

FOCUS FIRST: HOW MINDFULNESS FUELS PERFORMANCE

DATE/TIME: Wednesday, April 22, 2026, 2:00pm-4:00pm CT
PLACE: Register, https://t.e2ma.net/click/s6li3i/sucb6dkc/088vd9

Build athlete focus, emotional regulation, and resilience through mindful, healing-centered coaching.

HMONG ARTS & CRAFT FAIR

DATE/TIME: Saturday, May 2, 2026, 11:00am-6:00pm
PLACE: Pan Asian Center, 3001 White Bear Ave BLDG A, Maplewood, MN 55109

Spring craft fair. This is the perfect time to grab those last minute Mother's Day gifts.

SONGKRAN FESTIVAL

DATE/TIME: Saturday, May 16, 2026, 11:00am-8:00pm and Sunday, May 17, 2026, 11:00am-6:00pm
PLACE: Wat Promwachirayan,2544 Highway 100 S, St. Louis Park, MN 55416

Songkran is a joyful celebration of the Thai New Year that brings together families, food, culture and community. Join them for Thai food, music, dance performances, a vendor marketplace and more.

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