



Final Report of Strategic Planning Project  
For  
Asian American Resource Center City Facility

October 18, 2016

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## Abbreviations Used

AARC-city:	Asian American Resource Center- City Facility
AARC-np:	Asian American Resource Center-Nonprofit
PARD:	Austin Parks and Recreation Department
AAPI:	Asian American Pacific Islander
NAAO:	Network of Asian American Organizations
APAPA:	Asian Pacific Islander American Public Affairs Association
MACC:	Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center

## Background

In August 2016, AARC-City Facility hired Meeta Kothare of Neeva Solutions as a consultant to provide guidance and facilitation for a strategic planning process with the goal of developing a three- to five-year strategic plan for the facility. Since its inception in 2013, the AARC-City facility has grown its programs organically to serve more of the community's needs, but Taja Beekley, Manager of the facility, felt that it was time to reflect and develop a plan for systematic growth in keeping with the mission of the organization, yet serving the most pressing needs and desires of the AAPI community.

The project included in-person interviews with leaders of four organizations that partner with AARC-City, and an online survey sent to five partners and 19 staff members. The interviews and survey were followed by an all-day planning retreat facilitated by Meeta Kothare on September 23<sup>rd</sup> with 7 staff members and 6 partners attending. The complete lists of interviewees and retreat participants are provided on page 16.

This report includes the strategic plan developed at the retreat, consultant's additional recommendations, a report on the interviews, and the results of the online survey.

## Mission Statement

The current mission statement of AARC-City was revised at the planning retreat to more accurately describe the scope of the organization's work.

### Existing mission Statement:

The mission of the AARC is to provide cultural spaces, resources, services, and educational programs through an Asian Pacific American perspective that bring Austin's diverse communities together.

### Points of discussion:

The last section of the mission statement, "...that bring Austin's diverse communities together," was viewed as more appropriate in a vision statement, and was deleted. The word "educational" was omitted because it does not cover the scope of all the programs that AARC-City offers. The word "Services" generally refers to activities within a program and was deemed redundant. The new mission statement appears below.

### Vision Statement:

The AARC City Facility did not have a vision statement prior to the strategic planning process, and it was briefly discussed at the retreat. In a follow-up meeting, Meeta Kothare and Taja Beekley discussed the importance of distinguishing it from that of other Asian American Pacific Islander organizations all of whom ultimately seek the single overarching goal: To improve the quality of life for AAPI communities.

### Values:

Since the retreat did not allow adequate time to develop a set of organizational values (although many of them were evident in the discussions), Kothare and Beekley discussed this in their follow-up meeting. It was agreed that the City of Austin's values for all its organizations would be adopted, but would be fleshed out after discussions with staff to explain how AARC City Facility exemplified each of those values in its work.

### **Mission Statement**

**The mission of the AARC is to provide cultural spaces, resources, and programs through an Asian American Pacific Islander perspective to serve the Austin community.**

### **Vision Statement**

**The cultural heritage of Asian American Pacific Islanders is embraced and celebrated by the City of Austin, resulting in an improved quality of life for AAPI communities.**

### **Values**

- P** Public Service
- R** Respect
- I** Innovation
- D** Diversity
- E** Ethics

## Strategic Priorities Identified at the Planning Retreat

After much discussion at the retreat, the group arrived at five overarching goals for the 3- to 5-year strategic plan. These goals with objectives, strategies, and some action plans (where identified) are listed below. Two caveats are in order here: First, given the limited time at the retreat, this list may not be exhaustive, and second, a final plan will be developed only after feedback from the community and from partner organizations. As such, this set of priorities should be viewed as a starting point for further discussions.

### Goal I:

**Programs and services are provided through increased active collaboration with other organizations whose missions are aligned with the needs of the AAPI community. Such collaboration will ensure that programming is mission-focused, relevant to the target communities, and makes efficient use of AARC-City's resources.**

#### Objectives

1. \_\_\_% increase in use of facility by AAPI communities that are not currently using it
2. \_\_\_% increase in use of facility by age groups that are not currently being served
3. \_\_\_% increase in facility utilization in evenings and weekends
4. \_\_\_% of community responds favorably in satisfaction surveys

#### Strategies

- A. Increase program collaborations
- B. Increase event collaborations
- C. Increase resource collaborations (example, financial)
- D. Increase direct services collaborations (example, flu shots)

#### Tactics (for each strategy):

- a. Create list of current collaborations
- b. Simplify forms

## Goal II:

**The AAPI community and the Austin community is well-informed about the programs and services offered by AARC-City.**

### Objectives

1. \_\_\_% Increased use of facility
2. \_\_\_% Increased volunteer participation
3. Increased advocacy

### Strategies

- A. Evaluate and modify current communication tools

#### Tactics

- a. Make newsletter link to events calendar more visible
- b. Collect emails more consistently
- c. Make mission statement more visible
- d. Provide internal training for frontline staff to answer queries more accurately

- B. Create new communication mechanisms

#### Tactics

- a. Conduct facility user surveys
- b. Create more translated materials

- C. Increase frequency and quality of community engagement events

#### Tactics

- a. Redevelop Community Advisors program
- b. Develop a presentation for community forums (possibly with video). NAAO has offered to help convene, but reach out to other organizations like APAPA too
- c. Hire outreach staff

- D. Build relationships with refugee coordinators in schools and with nonprofits providing direct services to students



Tactics

- a. Distribute fliers to refugee coordinators and schools

**Goal III:**

**Improved and safer access to the facility.**

Strategies

- A. Work on increasing public transportation

Tactics

- a. Explore Metro flex options
- b. Create a landmark stop outside center
- c. Increase van utilization
- B. Conduct demographic analysis
- C. Construct bridge (could be funded by a grant or a sponsor)
- D. Right-of-way
- E. Pedestrian crosswalk

**Goal IV:**

**Facility features are consistent with organizational and programmatic goals.**

Strategies

- A. Construct playscape
- B. Add benches, picnic tables
- C. Add outdoor exercise equipment
- D. Increase signage around the facility
- E. Improve lighting near street
- F. Redo sidewalks
- G. Install partitions in ballroom

**Goal V:**

**The AARC facility achieves a balance of program offerings that are reflective of community needs**

*Strategies*

- A. Increase youth services
- B. Increase services to refugee populations (with caveat on page 10, point # 3)
- C. Adapt programming to changing demographic needs

## Additional Points of Discussion at Planning Retreat

A number of issues were raised at the retreat that provided additional context for the strategic planning process. Some of these ideas are worth pursuing, but are outside the scope of this strategic plan. Some others are listed here so that the reader may better understand the thinking behind the selection of priorities for this planning period.

### *1) Name Change*

This was a topic of conversation at the retreat and in external interviews. AARC-City Facility and AARC-nonprofit are commonly confused because of their similar names. Additionally, some participants pointed out that the word “Resource” is difficult to translate in many of the Asian languages. Finally, concern was expressed that the name does not include Pacific Islanders. It was decided, however, that a potential name change would require input from the community and partner organizations, and should be deferred at this time.

### *2) Should AARC continue to be under PARD?*

Being part of PARD restricts the AARC-City Facility in some ways. It has limited ability to increase funding within PARD’s already stretched budget. PARD does not allow its sites to apply for grants less than \$25,000 due to processing costs. Given the focus of the AARC-nonprofit along with the needs of the AAPI community for health and social services, some respondents to the strategic planning process felt that it would benefit PARD leadership to consider the possibility of re-assigning the AARC-City Facility to the Health and Human Services Department. This decision will require further discussion and is outside the scope of this strategic planning process.

### *3) Services and outreach to refugees/underserved populations*

This priority received the highest ranking from participants when they were asked to rank priorities that had emerged from the online survey. Considerable discussion ensued around this topic. It was determined that strong organizational values to serve the neediest groups among the AAPI community were driving this priority, but AARC-City does not have the capacity to accomplish this goal. Many in this population are moving outside city limits and as a city organization, AARC can only offer services inside the city. Transportation into the city is difficult for this resource-strapped community, even when AARC-City offers to provide transportation once they arrive within city limits. Moreover, the kinds of services they most require, for instance, mental health services, are not a core competency for

AARC-City. Language barriers and limited staff capacity to speak the languages is another constraint. After several minutes of reflection and discussion, it was decided that this cannot be a goal for AARC-City.

#### *4) Daytime programming versus evening and weekend programming*

AARC-City's programs are heavily weighted toward serving the senior population (see staff survey results). Much of this programming is during the day. The facility has the dilemma of being over-capacity at times and underutilized at others. Evening and weekend programs targeting younger audiences would utilize the facility at times when it is currently less used. Discussion centered around the kinds of programs that would attract younger audiences. It was decided that AARC-City should not compete with other organizations to provide educational programs such as Kumon, etc., but continue to provide cultural programs (and perhaps health and wellness in partnership with other organizations). The occasional college admissions workshop, etc., may be successful, but not a full-fledged test prep or admissions program. However, any additional programming in this area would impose a greater burden on the existing limited staff and was therefore not considered a priority for this planning period. Instead, enhancements to the grounds, such as a playscape and picnic benches -- improvements that would attract younger families -- were included in the current strategic plan.

## Additional Consultant Recommendations

### *1. Plan for Succession*

It is always good practice to plan for a smooth leadership transition even when a transition is not anticipated in the near future. In fact, this is the perfect time for succession planning. Strategic planning is a good step in that direction. Some other important steps to consider are: develop other leaders within the organization, communicate important information through written documents, document organizational policies and processes, engage as many external stakeholders as possible. Finally, consider archiving the history of the organization through written documents, stories, photo albums, some of which can be included on the website. These materials will help preserve, honor, and pass along the stories of those who came before, and inform future leaders of the thinking and passion that went into the formation of the organization. This will ensure that future leaders will continue to be sensitive to the organization's and community's culture.

### *2. Continue to clarify relationship between AARC-np and AARC-City*

Almost all partners discussed this issue. There is considerable pride in the community for both organizations, but often not enough clarity around the roles of each. It appears that the current leaders of both organizations have great mutual respect and an excellent working relationship. It is important, however, that the areas of cooperation, and the distinction in missions is made clear and visible to staff, board, external stakeholders and partners, so that the two organizations can continue this critical partnership with future leaders.

### *3. Have laser focus on mission*

The community expects and needs much from AARC-City. The facility however has limited staff, resources, and space. It is very important that the organization avoid mission creep as it seeks to serve diverse communities. A good example of this choice came up during the retreat. A majority of the participants were initially in favor of increasing services to refugee and underserved populations, until it was determined through discussion that such programs would not be possible given the resource constraints of the organization. A good way to achieve mission focus is to have the mission statement visible at every opportunity,

and to continually ask the question, “Is this consistent with our mission?” and “Is this feasible with our resources?” Another helpful exercise is to place each program or service into one of four boxes in the following matrix. For instance, some activities that increase resources such as fundraising are not high on mission focus, but are necessary for sustaining the organization. An equivalent example in AARC-City’s case would be the income from rentals for events not focused on the AAPI community. Programs that neither focus on mission nor sustain the resources of the organization should be avoided. The ideal box of course is the right top corner, which is your core strength and one for which resources are available. Programs that fall in the top left box are often where your heart lies, but are difficult to provide because of resource limitations. These can be provided in a limited manner through partnerships with other organizations.

High ----->Mission ----->Low	<b>High Mission Impact/Low Viability</b>  Decision: Keep but provide limited direct resources  e.g. Education, Health & Wellness – seek out partners	<b>High Mission/High Viability</b>  Decision: Continue and grow  e.g., Cultural programs, RICE Senior Meals
	<b>Low Mission Impact/Low Viability</b>  Decision: Discontinue	<b>Low Mission Impact/High Viability</b>  Decision: Keep  Example: Facility Rentals for events not related to AAPI community

Low-----> Resource Viability-----> High

#### 4. *Establish success metrics*

It is inevitably difficult to measure programmatic and organizational success, but efforts must be made to collect as much quantitative and qualitative data as possible. Currently,

the facility does collect user surveys at events, and has data on capacity utilization. As the communication strategies are fleshed out, keep in mind how best to gather information from the community (feedback from focus groups, community forums, annual surveys of newsletter subscribers, etc.)

#### *5. Be flexible as you develop a strategic plan*

While a strategic plan is a roadmap for 3 to 5 years, conditions do not remain static during that time. It is best to review the plan initially after six months, and make any changes if necessary to the strategies and action plans. After that, an annual review will suffice. In the interim, the best way to ensure that the strategic plan is being followed is to distribute it widely, and to always consider any actions within the lens of the strategic plan, “Is this idea/program/initiative/activity consistent with our plan, and if so, which specific goal or which specific strategy is it?” Staying within the plan will also keep you focused on your mission (see #3 above), and help you say no to the inevitable demands to be different things to different constituencies.

#### *6. Collective impact model for collaboration among AAPI organizations*

This recommendation is humbly submitted for consideration not just by AARC-City, but by partner organizations with whom this report is likely to be shared. As retreat participants concluded, AARC-City must collaborate extensively with other organizations in the city that serve the needs of the community. Collaborations are a complex undertaking and their success depends upon several factors. Studies on collective impact suggest that for collaborative organizations to be impactful in their communities, the following factors are crucial:

##### *Common Agenda:*

Participating organizations do not have to agree on every dimension of the problem, but must find common ground and agree on primary goals. Perhaps the Asian-American Quality of Life Commission or the NAAO could develop high-level goals for the community that feed into every organization’s goals.

*Mutually Reinforcing Activities:*

Each organization undertakes activities at which it excels in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others. This thinking would be helpful as AARC-City and AARC-np try to link their work together.

*Constant Communication:*

In recent years, the various AAPI organizations have not met much at all. NAAO seems to be amenable to convening leaders of all organizations on a regular basis. These meetings would benefit from a structured agenda and possibly from facilitation by a neutral party. This would develop trust and appreciation for the common goals of different efforts being made in the community. An online discussion group for leaders of different organizations may also foster more frequent communication.

*Shared Measurement:*

All organizations should agree on the way success is reported and measured. If the above three factors are in place, it will make it easier to hold each other accountable as well as to learn from each other's successes and failures.

One aspect of the collective impact model that will be harder to replicate is a backbone organization that coordinates the activities of the entire group. Each AAPI organization that currently exists has a unique mission and must ultimately focus on its own mission. Therefore, no organization can serve as an impartial connector for the others. Despite this drawback, the community will be better served if organizations were mindful of the principles outlined above as they work together.



## List of Participants

The following staff members and partners participated in the planning retreat held on September 23, 2016 in the AARC-City Facility's conference room, from 9 am to 4:30 pm.

### AARC-City Staff Members:

Taja Beekley  
Hanna Huang  
Bianca Xoyamayagua-Galvan  
Jieun Beth Kim  
Michael Miyasaki  
Rani Arni  
Yvonne Lim Wilson

### Partners:

\*Vincent Cobalis, Asian American Quality of Life Commission  
\*Esther Martin, AARC-np  
\*Laura Esperza, Museums and Cultural Programs Division, PARD  
Victoria Li, APAPA  
\*Gopal Guthikonda, NAAO  
Bobbi Kommineni, AARC-np

\* Denotes partners who were individually interviewed by Meeta Kothare prior to the retreat.

## Summary of Discussions with Leaders of Partner Organizations

As mentioned before, four in-person interviews were conducted with leaders of partner organizations. The following sections discuss responses from partners to questions about AARC-City's strengths, organizational constraints, potential future directions, and current and future trends that are likely to affect the organization.

All partners interviewed were genuinely invested in the future of AARC-City and felt ownership for its growth and sustainability. All agreed that the organization has had strong leadership from Taja Beekley who has been with the organization from the very beginning. Being under PARD has resulted in a focus on cultural programming, although some of that was by design to draw the community in to use the beautiful space. AARC-City's programs are generally considered successful, its staff is perceived as dedicated, and the organization is considered a good partner by other AAPI organizations.

### *Suggestions for future directions*

These stakeholders had several suggestions for the future direction of AARC, not all of which can be addressed in this strategic plan window. Primary among them were ideas about the next phases of development for the facility. This conversation has been percolating in the community for a while, and many different ideas have been floated that need further discussion and debate. Some concerns were raised about the limitations imposed on the facility's programming by virtue of it being housed in PARD. In addition, partners sought clarity around the relationship between AARC-City and AARC-np. Many also noted that while the community has many needs and demands, the facility with its limited capacity could not be expected to meet all of them. It was important for the facility to do what it does well and partner with other organizations for other programming.

Some specific suggestions for programs and improvements include:

- Partition the ballroom to create additional space to be used when entire room is not in use for events.
- Find ways to increase capacity utilization on weekends and in evenings.
- Questions were raised about the implementation of the kitchen expansion. How would it be staffed? How would it support the community?
- Community needs conversational English, not ESL.
- Programs are mostly focused on the senior population, but not much programming for younger age groups.

- Provide more intellectual recreation. For example, MACC celebrates Cinco de Mayo with book discussions or panel discussions with authors.
- Do better marketing and outreach.

#### *Trends that create a positive environment for AARC-City's work*

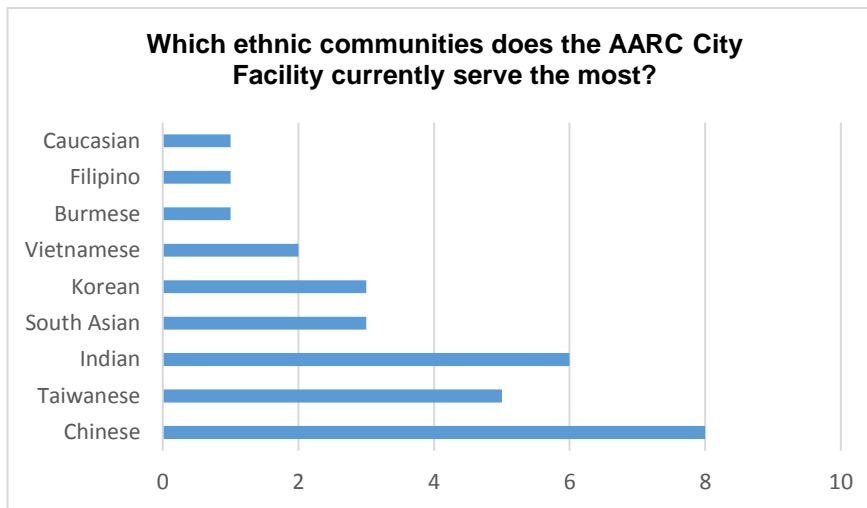
- A growing Asian American community could mean more attention from city as well as greater voting power.
- Mayor Steve Adler is very supportive of the community. Lesley Varghese, his Chief of Staff, is the former Executive Director of AARC-np, and continues to be active in the Asian American community.
- A substantial majority of the city council is supportive of Asian American causes.
- Budgets for city facilities increase through citizen activism in addition to staff input. With a growing Asian American population there is greater potential for activism.
- Potential to work more closely with Capital Metro for Senior meals in addition to AARC's own transport.

#### *Trends that adversely affect the environment in which AARC operates*

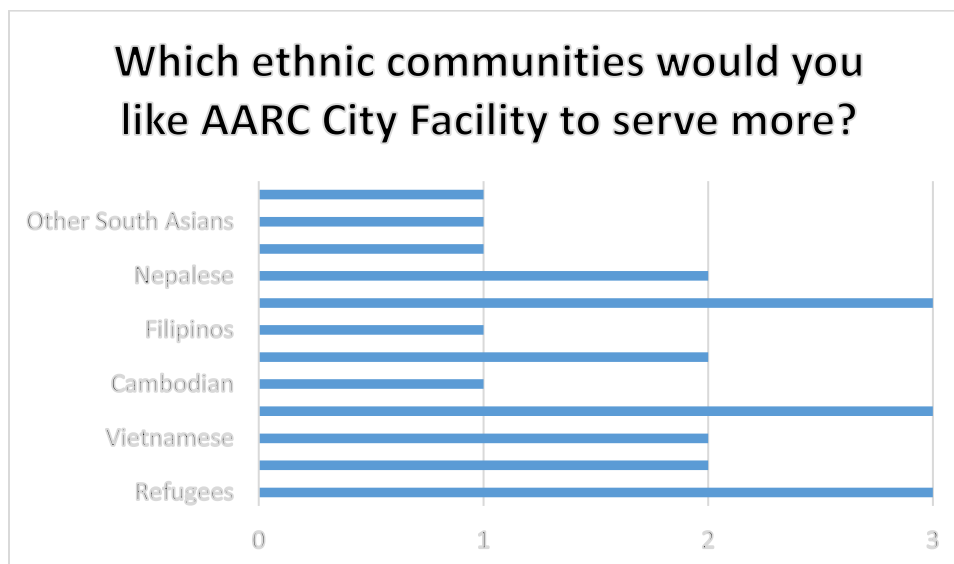
- Many different communities form the AAPI diaspora. Unity among these disparate communities is fragile.
- The prevailing perception is that only some communities use the facility and that the facility is not serving the needs of the entire AAPI community.
- A growing AAPI population has many positive outcomes, but this trend also means more needs and greater demands on AARC-City and other AAPI organizations.
- The AAPI community has historically not voted in large numbers and, therefore, has not received as much attention from elected officials. The creation of a local chapter of APAPA is a positive step in this direction.
- Language barriers or concerns about immigration status cause sections of the population to hesitate to engage with the city or to use services provided by AAPI organizations.
- AAPI communities, especially the ones who most need services, are moving outside city limits, and AARC being a city facility cannot provide services to them.
- Different AAPI organizations are not coalescing on missions. It is critical to have compatible missions with a singular focus on serving the community.

**AARC City Facility Staff and Partners Survey  
Strategic Planning Retreat  
September 23, 2016  
(12 responses)**

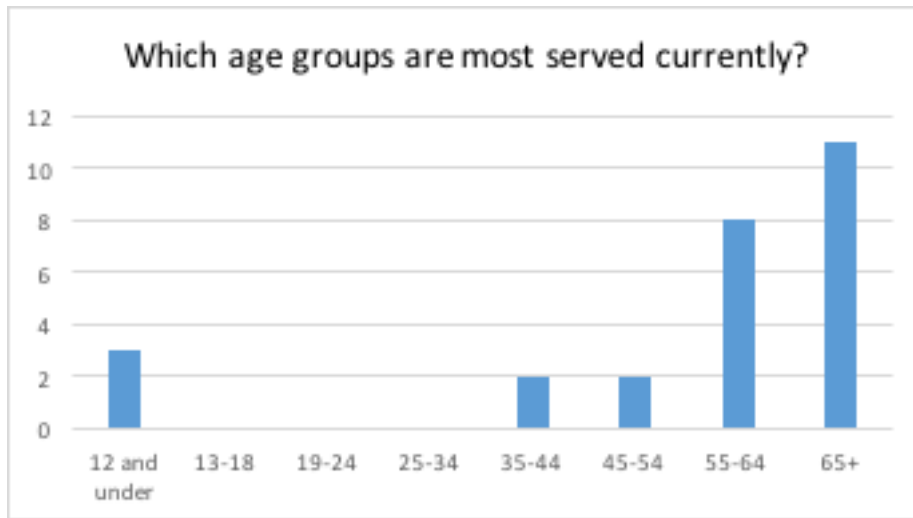
**1.**



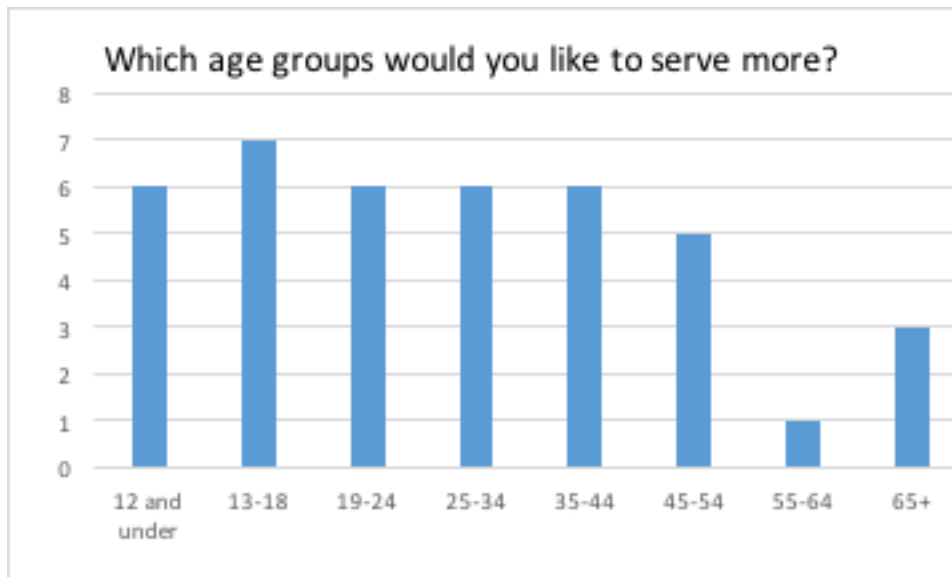
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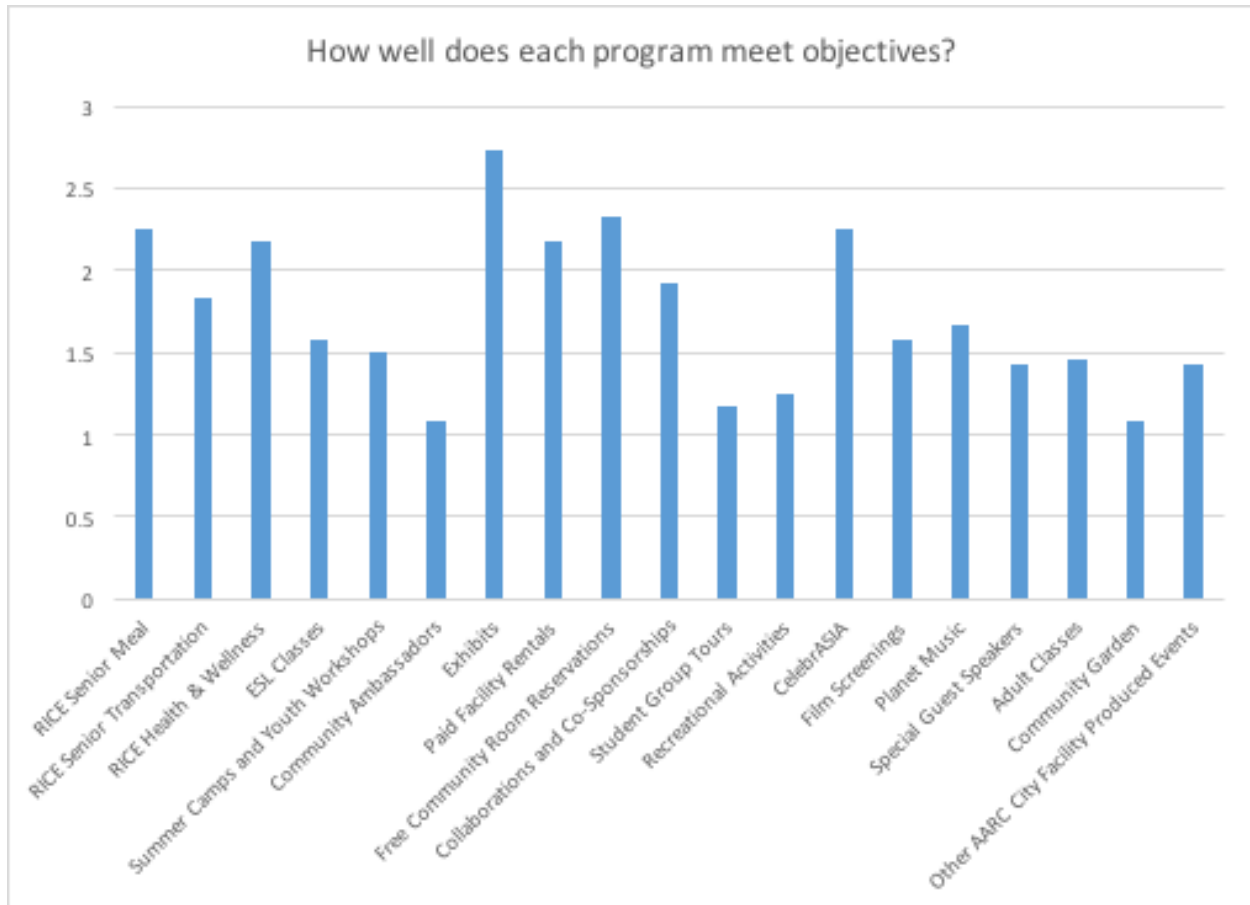
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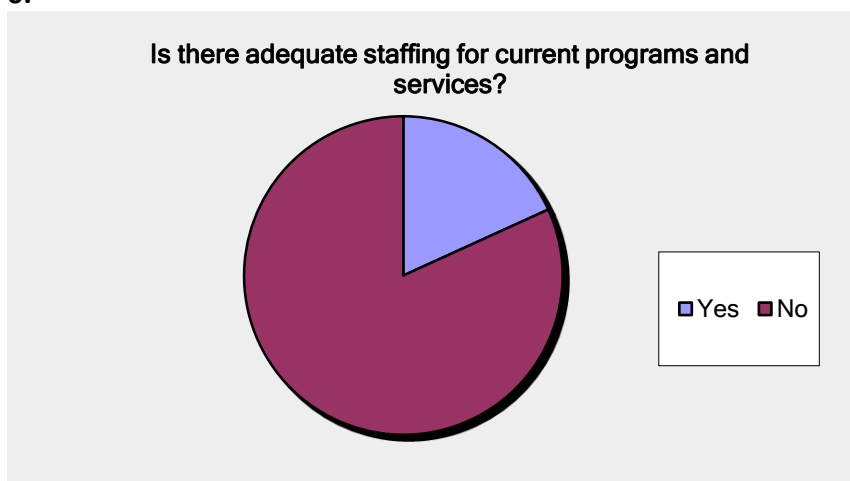


5.



Ratings Scale: 1=Does Not Meet Expectations; 2=Meets Expectations; 3=Exceeds Expectations

6.



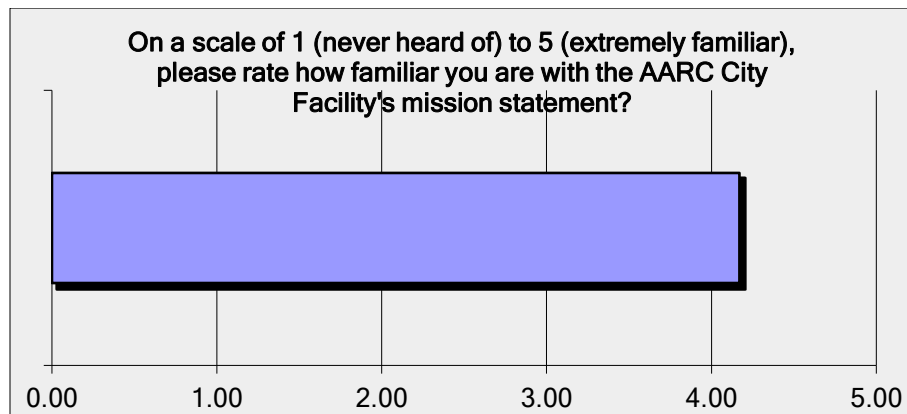
Yes = 2 responses; No = 9 responses.

**7. What unmet or commonly requested needs in the community have you observed that you wish to serve more?**

The following is a summary of common responses:

- More evening and weekend availability.
- More recreational activities, especially gym, playground, outdoor equipment.
- Better parking.
- Increased transportation services.
- Services for Pacific Islanders.
- Translation and interpretation services.
- More youth programs
- More social services geared toward low-income and refugee populations
- More social services geared toward integration of immigrant communities into American society.

**8.**

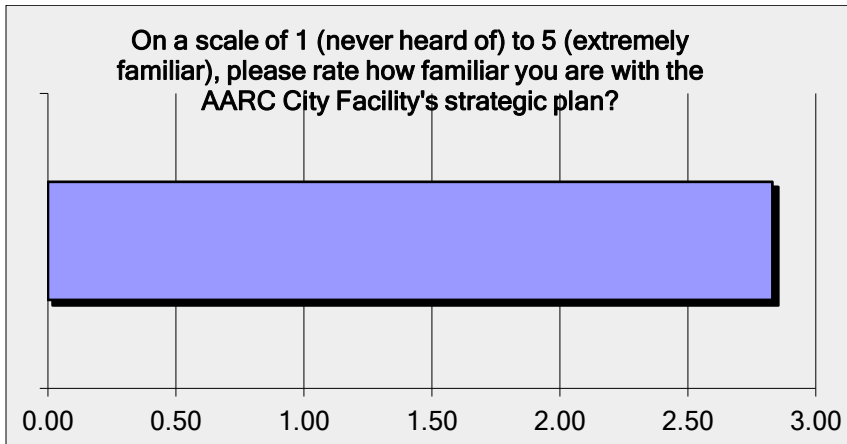


**Average rating: 4.17**

**Comment:**

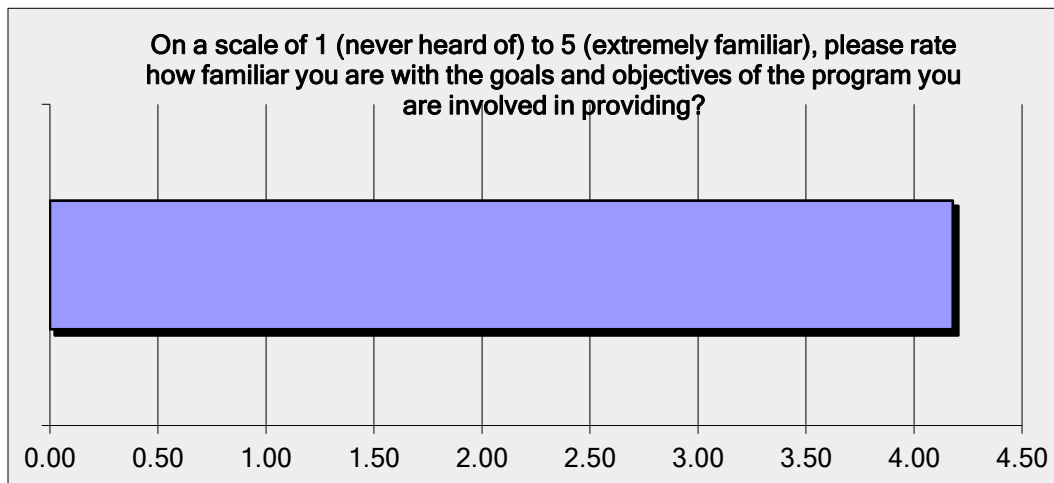
I think I know the mission, but I can't put it into words. Having something on the wall would help.

9.



Average rating: 2.83

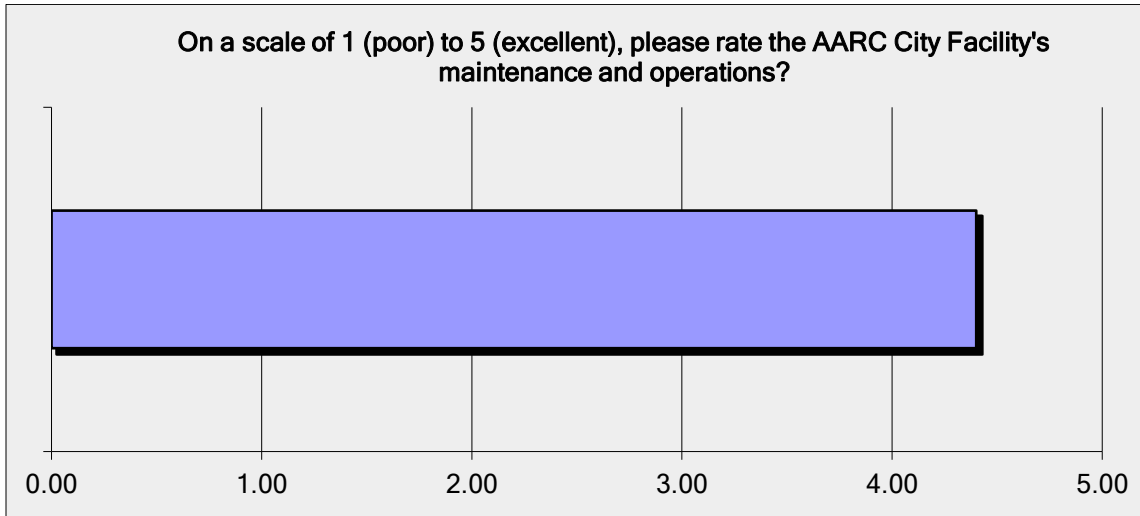
10.



Average Rating: 4.18



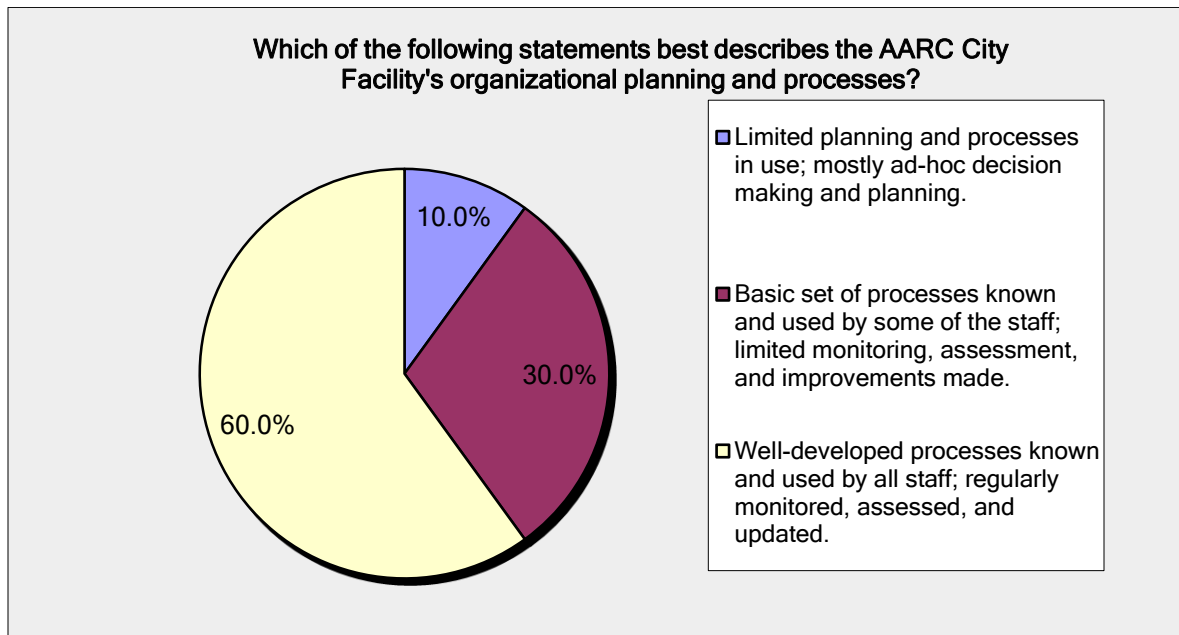
11.



**Summary of Responses:**

The facility does well despite limited staff. However, there is need for better facilities services - maintenance, custodial, lawn and garden.

12.

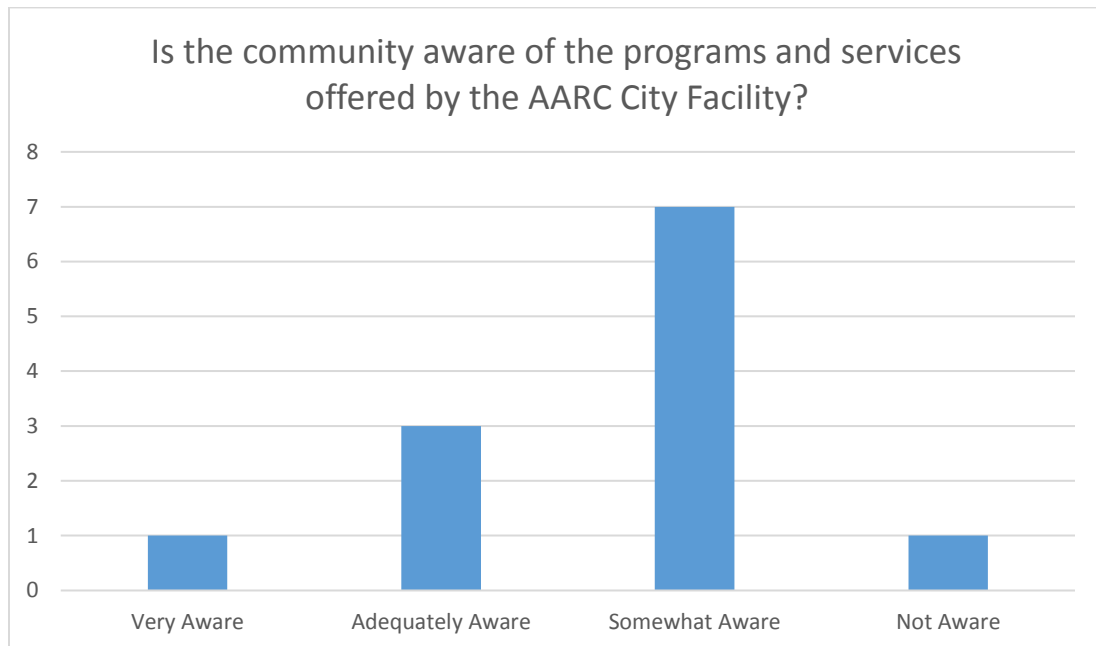


**Total: 10 responses**

**Summary of responses:**

Processes continue to be improved, but we need to have a better understanding of the demographics of the communities that are currently being served and the communities that need more outreach.

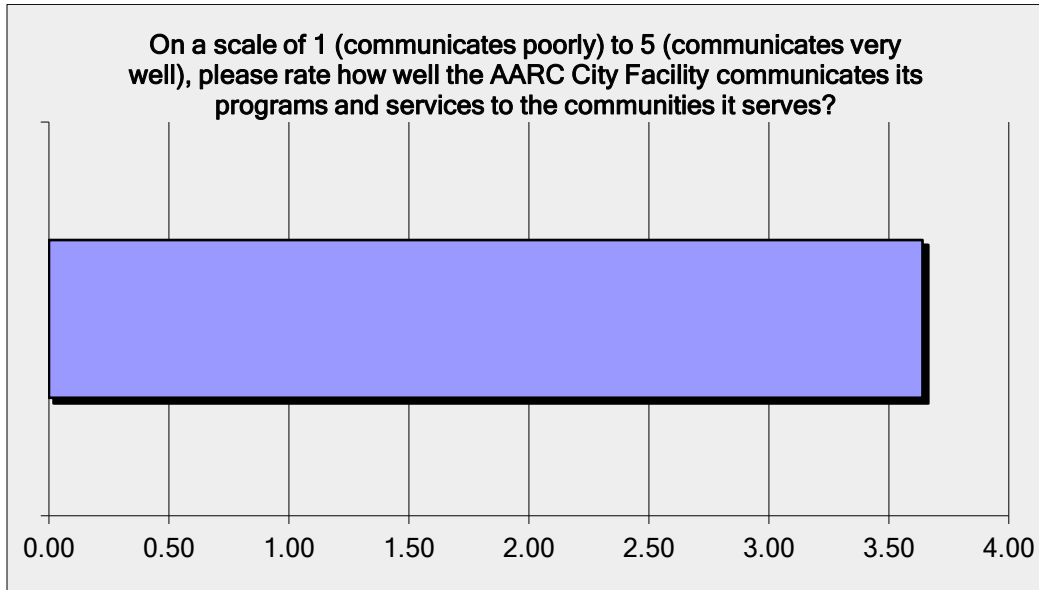
13.



**Summary of responses:**

- Many in the community are not aware of us at all, and if they are, they are not aware of the scope of our activities.
- While some in the community are very aware of us, those who really need the services (especially refugee populations) are often not aware.
- Seniors are well-served and we are good at communicating our events and programs to them.
- Our exhibits are not well known to the local art community.
- The distinction between AARC City Facility and AARC nonprofit is not understood well by the community.

14.



**Average rating = 3.64**

**Comments:**

- The center has done a good job, given limited staff and resources, but suggestions for improvements include:
  - getting more people to sign up for newsletter
  - finding other outlets to communicate with the community, e.g., ads in ethnic papers
  - working with local schools to identify opportunities for tours and educational programming
  - more translated materials
  - more in-person community outreach
- Better communication about programs with front desk staff so that they can be fully informed when fielding inquiries.

**15. What are the three most important priorities for the AARC City Facility to focus on over the next three years?**

The following is a categorized summary of all the responses received. The categories and their components are in no particular order of importance.

**How do we improve programs and services?**

1. More youth/teen camp and education programs
2. More family programs
3. More adult education programs
4. Rigorous exhibit program
5. Art program
6. Better mix of food and non-food programming. Consider whether Rice should charge a small fee to seniors who can afford to pay.
7. More translation services
8. More transportation
9. Increased collaboration programs that allow AARC to meet resource demands from community

**How do we make the facility more appealing?**

1. Expanded hours
2. Improvements to facility – gym, basketball court, playground, outdoor equipment

**How do we create strong organizational values?**

1. Being more inclusive
2. Respect for staff
3. Use of environmentally friendly technology
4. Fair pay and proper training for all employees

**How do we communicate what we do?**

1. Social media presence
2. More breadth and quality of communication about services and programs offered

**How do we serve underserved populations?**

1. Services and community awareness/outreach for refugee and underserved populations
2. Facilitate access to AARC for underserved communities such as refugee groups and groups that cannot afford rental fees

**How do we grow?**

1. Planning for future expansion

## **6. What would you like to gain from the staff retreat and strategic planning process?**

The following is a summary of the responses received. In general, respondents wanted to come away with a plan for the next few years that:

- Clarifies the mission of AARC
- Clarifies the role of different constituents
- Is clear
- Sets a comprehensive direction for moving forward
- Has easily identifiable and attainable goals
- Has plans and goals for each program
- Has team buy-in
- Sets general expectations from each employee, how employees can support the plan and support each other.
- Streamlines standard of procedures, making them consistent across staff
- Provides for effective and efficient operations with limited staff resources