

Appendix A: The Hmong Experience

History of Hmong in Asia

History places the Hmong in China over two thousand years ago. It is said that the history of the Hmong “is a long search for the freedom of high places, and adamant resistance of those that would deny them.”¹ As the Han Dynasty moved the Chinese empire southward, settlers forced the Hmong, called Miao by the Chinese, to move into valleys and adopt Chinese culture and agricultural methods. There was fierce resistance and, in 1735, it is reported that 18,000 Hmong were slaughtered. Seeking to preserve their way of life, especially their mountain-based form of agriculture, the Hmong moved south into Laos, Vietnam and Thailand. Their peaceful independence continued to elude them as larger conflicts involving the Vietnamese and French in Vietnam and the Khmu, French and, later, the Japanese, in Laos drew them into war. They found that moving onto higher and higher ground allowed them to be left to themselves.²

While the Geneva accords of 1954 that followed the French departure from Indochina left Laos as “neutral” in the Cold War divisions, local insurgencies arose anyway. While not partitioned like Vietnam, the nation was still torn apart by internal insurgencies. In the 1960’s, a tripartite coalition government was formed and foreign forces remained banned. Nevertheless, between North Vietnamese forces supporting the Pathet Lao and utilizing the Ho Chi Minh Trail to supply the war in South Vietnam and American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Green Beret forces training the highland Hmong in guerilla warfare, the isolation of the mountains was no longer possible. General Vang Pao helped mobilize nearly 40,000 Hmong to participate in this “secret war.” As the American presence in Vietnam grew larger, approaching a half-million,

¹ W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge: the Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*, Zed Books Ltd., 1998, p. 106.

² *Ibid.*, p. 107.

the Hmong efforts were increasingly dwarfed by efforts to pin down North Vietnamese forces and cut off the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Hmong losses in the war were enormous: 18,000 to 20,000 killed in combat, 50,000 civilians killed or wounded and, by 1973, 120,000 refugees in their own land. Despite a 1973 peace agreement, the war continued and by 1975 Communist victory in Laos was likely. The Hmong stronghold of Long Cheng was surrounded and the United States evacuated Vang Pao and 2,500 Hmong to Thailand. Many thousands more were left at the airstrip and an exodus to Thailand began. Some 60,000–100,000 regrouped in Phu Bia, south of Long Cheng. In 1977 and 1978, the Pathet Lao launched “Operation Sam Kieng” (Complete Destruction) to eliminate Hmong resistance. Out of a population of 350,000, Hmong deaths between 1975 and 1980 were estimated to be from 50,000 to 100,000. By August 1975, there were some 12,000 Hmong and other Lao ethnic minorities living in two refugee camps. By the end of the year there some 54,000 refugees from Laos in Thai refugee camps — and this did not include many others living on their own or with relatives or friends throughout Thailand.³ By 1980, another 100,000 Hmong or other Lao ethnic minorities sought refuge in Thailand.⁴

The conditions in the refugee camps were severe. Conditions worsened as the population within the camps swelled. There was inadequate food and shelter. Corruption reduced available supplies and violence and greed led to abuse of the refugees. In 1980, the United States admitted 14,800 Hmong refugees to be settled in the United States. That number was reduced by 1982 to 1,800. In the meantime, the flow of Hmong into Thailand continued. Those who entered outside the normal channels and some who faced Thai screening committees were “pushed back” into Laos or refused entry. They faced abuse or death in Laos. While Hmong were not inclined to

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 107.

consider repatriation opportunities as some other groups did, they also were reluctant to accept resettlement to the West.⁵

Hmong Community in Wausau, Wisconsin

Background

Before coming to the United States, Hmong resided for many years in the rural, highland areas of Laos. Hmong fighters were allied with the United States in the Southeast Asian war and subsequently were forced to flee following the conclusion of that war. In addition to the arduous refugee process, they experienced probably the most dramatically different environment from the United States than other Southeast Asian refugees.

As Southeast Asian refugees considered resettlement to the United States, Hmong considered their options with great reliance on decisions made by community and military leaders. Despite where they originally arrived, many responded to the decision to establish a community in California's Central Valley, particularly around Fresno, Stockton and Merced. This decision was due to declining funds for resettlement in many locations and the need for language and other support programs, but, ultimately, it was the opportunity to return to their reliance on farming. While it is true that these are among the richest agricultural lands in the United States, it is harder and more expensive to farm there than they had anticipated. Despite the tradition of "moving for betterment," this was not to be the ultimate home for all Hmong. Fresno remains a principal center of Hmong communities, but many moved on from California. For a large number, this meant moving into or back to the Midwest. Hmong from smaller communities were reconsolidating in larger ones. Fully 90 percent of all Hmong in America now live in California, Minnesota or Wisconsin, with the highest concentrations in St. Paul and

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 115-116.

Minneapolis, Minnesota and California's Central Valley. At the same time, Hmong face serious difficulties in America. Hmong, along with Cambodians, are among the poorest ethnic groups in the state of California. Similarly, a study in Minnesota found that 65 percent of the community lives at or below the poverty line, 66 percent receive public assistance, 48.8 percent of adults speak little or no English, 87 percent live in public housing or rental units, single females head up 23.6 percent of all Hmong households and Hmong households have an average of 5.3 children.⁶

Wausau, Wisconsin is not a large city. Its current population is 38,936. When Southeast Asians began to arrive in the 1970's, they were the largest minority group by far. The Hmong were the largest ethnic group, all the more so with the passage of time and resettlement from California and other locations. Wausau residents were nearly all white, including Germans and Polish, when Hmong began to arrive.⁷ Hmong community leaders estimate that there are some 5,700 Hmong in Wausau — roughly 12 percent of the population.⁸ This makes Wausau the highest concentration of Hmong residents in Wisconsin, as well as the second largest Southeast Asian community and the highest Southeast Asian concentration. The city of Wausau hired a minority affairs director, a position that has been filled by a Hmong person since its inception. While a relatively small city, Wausau is the largest municipality for many miles in each direction, and it is not a suburb or within commuting distance of any comparably sized or larger city. Because it would take hours to drive to any other city, it is served by the Central Wisconsin Airport south of town and a smaller airport in the city. Wausau is best known beyond Wisconsin for advertisements by Wausau Insurance, which is indeed one of the town's largest employers. It is located near Wisconsin's north woods and lake region, however, so a paper processing plant

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 135 -136

⁷ City of Wausau, official website.

⁸ Interview with Peter Yang, April 11, 2005.

and a number of window and door manufacturers are also located there. The relatively rural atmosphere likely appealed to early Hmong arrivals. The community has been largely accepting of the Hmong community. Over the years, especially back in the 1990's, there was more prejudice and tensions with some in the larger community. Problems relating to Hmong students being segregated into particular schools became an issue and received national media coverage. While this did not apparently result in ongoing division, it did, however, encourage Hmong leaders to run for the school board. That community leaders sought to analogize the ethnic concentration of Hmong students to the history of American racial segregation demonstrates a sophistication and understanding of both public policy and opinion. A recent incident, involving fatal shootings by a Hmong hunter in Sawyer County, Wisconsin, several hours to the north and west of Wausau, has not resulted in a backlash in Wausau as it appeared to have in the community where the shootings took place. Neither Hmong nor Caucasian interviewees seemed to believe that the incident had much effect on the Hmong community in Wausau.⁹

The first Hmong arrivals to Wausau were sponsored by church groups, with Trinity Lutheran Church greeting the first families in 1976. A new wave of refugees is now arriving from camps and temples in Thailand. Some 489 refugees from 79 families have already begun to arrive. More are expected during the summer.¹⁰ While the Hmong community in Wausau is a longstanding one, many young people find career opportunities limited and leave to find jobs in other cities. This sort of "brain drain" is not unusual in rural Wisconsin for many young residents, but the importance of family and extended family in the Hmong community makes the impact significant. Most of the Hmong residents live within the City of Wausau. Over the last 5–

⁹ Interviews, April 11-13, 2005.

¹⁰ "Hmong Connection Special Edition," *Wausau Daily Herald*, June 27, 2005, pp. 7.

6 years, however, community leaders note a growing number moving outside the city to unincorporated Marathon County. The target election districts are all within the city limits.

Project VOTE in Wausau, WI

The organization serving Hmong in Wausau and Marathon County, Wisconsin is the Wausau Area Hmong Mutual Association (WAHMA). The association, like other mutual assistance associations, has played a role in serving the needs and representing the interests of Southeast Asian refugees arriving to the greater Wausau community. Since the Hmong are the group with significant numbers in the area, WAHMA primarily serves Hmong people, but they also serve others from Southeast Asia. Incorporated in 1983, WAHMA began as an all-volunteer organization. There are now 22 full-time and 3 part-time staff. The poverty that many Hmong families face in other regions is also present in Wausau. With United Way funding, WAHMA provides job-training programs, including the Asian American Construction Company, which does work for private and public customers throughout Marathon County. Programs for seniors and for youth are also priorities as are business development and assistance to persons with disabilities. Media projects are also important, and include the bilingual *Hmong News* produced quarterly, a weekly TV news program run on the local NBC affiliate and cable access, and a radio news and entertainment program. Among its most important programs is WAHMA's Citizenship Project, which has helped people apply for citizenship, green cards and passports since 1995. Through the project, 112 people have completed citizenship applications, 85 have renewed their green card applications, 3 sought new green cards and 7 applied for reentry or passports through the program. There were also 91 students who attended citizenship classes through WAHMA, 161 who applied for citizenship interviews in Madison, Wisconsin or

Bloomington, Minnesota and 82 who traveled to citizenship ceremonies in those cities. There were 1,553 inquiries to the project regarding citizenship or green cards.¹¹

WAHMA has not previously had a voter registration or get out the vote program, though some information on past elections has been shared with the community through other programs and media projects. There have been candidates for local office from the community, and candidate forums have been sponsored or cosponsored by WAHMA over the years. Project VOTE provided funding for staffing on a part-time basis only, as well as the training and statistical support. Chaxiong Lo was the Project VOTE staff person from 2002 to 2003. Mr. Lo voted for the first time in the 1980's and arrived in Wausau in 1991. He believes language-specific education and outreach are the most critical needs in increasing voting in his community. He attended the training in Washington, D.C., but left WAHMA for private employment in November 2003. Lee Vang continued the project through the 2004 election. Since Project VOTE paid only part of her time, she works for the WAHMA Citizenship Project and has done so for some 8 years.

APALC trained WAHMA staff on November 15, 2003, showing how Census 2000 data can support efforts to increase political participation. The training included analysis of Hmong population growth in Wausau and community characteristics such as nativity, citizenship, limited-English proficiency and voting age. Staff from AAJC and SEARAC were also present. At the same time, key community leaders, staff and volunteers that would be involved in the project were trained on the project's goals, relevant election law and how to conduct exit polling. Mayor Linda Lawrence of the City of Wausau explained how to choose candidates and the city clerk trained volunteers on voter registration and how to become poll workers. Training was designed so that participants could train others to assist with Project VOTE.

¹¹ Interviews with staff, April 11-13, 2005.

Wisconsin has in-precinct voter registration. If you are a citizen eligible to vote, you can register in advance for the election or just show up and register prior to voting. WAHMA held a voter registration education event at their office, with three people on hand who were capable of assisting voters who were interested in registering. Approximately 70 people were assisted through WAHMA's program. Prior to and following the event, the media was used to promote the need for voter registration. Bilingual flyers and information in WAHMA's news mailing and television and radio shows stressed the importance of voting and how to do it. Linkage to the Hmong veterans issue, where an extension of promised benefits was needed for Hmong veterans who had worked with U.S. forces during the Southeast Asian war, demonstrated how civic participation directly affects the community. Written bilingual materials are of greatest interest to middle-aged Hmong, as older people were not literate when in Laos, and the written Hmong language is a relatively recent development. Additionally, while younger people may speak the language, they primarily read in English.

WAHMA directly linked its citizenship program to Project VOTE, both because of the limited resources demanding shared staff and because the citizenship staff was familiar with the people in the community who had recently naturalized and were eligible to vote. Direct outreach to these people for both registration education and Election Day reminders was made. Primary get out the vote (GOTV) efforts involved phone banking. Bearing in mind that eligible voters could register right before voting on Election Day, Ms. Vang contacted all of those eligible by telephone two to three days before the election.

Radio and TV programs also emphasized GOTV, though these methods were not as effective as the phone calls. Information on candidates and their positions was also broadcasted through these shows. About 1,000 households receive WAHMA's newsletter, which is in

Hmong and English. It only goes out quarterly, however, due to funding limitations. The *Wausau Daily Herald* has a section called “Hmong Connection” that it has published on a roughly monthly basis. It is read largely by young people as the paper is entirely in English. The paper has just hired someone to translate articles into Hmong, so this should expand its effectiveness. This special edition is sent to all Hmong households by the newspaper utilizing WAHMA’s mailing list.¹²

In 2004, Wisconsin was one of the so-called “battleground states.” There was great media attention to the close Presidential race as well as a U.S. Senate race. In addition to media coverage, the major political parties and their nominees devoted tremendous effort to get voter support. There were also local candidates. In Wausau, this meant people going door-to-door and a local appearance by the Democratic Presidential candidate. This sort of attention reminded the Hmong community of the election and their vote. There was no significant outreach by the national campaigns targeting the Hmong community. Some particular focus and support for President George Bush from the Hmong veterans was apparent and outreach from the Kerry campaign to Asian Americans and local support of Democratic officeholders from the community was evident, but the major impact of the intensity of the political atmosphere was to remind Hmong community members of the election and its importance to the larger community. It is not clear where the Hmong community’s political support went in 2004, but it is apparent that there was support for both parties at the national level and for incumbents at the local level.¹³

2004 Election

From 30 to 40 people were given rides to the polls and about 50 limited-English-speaking voters were provided assistance also. WAHMA’s van for the elderly nutrition program was used

¹² Interviews with Peter Yang and Chaxiong Lo, April 12, 2005.

¹³ Interview with Peter Yang, April 11, 2005 and Kelly Michaels-Saager, Wausau City Clerk, April 12, 2005.

for part of the day and one car was rented to take voters to their polling sites. Shortage of staff made Election Day assistance difficult. Ms. Vang is funded to work on the citizenship program in addition to Project VOTE and Tuesdays she needs to assist members of the community with the citizenship process. The limited staffing meant that the same staff people that helped with the transportation and language assistance also performed the exit polling. Since most respondents needed assistance, staff could not have them fill out the form, so staff filled them out in response to verbal questions. Most did not answer the bulk of the questions and those that did provide a response to who they voted for did so only for local candidates.¹⁴ A number may have been confused by the question as they indicated support for candidates that were not on the November 2004 ballot: these included Jim Tipple, who was elected Mayor in the spring of 2004; Greg Huber, a former assemblyman who was elected judge and thus was not running in 2004; Ya Yang, a WAHMA staff person who was on the spring 2004 ballot for City Council; and Chaxiong Lo, a former WAHMA staff person who also ran for office at another election.¹⁵

The lack of exit polling, as well as the incomplete nature of the brief questionnaires filled out by staff has made it very difficult to assess the relative effectiveness of the various get out the vote and education methods. By interviews and limited focus group discussions held months after the election, while not statistically accurate, possible conclusions can be drawn as to these questions.

Those that received assistance did answer questions about the election process. All respondents indicated that the poll workers were helpful, but that none were Hmong. They also indicated that translated written material in their language would be a good thing, with only a few feeling it was not necessary. Some 15 of the questionnaire respondents felt that multilingual

¹⁴ Interview with Tong Xeng Thao, April 12, 2005.

¹⁵ Project VOTE survey forms, November 2004.

written materials are useful to certain segments of the community primarily, indicating that they themselves would use multilingual written materials. Ten did not feel that the materials would be useful. One respondent indicated that they wanted to see more Hmong candidates for office and all agreed that there were no Hmong poll workers in their polling place. The exit sheets were filled out for voters at three different election sites.¹⁶

Wausau City Clerk Kelly Michaels-Saager had spoken at one of Project VOTE's early community training sessions. She was trying to recruit Hmong poll workers. She and her polling workers indicated that they were aware of the language barrier faced by the Hmong community. She explained that while the payment was not large, she felt that having a governmental commitment to the community would make a difference. She has also tried to recruit poll workers at the nearby University of Wisconsin branch, figuring that the combination of English and Hmong speaking abilities was most likely to be found in younger people. She did observe that many older Hmong used sons and daughters for assistance and that, with Project VOTE, many had WAHMA language assistance. As far as bilingual ballots, her office was advised by Wisconsin state officials that they could use them if the jurisdiction met federal Voting Rights Act requirements, which, given the small population size, it does not.¹⁷ WAHMA staff estimates that roughly 70 percent of the community would prefer information in the Hmong language.

Overall, Wausau Hmong turnout in the 2004 General Election ran at 85 percent, compared to the overall Wausau turnout of 92 percent. On the other hand, the turnout rate for Hmong voters in Wausau currently registered and eligible to vote in 2000 and 2004 went up by 8 percent from 2000. Comparing these numbers to those of "dual-eligible" voters in Green Bay,

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Interview with Kelly Michaels-Saager, Nancy Robinson and Don Haney, April 12, 2005.

Wisconsin and Stockton, California, there was a 7 percent increase in Green Bay and a 15 percent increase in Stockton. The number of voters overall was substantially higher in Stockton (2,098 eligible, 984 voting in 2004). For both Wausau and Green Bay, the total number of voters was relatively small, with Wausau's 2004 total turnout 441 of the 516 eligible.¹⁸

It is difficult to assess whether the increase in voters in Wausau was due to Project VOTE. While the increase in turnout was slightly lower in Green Bay and higher in Stockton, the reasons for the differences are probably more complex and were not tested given the relatively small sample of information that was available. What is clear, however, is that WAHMA gained experience in assisting voters in their community and have developed a sense of what is most effective.

In addition to the exit polling responses, in April 2005 interviews were set up with a number of eligible voters who either voted or did not in 2004. While the sample was too small to be statistically valid, the interviews supported reports from staff about responses on Election Day from voters or nonvoters in response to GOTV calls in the several days before the election. Chang Vang Thao was a first-time voter in 2004. He became a citizen with the help of WAHMA in June 2004. He received a call and reminder card in the mail from WAHMA just before the election. He and his wife went to the polling place and registered on-site on Election Day.¹⁹ Songka and Thay Banhaphanit are Laotian Americans, as opposed to Hmong. They utilized WAHMA's Laotian interpreters on Election Day and for their interview. Both became U.S. citizens in May 2004 and voted in November for the first time. WAHMA's citizenship coordinator called and asked them to register, and they did. Their motivation was to fulfill what they understood to be part of a citizen's responsibility as explained by WAHMA staff. They

¹⁸ APALC statistics, *Cambodian and Hmong Voter Registration, Turnout, 2004 General Election and Cambodian and Hmong Voter Registration, Turnout, Voters Currently Registered and Eligible to Vote in 2000 and 2004 General Elections.*

¹⁹ Interview with Chang Vang Thao, April 12, 2005.

wanted also to show their gratitude to WAHMA for their assistance. They weren't familiar with candidates other than for President.²⁰

According to Ms. Vang of the WAHMA staff, the biggest excuses for not registering or voting were being "too busy," lacking transportation or not seeing how voting would affect their lives. Her feeling was that many were also uncomfortable with the process because of language barriers even when translators were offered, though few stated this. Virtually all, whether voting or not, indicated that greater translator involvement and bilingual explanatory materials or ballots would be useful. Pa Xao Vang and Mai Ya Vang became citizens in 2004. They knew about the election and remembered hearing the radio announcements. They couldn't make it to WAHMA when the registration education program was held, even though staff had contacted them. They decided to vote, but forgot the specific date and time. On Election Day, they heard voting was taking place and thought they could vote, so they called Lee Vang at WAHMA to find out what they needed to do. She was out of the office assisting citizenship applicants so she was not able to get back to them and they didn't vote, though they plan to in the future. They know about Hmong candidates like County Board Member Ya Yang and would want more Hmong representation.²¹

Project VOTE did have an impact on Hmong voting in Wausau. It encouraged WAHMA to continue to seek to do voter education, registration and get out the vote. Attempting a variety of methods, it was clear that some were most effective, though it wasn't clear of the impact of many programs or materials. The cohesive nature of the community and the central role WAHMA plays with Hmong in Wausau was an important factor. The development of Hmong communities in America demonstrates the effect of decisions made by community leaders to

²⁰ Interview with Songka and Thay Banhaphanit, April 13, 2005.

²¹ Interview with Pa Xao Vang and Mai Yia Vant, April 12, 2005.

settle and resettle in specific locations. The group commitment that carried through from the mountains of Laos to relocation centers and to initial and secondary settlement locations still affects the community's unity today.

The effect of being a hotly contested area, leading to sizeable media expenditures by both major political parties and local door-to-door activities, made the election hard to miss. Project VOTE efforts to educate the community on the process and the candidates and issues affecting the community also made a difference. Hmong candidates have run for school board, city council, county board (usually one runs for both county and city bodies, though can lose one and win the other) and mayor. The fact that a major national television news program covered community complaints that Hmong students were being concentrated in a particular school made the community aware of how policy could affect them. Moreover, the issue also demonstrated how the community and media coverage could change policy. The community has developed particular ties to local and state officeholders, including the former and new mayor, state legislators, Senator Russ Feingold and Governor James Doyle, based on visibility and hearing of officeholders reaching out to Hmong communities not only in Wausau but in Green Bay and Milwaukee as well. While these factors have increased interest in voting, Project VOTE provided the opportunity to see that a community organization can help members of their community to vote, even with a relatively small commitment of resources.

Of greatest impact, though, is the sense of obligation and response to WAHMA staff and volunteers who urged them to educate themselves about registering, learn about the issues and vote. This is consistent with the community's history and the direct linkage Project VOTE established between its strong citizenship program and registration education and GOTV efforts.

New citizens especially seem responsive to accepting voting as part of the responsibility of a citizen to the Hmong community and the Wausau and American community-at-large.

Certain barriers exist to increasing the voting participation of Hmong Americans in Wausau. Citizenship is necessary, but WAHMA's aggressive naturalization program has made citizenship more accessible to the community. High levels of poverty and the need for many to work long hours also make the inconvenience factor more problematic. Many Hmong families are large (two of the families interviewed mentioned around 10 children living in the household) and this also makes child care both a need for many and a popular career for Hmong people. Both factors limit the ability of some to leave their homes to vote or register to vote.

The common excuse among many Americans for not voting is that they are not convinced that it will make a difference. This is all the more true for immigrants coming from countries where democratic choices were few or none. Issues like benefits for Hmong veterans, local school concerns and cutbacks in social service funds, however, are felt by the community. WAHMA and the community's commitment to provide education has paid off, though it will take time and continued effort to make long-term change. Hmong candidacies seem to have made an impression on many Hmong citizens. Several candidacies for City Council and County Board, Mayor and School Board have made an impact. So far, only Mr. Yang, WAHMA's business developer, has succeeded in getting elected to School Board, then to City Council/County Board. In the election in early 2004, he was defeated for City Council, retaining his County Board seat, but other candidates continue to pursue office. The size and concentration of the community mean that any Hmong candidate would need non-Hmong votes as well to win and Mr. Yang, and some of the other candidates as well, have achieved this.

Language and cultural barriers continue to be a factor. Despite the fact that WAHMA provided translators, more could be served with greater resources. Government commitment to poll workers should be better coordinated with WAHMA and, hopefully, additional resources could be committed to it. In 2004, WAHMA focused its limited resources on Project VOTE. Perhaps if greater partnership with the city and county were attempted, recruitment of bilingual workers could be more effective. Even if bilingual poll workers were hired, to be effective in increasing voters there would need to be pre-election publicity for limited-English-speaking voters to know that such resources existed at their polling place. Recruitment could be a cosponsored community campaign.

While Wausau was chosen, among other things, for WAHMA's potential in getting future funding, the government and foundations have had to focus their limited resources on important programs as the economy and governmental decisions have created a crisis. WAHMA was only funded for a half-time employee for Project VOTE. To make the project work, staff from other projects pitched in when needed. This is increasingly more difficult as funding is more restricted. While the three election sites with the greatest concentrations of Hmong were chosen, Hmong residents live in many other districts that could be served. The voting assistance staff person is also the citizenship coordinator. This made her particularly effective in convincing new citizens to vote as she recently had provided assistance to many of them and knew who could become a voter. At the same time, this dual role took her away on Election Day and resulted in other staff and volunteers fulfilling the needed tasks. It was felt by WAHMA staff that a full-time person could accomplish much more in increasing voting. Support for a bigger van or additional rental vehicles, assuming that additional staff or volunteers were available,

would also increase the number of people that could be helped. WAHMA is likely to seek support to fill these gaps.

The exit polling was done on a very limited basis. While the fact that the same people assisted with transportation and translation made the project more efficient generally, it was especially hard for that person to also provide the focus and have enough independence to get a good response to even the short questionnaires that staff partially filled in for voters. Having Election Day workers who are only doing the exit polling would be necessary for more reliable or detailed results. They would have to be bilingual or assisted by translators. Perhaps this could be done in cooperation with an educational institution.

The progress made in Wausau with Project VOTE has increased community voting even at a modest level and allowed WAHMA to gain experience in dealing with registration and GOTV projects. With state elections coming in 2006 and another national election in 2008, the community could build upon this project and refine the program to be even more effective. The Hmong community has seen increasing numbers of local officials in its areas of highest concentration and a state senator in Minnesota. While smaller, Wausau could over time see even more dramatic breakthroughs and could increase governmental understanding of the complex needs of the Hmong population. The new wave of refugees entering the community this year demonstrate the ongoing needs for a project devoted to civic participation.