

Vietnamese Community Action Plan

Community Action Research and Empowerment Project
Phase 2: September 2011 – June 2012

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About The Care Project

The Vietnamese Friendship Association (VFA) was founded in 1978 to support the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees affected by the Vietnam War. Our mission is to empower the Vietnamese community to succeed while bridging, preserving and promoting cultural heritage. We focus on four areas: 1) supporting students to be college or career ready; 2) strengthening families to be self-reliant and successful; 3) developing leaders so the Vietnamese community is heard and represented; and 4) engaging with diverse communities to share our culture and learn from others.

History of the CARE Project

VFA addresses the root causes of social and economic inequality by increasing civic engagement among the Vietnamese community, which has historically been negatively affected by discriminatory policies and violent oppression from war. From our work, VFA has learned that members of Seattle's Vietnamese community face numerous barriers to self-sufficiency and economic stability. Additionally, the community has expressed concerns about whether its unique culture, history and language will be preserved for future generations. Unfortunately, there has not been a lasting collective effort to address these issues in recent decades.

Recognizing this lack of unity and civic engagement, VFA launched the Vietnamese Community Action Research and Empowerment (CARE) Project in 2009. CARE is a participatory action research project designed to bring the community together to assess the strengths and needs of the Vietnamese community of Southeast Seattle, and to create a common vision and strategies to address those needs. CARE represents the first major effort to involve Vietnamese refugees and immigrants in community planning and mobilization.

Goals of the CARE Project

The project has four main goals:

- Promote greater civic participation, grassroots leadership development, and general community involvement among Vietnamese community members;
- Provide and encourage experiential learning and professional networking opportunities for undergraduate students to develop critical career and academic skills;
- Connect Vietnamese youth and elders to promote greater understanding and mutual cooperation between different generations;
- Develop a community-based plan that reflects community needs and desires, fosters community ownership of the plan, and is recognized as an official community plan by the local planning agency.

Phase 1 of CARE (2009-2010)

During Phase 1, nine young adults—known as the Youth Action Team (YAT)—were trained in participatory research methods and community building. They conducted 16 focus groups and 85 individual interviews, hosted two community-wide forums, and collected 316 surveys. From this research, they learned several important things about the Vietnamese community's strengths, weaknesses, needs, and hopes for the future.

Overall, the community identified these seven challenges as negatively impacting the community. This united effort led to the release and dissemination of the first ever Vietnamese Community Assessment Report in 2010. More information about the phase 1 research can be found at www.vfaseattle.org/care. Research data from Phase 1 also paved the way for Phase 2 of the CARE Project (2011-2012).

Phase 2: Community Planning

The purpose of Phase 2 (2011-2012) was to increase awareness and understanding about issues of importance that were uncovered during Phase 1 and to mobilize the Vietnamese community to draft a Community Action Plan—a roadmap that states its common agenda, vision, and strategies.

Methods:

A new Youth Action Team was formed in August 2011, consisting of 11 students from the University of Washington and Seattle University. They learned about community development, cross-cultural communication, and interviewing methods.

Between December 2011 and June 2012, the YAT hosted two community-wide gatherings which were attended by more than 100 people each, interviewed over three dozen community members and leaders, and conducted 12 focus groups.

Event	Date	Participants
Phase 2 Community Kick Off	December 2, 2011	100+
Community Interviews	January – March 2012	36+
Community Focus Groups	February 25, 2012	50+
Review of Community Plan	May 18, 2012	100+

During these interactions, the YAT introduced the CARE Project to community members and discussed findings from Phase 1. The YAT then asked individual community members where they would like to see the community in ten years (visioning), and how they think we can get the community there (strategizing).

Results:

Using the input and feedback from the community, the CARE Project team created an action plan that incorporated the vision and strategies of the broader Vietnamese community. The Community Action Plan specifically addresses the seven important issues identified by the community.

Each issue area contains its own unique vision for the future and strategies to achieve that vision. Thus, we hope the Community Action Plan will serve as a roadmap for the community over the next ten years.

What's in the Community Action Plan

The Community Action Plan is intended to be ambitious in scope, but achievable through collective action. Our vision for the Vietnamese community will span the next ten years, and addresses seven important issues, including:

- Civic Engagement and Leadership
- Youth and Education
- Jobs and Economy
- Health and Social Services
- Housing
- Community Safety
- Public Gathering Space

The following sections present a summary of each of the seven issues identified, as well as the vision statement and strategies for addressing that issue.

The Community Action Plan also includes a framework for implementation that can be used by community members, organizations, City agencies, or other groups interested in addressing the needs of the Vietnamese community. These suggested actions for implementation are based on community conversations by the Youth Action Team. They are a spark for initiating collective action, but are by no means a comprehensive list of all possible action steps—external factors may either directly or indirectly impact and/or alter the implementation of each of the seven priorities issues over the next ten years.

The Community Action Plan and Phase 2 of the CARE Project build upon previous community research and assessment. To get a full understanding of the needs, challenges, and opportunities in the Vietnamese community, we recommend reviewing the 2010 Vietnamese Community Assessment Report¹.

¹ www.vfaseattle.org/care
Community Action Plan

Community Action Plan (summary)

Civic Engagement and Leadership Vision: Community members engage in civic and leadership activities, and the influence of Vietnamese-Americans is evident in the political realm.

- Strategy 1: Increase communication across individuals and groups.
- Strategy 2: Strengthen cooperation both within and between the community and allies.
- Strategy 3: Build relationships and gain representation and voice in political activities.

Youth and Education Vision: Vietnamese youth are empowered, educated and connected across generations with active support from parents and other community members.

- Strategy 1: Involve more youth in community service and leadership.
- Strategy 2: Increase interaction across the diverse spectrum of Vietnamese students.
- Strategy 3: Preserve culture, heritage, and language.
- Strategy 4: Increase parent involvement and support.

Jobs & Economy Vision: Community members have equitable access to opportunities that create economic stability.

- Strategy 1: Increase access to economic opportunities by building relationships, community and alliances.
- Strategy 2: Build skills of Vietnamese community members to increase their competitiveness in the economy, and build system capacity to provide those skills.

Health and Social Services Vision: All community members benefit from health and social services.

- Strategy 1: Raise awareness about health and social services.
- Strategy 2: Make health and social services more accessible.
- Strategy 3: Increase advocacy for better health and social services.

Housing Vision: Community members will have quality housing within their means.

Strategies:

- Strategy 1: Advocate for local housing organizations and individuals to meet community needs.
- Strategy 2: Increase availability and accessibility of easy to understand resources on housing and financial planning assistance.
- Strategy 3: Ensure adequate and ongoing research on housing and community needs.

Community Safety Vision: A crime-free environment where community members feel safe and are safe.

- Strategy 1: Increase community involvement in safety groups and organizations.
- Strategy 2: Improve relationship between police department and the community.

Public Gathering Space Vision: The Vietnamese community has a dedicated space for community members to gather.

- Strategy 1: Engage community members in a shared effort to create a gathering space
- Strategy 2: Access diverse opportunities, partners and support to realize a gathering space

Civic Engagement and Leadership

Background

A large number of Seattle Vietnamese community members do engage in some form of community activity and see civic participation as valuable. Close to 75% of community members surveyed engaged in some form of community activity, with the majority indicating religious activities, such as a church or temple, as being the most common form of engagement, followed by participation in social or cultural activities.

While many participate in these religious and social activities, there is an overall lack of civic and leadership engagement. Those surveyed expressed a sense of community disunity and weak representation of Vietnamese voice in politics, in part due to what many see as a weak sense of leadership in the Vietnamese community. Moreover, civic engagement remains a challenging issue because many Vietnamese-Americans are fearful of participating within politics, and believe they lack knowledge about the American political system.

The project data shows that the current state of Seattle's Vietnamese community in relation to the civic and political realm is rather complex. While many acknowledge the importance of civic engagement and community participation, the issue of disunity influences the community's general perceptions about civic engagement, and subsequently, how individuals behave and respond. As a result, it is important to address perceptions by clarifying and communicating accurate facts, resources, and opportunities about civic engagement and leadership across individuals and organizations within and outside the community.

Vision

- Community members engage in civic and leadership activities, and the influence of Vietnamese-Americans is evident in the political realm.

Strategies

- Increase communication across individuals and groups.
- Strengthen cooperation both within and between the community and allies.
- Build relationships and gain representation and voice in political activities.

Suggested actions for implementation

- Convene Task Force of representatives from key organizations that provide or sponsor civic or leadership activities in the Vietnamese community.
- Develop educational programs or information packets about American political systems at local, regional and federal levels.
- Organize community forums with key political individuals and establish ongoing opportunities for community engagement such as town hall meetings.
- Register and educate new Vietnamese voters.

Youth & Education

Background

Vietnamese in Seattle face numerous barriers to self-sufficiency, cultural preservation, and educational success. The Seattle School District (2011) reports that more Vietnamese students (73%) are on free and reduced lunch compared to Japanese (10%), Korean (14%), Chinese (49%) and Caucasian (12%) students. Vietnamese students (32%) are also more likely to have limited English proficiency compared to Japanese (6%), Korean (12%), and Chinese (21%). Finally, roughly 35% of Vietnamese students do not live with both parents--more than double the percentage of Japanese (16%), Korean (17%), and Chinese (16%) students. The combination of these factors leads to a heightened risk for academic failure for these students.

In addition, youth face other issues of losing connection with the Vietnamese culture, experiencing confusion with cultural identities, and lacking places to go for activities outside of school. The CARE Project data also revealed a major gap between youth and elder generations. Many community members expressed concerns about the lack of youth involvement in the community work. Also, many Vietnamese youth said that they are experiencing confusion of cultural identities, losing connections with Vietnamese heritage, and having no place to go for activities after school.

Vision

- Vietnamese youth are empowered, educated and connected across generations with active support from parents and other community members.

Strategies

- Involve more youth in community service and leadership.
- Increase interaction across the diverse spectrum of Vietnamese students.
- Preserve culture, heritage, and language.
- Increase parent involvement and support.

Suggested actions for implementation

- Establish a "Youth Summit" to address the challenges that each group is facing as well as connect Vietnamese youths with different backgrounds.
- Work with existing organizations to establish mentoring programs that use skill sets of Vietnamese students.
- Develop a coalition between the various Vietnamese language schools to create and carry out solutions for challenges faced by Vietnamese schools.

Jobs and Economy

Background

85% of survey respondents expressed strong or moderate concern about job and career stability. 46.2% work full-time. 16.1% do not work and nearly 15% are looking for a job. Half make less than \$30,000 annually, and over one-third make less than \$21,000. Challenges were exacerbated for community members with low incomes. Those with salaries below \$21,000 or who struggle to pay for housing are also much less likely to have healthcare coverage.

Vision

- Community members have equitable access to opportunities that create economic stability.

Strategies

- Increase access to economic opportunities by building relationships, community and alliances.
- Build skills of Vietnamese community members to increase their competitiveness in the economy, and build system capacity to provide those skills.

Suggested actions for implementation

- Create a comprehensive listing of jobs and jobs wanted in the Vietnamese community (online, newspaper, bulletin board).
- Organize a career fair, with both Viet and non-Viet employers. Target a broad range of educational and skill levels.
- Provide business counseling to small businesses. Reach out to relevant stakeholders.
- Sketch out current landscape of Vietnamese business owners, professional organizations and business associations, and general job-related organizations to inform efforts.

Health and Social Services

Background

About 25 percent of Vietnamese community members surveyed in Phase 1 of CARE do not have healthcare coverage. Community members were nearly unanimous in the importance of social services such as job training programs, Vietnamese classes for children and English classes for adults. Phase 2 interviews and focus group discussions expanded understanding of these issues. Many community members described problems with awareness about different available health and social services as well as challenges accessing these services. In addition, many mentioned the need for more advocacy to improve health and social services that serve the Vietnamese community.

Vision

- All community members benefit from health and social services.

Strategies

- Raise awareness about health and social services.
- Make health and social services more accessible.
- Increase advocacy for better health and social services.

Suggested actions for implementation

- Organize social service and health fairs that target the Vietnamese community.
- Support community-based organizations to publicize health and social service information in Vietnamese newspapers.
- Create a directory listing organizations that provide specific services and resources for the Vietnamese community.
- Create a centralized phone line for Vietnamese/English speakers to help answer questions and provide referrals.
- Share data with service organizations and advocate for changes that would better serve the Vietnamese community's specific needs.
- Form a coalition of (or build on existing) social service advocates to share information and advocate for policy changes.

Housing

Background

In phase 1 of the CARE Project, survey and focus group results showed that 75% of respondents indicated they were “very” or “somewhat” concerned about housing stability. Housing was ranked one of the two highest issues when community members were asked about important issues in their household. At least 25% of respondents expressed some level of difficulty paying their monthly mortgage or rent while 25% are receiving some form of low-income housing assistance. During phase 2, the CARE Project interviewed individuals who work directly to provide housing and related services as well as to community members. Many said it is vital to have low income and home ownership housing assistance that is easier to understand, more available, and more easily accessible. Housing advocacy, increased financial planning support, and increased housing education are needed.

Vision

- Community members will have quality housing within their means.

Strategies

- Advocate for local housing organizations and individuals to meet community needs.
- Increase availability and accessibility of easy to understand resources on housing and financial planning assistance.
- Ensure adequate and ongoing research on housing and community needs.

Suggested actions for implementation

- Establish a team to advocate for senior housing and make plans to improve related housing services for the elderly.
- Work with public agencies, housing organizations, and realtors to address low-income housing needs.
- Create an accredited Vietnamese Realtors Association that can be a resource for financial planning and housing education.
- Partner with existing programs to create tailored financial planning workshops and classes for the Vietnamese community.

Community Safety

Background

Safety is a significant concern for community members. Phase 1 surveys indicated that only about one-third of respondents felt safe in South Seattle. 6.5% did not feel safe at all in their neighborhoods. In terms of specific types of crimes, property crimes, drugs and domestic violence concerned community members most.

In phase 2, community members were asked how they felt about safety. There was a general feeling of being disconnected with resources and being isolated. Many senior citizens especially conveyed this opinion. They expressed how in Vietnam, police were seen as “...people out trying to get you in trouble” and much of that perception still remains. Also, when asked about whether they knew how to call for help, issues were raised about difficulty understanding the operator or not being able to read information about safety.

A reoccurring theme for respondents is not being in touch with resources that would enable them to feel safe and isolation keeping community members from feeling safe in their own homes. These themes can be addressed by connecting community members with the police force and local safety groups.

Vision

- A crime-free environment where community members feel safe and are safe.

Strategies

- Increase community involvement in safety groups and organizations.
- Improve relationship between police department and the community.

Suggested actions for implementation

- Use common media outlets such as radios, newspapers, internet, etc. to promote awareness and information about safety
- Strengthen the relationship between the Police Department and community.
- Encourage more community members to attend public safety meetings

Public Gathering Space

Background

The Vietnamese community mentioned a lack of community center as a challenge. Testimony from a number of community members describe feeling not having a “place to call home.” Interviews and focus groups during Phase 2 reinforced this finding. The theme of a shared community gathering space was mentioned in relation to and during discussions of other issues including leadership, civic engagement, education, and social services. Many community members believe a gathering space would help unite the Vietnamese and increase civic participation. However, there is currently no significant public gathering space to fulfill this need.

Vision

- The Vietnamese community will have a dedicated space for community members to gather.

Strategies

- Engage community members in a shared effort to create a gathering space
- Access diverse opportunities, partners and support to realize a gathering space

Suggested actions for implementation

- Hire a planning consultant to assess needs, resources, and challenges of creating a community gathering space
- Work with City planners to identify sources of funding and support
- Develop a strong coalition and leadership to oversee the management of a public gathering space.

Implementing the Community Plan

As previously mentioned, the purpose of Phase 1 of the CARE Project was to reach out and convene the Vietnamese community to identify and address priorities, needs, and issues. We engaged over 300 throughout this process through surveys, focus groups, and community gatherings.

The purpose of Phase 2 was to increase awareness and understanding about issues of importance that were uncovered, and to use this information to draft a Community Action Plan — a roadmap that states our common agenda, vision, and strategies. We reached out to over 350 individuals and stakeholders during this process using similar outreach strategies.

Now that a strong plan is written with significant community input, we want to ensure that it is carried out and not just sitting on a shelf. Phase 3 of the CARE Project will focus on mobilizing the community to implement the plan across each of the seven issues over the next ten years.

In early 2013, we will again reach out and convene community members, service providers, community organizations and City departments. We will invite back people who have previously been involved with the CARE Project, and also invite new members to become involved with the process. We will review the history of the CARE Project, and present the full Community Action Plan to the community. The gathering will be presented in both English and Vietnamese, to accommodate the cultural and language needs of our immigrant community.

Feedback and input from the community will determine which of the seven issues will be a priority for the CARE Project, and how CARE and VFA can build on efforts already way and provide support to implementation of the Vietnamese Community Plan.

Authorship

This report was compiled by the Vietnamese Friendship Association (Seattle, WA).

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