

Hmong Minnesota

The United States ran a Secret War in Laos; Hmong forces allied with the CIA. After 1975 came persecution, camps in Thailand, and refugee resettlement. St. Paul is a national hub. Most Hmong Minnesotans live in the Twin Cities; many are second and third generation.

Maintained by: Equity and Inclusion Operations Consultant

History carried forward

Hmong textile arts bring memory, skill, and imagination into public view. The Minnesota Historical Society's Hmong collections offer a way to explore this creative work alongside the community's history in Minnesota. A history of displacement is part of the story—not the whole story.

- **Explore Hmong history and creativity** — <https://www.mnhs.org/hmong>

A different starting point

When planning a conversation across generations, how could you make room for each person's knowledge and preferred way of communicating?

Community overview

Traditional healing and Christianity are both widespread. Elders and U.S.-born youth may differ sharply on language and family authority. Clan matters for some families and not for others.

Names and terms

Hmong; Hmong Minnesotan; Hmong American

Also used: Mong (used by some Green Hmong speakers)

Clan names are shared by many people; given names may change at marriage or with an honorific for men. Ask how the person wants to be addressed.

Spelling of the language name itself (Hmong, Mong) is contested among speakers; follow the person.

History and place

Origins and the Founding of a People

Hmong peoplehood is older than Laos, older than the CIA file, and older than the refugee camp. Oral history and scholarship place origin in southern China; movement into the highlands of what became Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand under pressure from imperial states. Statelessness is a political fact, not a personality.

Clan, language, writing

There is no Hmong nation-state. Clan, language, agriculture, and ritual organized life without a capital city. Writing systems came late. The Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA), developed in the 1950s in Laos, is the common Latin script in Minnesota. Historically the language was oral. Paj ntaub / paaj ntaub — story cloth and embroidery — carried memory when paper did not.

White Hmong and Green Hmong

Two large dialect-and-dress groups live in Minnesota: White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb) and Green Hmong, also called Blue Hmong or Mong Leng (Hmoob Leeg / Moob). The names come from dress, not politics. The dialects are close and not always interchangeable in an interpreter. Green Hmong often write the people-name without the H: Moob. That is the same instruction as this page: say mung.

What people brought

Clan, ancestor obligation, shamanic healing and Christianity both, farming knowledge, oral skill, a memory of being recruited to fight someone else's war and then left. What they met in Minnesota: an English form, one "Asian" checkbox, and often one interpreter labeled "Hmong."

The Geography of the Hmong World

Homeland is not one flag. Southern China remains a Hmong (Miao) geography. The Laos highlands — Xieng Khouang, Long Tieng, the places named in veteran stories — are the origin of most Minnesota families.

Diaspora

There are Hmong communities in Vietnam, Thailand, Burma/Myanmar, and a global diaspora: California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Carolina, France, Australia.

Pew (May 2025): California is the largest U.S. state community; Minnesota second; Wisconsin third. Fresno and Sacramento sit next to Minneapolis–St. Paul as sister maps. Secondary migration built Minnesota. Church sponsors scattered people; clan pulled them back together.

In Minnesota

St. Paul is the national urban hub. East Side. Frogtown. University Avenue / Little Mekong. Ramsey County. Brooklyn Center and inner-ring suburbs. A small Greater Minnesota share. Frogtown is not the whole. The person in front of you may not have been to Laos.

Minnesota and Hmong History

St. Paul is one of the largest urban Hmong communities in the world. That is why this page has to be as complete as the African American and Somali intelligences — because this department will meet this community on waivers, child welfare, health care, cash, food, aging, and employment.

Places, not a blob

East Side St. Paul; Frogtown; University Avenue and Little Mekong; Hmongtown Marketplace (opened 2004, a former lumberyard); Hmong Village (2010, Johnson Parkway); Brooklyn Center; Maplewood; a

small Greater Minnesota share. Compass: about 94 percent Twin Cities.

Institutions

Partners include Hmong American Partnership; Hmong Cultural Center of Minnesota; Hmong Museum; Center for Hmong Studies (Concordia); Hmong 18 Council and clan structures some families name; CECLC as a department door — not the whole community.

Public calendar: Hmong New Year in St. Paul (weekend near the end of November, RiverCentre in recent years; held since 1977); Hmong International Freedom Festival at Como Park — sport, not consultation. Hmong American Day / May 14 is literacy. A calendar click is not community engagement.

Hmong staff are colleagues, not a stand-in for the community. A New Year visit is optional professional development. You are a guest. It does not make you the expert.

Culture and everyday life

People, place, and perspective

This brief is about Hmong people — Hmoob in White Hmong, Moob in Green Hmong / Mong Leng. It is a people with ancient roots in southern China, a highland life in Laos, and a Minnesota community built after 1975. Pronounce it mung. The H is silent. If you say Huh-mong in a lobby, you have already told the household you did not study.

Who this is

Minnesota Compass (ACS 2019–2023) puts Hmong ancestry near 99,900. About 94 percent Twin Cities, about 6 percent Greater Minnesota. About 38 percent age 17 or younger. About 33 percent foreign-born — which means a majority of this community was born here. Pew (May 2025, 2021–2023 ACS) put Minnesota near 95,000 on a Hmong-alone count and named it the second-largest state community after California. Date the number you use. A rate is not the person.

St. Paul is a national hub. It is not the map. Frogtown, the East Side, Little Mekong on University Avenue, Hmongtown Marketplace, Hmong Village, Brooklyn Center, Maplewood, and a smaller Greater Minnesota share are not one client.

The diversity inside this people is the point. A Secret War veteran who came through Ban Vinai, a Christian grandmother, a txiv neeb (traditional healer) whose altar is in the living room, a U.S.-born nurse, a farmer at the summer market, a college student who uses English with friends and Hmong with an elder, a person who left clan obligation and still shows up at New Year — share a people and do not share a Tuesday.

Who this is not

This is not a Census “Asian” mash. It is not Chinese New Year. It is not Karen, Vietnamese, Lao as a synonym, Cambodian, or a generic Southeast Asian interpreter. Shared continent is not shared culture.

How to read this

Read it as an orientation. A full mosaic is not a stereotype. A stereotype is when this page becomes the person in the lobby. Always defer to the person in front of you. This page is a hypothesis you still test on this family.

The facts that follow are meant to help you meet people well — how family is named, what respect looks like, what a greeting carries, what a form may land on. Counts are dated. History is here so the meeting is clearer, not so you deliver a lecture.

The Secret War, 1975, and the Camps — Foundational Event

If the Great Migration is the foundational demographic event of modern Black America, and 1991 of Somali Minnesota, the Secret War and 1975 are the foundational event of Hmong Minnesota.

The Secret War

From 1961 to 1975 the United States, through the CIA, recruited Hmong forces under General Vang Pao to fight in Laos — a war the Geneva Accords had said should not be there. Hmong soldiers blocked supply lines and died in large numbers. Boys were recruited. When the United States left in 1975, the Pathet Lao and Vietnamese forces treated Hmong allied families as the enemy.

Airlift, walk, camps

May 12–14, 1975: airlift from Long Tieng. About 2,500 people in those days. General Vang Pao left May 14. Minnesota later marked that date. Most people were not on the planes. They walked. Thai camps followed — Ban Vinai among the named ones. Years. Then resettlement.

Minnesota

The first Hmong family in Minnesota, Dang Her and Shoua Moua, arrived in December 1975. Church and voluntary-agency sponsors (Lutheran, Catholic, and others) placed people across the country so no one state would “take too many.” Clan and secondary migration undid the scatter. St. Paul became a hub because people chose each other.

U.S. policy at first treated Hmong people as “too primitive” for asylum. The Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act had to be amended. That sentence is literacy for the meeting. It is not a speech you give the family.

Family

Clan organizes family. About 18 clans are commonly named among Hmong from Laos now in the United States. The clan name is the last name: Chang, Cheng, Chue, Fang, Hang, Her, Khang, Kong, Kue, Lee, Lor, Moua, Pha, Thao, Vang, Vue, Xiong, Yang — English spellings of Hmong names. Same last name often means same clan. Marriage is supposed to be outside the clan.

Household size

Households are larger than a nuclear English form. Compass: average household size about 4.4. Elders, in-laws, adult children, and clan obligation sit in the same week. Who cares for the child may not match the waiver checkbox.

Marriage and labor

Bride wealth and clan negotiation are real in some marriages. Minnesota law still stands. A wedding custom is not a crime scene. Mandated reporting still stands.

Women's labor — market, factory, farm, professional second generation — sits next to a patrilineal clan. Both can be true in the same room. Ask who should be in the room.

Hmoob / Moob — the heart of a people

To be Hmong is to be a people without a state and with a long memory of being used by states.

In Minnesota

In Minnesota it sits inside another fact: many Hmong Minnesotans are Asian in a U.S. racial order that files them under a checkbox that also holds Chinese, Indian, and Korean histories they do not share; veterans of a war the United States ran and then classified; Christians and traditionalists in the same cousin-line.

Kwvtij

Kwvtij — clan-kin — is not a metaphor. Face, ancestor obligation, and not shaming the name travel into a waiver meeting. Harmony can look like agreement and then a plan nobody follows. Ask whether they agree. A smile is not consent.

This guide is a working orientation. Individual variation always supersedes group generalization.

Core Concepts

These concepts recur. They express differently by clan, church, generation, and how this family lives ritual. They are hypotheses — not a script for the person in front of you.

Clan

About 18. Patrilineal. Exogamous. The last name is not a decoration. Staff do not use it as an icebreaker. If the family names it, you listen.

Ancestors

Household ritual, soul, and funeral are not extras. A missed funeral obligation can be a crisis in the family when the English form thinks the crisis is a missed appointment.

Txiv neeb

Traditional healer / shaman. An altar in a living room is not a case plan and not a museum. If they name a healer, listen. The healer is the case plan when they asked. A soul-calling is not DHS programming.

Christianity

Catholic, Protestant, evangelical streams are large in Minnesota Hmong life. Church can be the information channel. It is not “the community.”

Face and harmony

Direct refusal may be costly. A yes that is courtesy is not a signature. Ask again, plainly, without humiliation.

Hu plig / poob plig

Soul-calling and soul-loss are meaning systems some families use for illness, fright, and developmental difference. They can sit next to a fierce wish for services. You can hold both.

Farming and market

Garden plots, farmers markets, and the two St. Paul markets are economy and culture. A food-court visit is not consultation.

Religion and Healing

Traditional Hmong religion is household-centered: ancestors, spirits (dab), shamanic healing, soul. It is not a Sunday service you can BCC. Christianity arrived through mission and camp and is now ordinary in Minnesota — sometimes in the same extended family as a traditional altar.

Pastor and healer

A pastor or a txiv neeb is the case plan when this family asked. Traditional practice is not witchcraft. Church is not the evolved version.

Funerals

Funerals can last days and gather clan. Burial timing, animal offering in traditional practice, and who must be there are not delays for your convenience. You still keep medical and legal time. You name the conflict instead of punishing it.

Illness meaning may not be the DSM sentence. MDH's 2014 qualitative work with Hmong parents on autism: unclear meaning of the word, stigma, waiting to share concerns, professionals who were not responsive. Late identification is a gate. Stigma is a gate. English-only is a gate.

Greetings

Elders first. A slight bow or nod with an older person is safer than a hard handshake you assume is universal. Many second-generation people will shake hands in English-language rooms. Follow this room.

Names

Nyob zoo is a common White Hmong greeting. English "hello" is ordinary. Say the name. The clan name is the last name; it is not optional.

Somali right-hand rules and the Black nod are not this page. This is not those grammars.

Physical contact: ask the room. Cross-gender touch with elders is not a default.

Naming Conventions

The last name is a clan name. Eighteen common clans. People who share it may be kin in a way the database cannot see — or strangers who still should not marry. Every Lee is not related. Two Lees in a household are not automatically a married couple; they may be clan-kin of a kind your form does not have

a box for.

Given names

Given names may be Hmong, English, or both. Soul names, nicknames, and generation names exist. The form that demands first-middle-last and a hyphen will invent a person.

Pronounce it. Ask. “Too many Vangs” is a closed door, not a joke.

Women may or may not take a husband’s clan name in U.S. records. Ask how to file. A mother and child who do not share a last name is not a fraud signal until you have a reason.

Dates of Significance

Hmong New Year — traditionally after harvest; in St. Paul a public weekend near the end of November since 1977. Courtship ball-toss (pov pob) is public history at the celebration, not a file. Guest, not researcher.

May 14 and public life

May 14 — General Vang Pao’s 1975 departure from Laos; marked in Minnesota as Hmong American / Hmong-Lao veterans memory. Literacy.

Fourth of July / Freedom Festival soccer and sport at Como Park — community public life, not consultation.

Lunar and household ritual dates vary by family and by traditional vs Christian practice. Ask. “Asian holiday” does not belong on a case note.

Etiquette

Shoes off in many homes. Accept a little food if offered. Elders first. Feet pointed at an altar or a person, in a traditional household, is not the default.

Time and the plan

Hospitality is a virtue. You still keep medical and legal time.

A living room is not a photograph of the altar. Ritual objects are not for touching. An elder is not entertainment explaining shamanism.

On-time for appointments. Traffic and multi-household logistics are real. So is a pattern of courtesy-yes then no-show when the plan was never agreed. Ask whether they agree. Confirm in the language they use.

Language and Communication

White Hmong and Green Hmong / Mong Leng. Confirm the variety. An interpreter labeled Hmong who does not speak this household’s dialect is still a closed door. RPA is the common written form; many elders do not read it. Second-generation English is common. Compass: among those 5 and older, about 77 percent speak a language other than English; about 31 percent speak English less than “very well.” Date the number.

Tone and yes

Hmong is tonal. The doubled vowels in RPA mark tone, not extra sound. You do not need to become a linguist. You need to put the variety on the interpreter request.

A long answer may be story. A short English yes may be exhaustion or courtesy. A smile is not consent. Ask whether they agree with the plan.

A Hmong coworker is not the interpreter.

LGBTQ

Queer and trans Hmong Minnesotans exist. Conservative clan and church climates can mean silence or exile. Some people live a public English life and a private Hmong life. You use the name they use. Outing them to an elder is not cultural humility.

Law

Minnesota's Human Rights Act still applies. A whole people is not a family-values exhibit.

Hair, Dress, and Body

Traditional dress is public at New Year and not a daily uniform. Second generation looks like Minnesota. "Still wears the costume" is not a clinic question.

Hair and silver

Hair and head: follow this person. Hair is not for touching. Silver, embroidery, and paj ntaub are art and history, not a mascot for the unit's Heritage Month table.

Music

The qeej (reed pipe) is ritual and art, especially at funerals. New Year stages hold dance, pop, and Christian music.

Not entertainment

A playlist is not engagement. A funeral qeej is not entertainment for staff.

Sports

Soccer and the Freedom Festival matter in public Hmong Minnesota life. Volleyball, flag football, and school sport are ordinary for the second generation.

Not a case plan

Sport clubs are not language access and not a case plan.

Literature

Oral literature first: proverb, funeral text, clan narrative. RPA made a written public possible.

Letters

Minnesota and U.S. Hmong writers, scholars, and journalists exist. You do not need to quote a novel. You need to know this is not a people without letters.

Art

Paj ntaub / paaj ntaub — story cloth, reverse appliqué, memory sewn when camps and exile made paper unsafe or unavailable. Hmong Cultural Center. Hmong Museum. 2025 Minnesota History Center exhibit on fifty years.

Guest

Guest. A story cloth is not a case plan. A museum visit is not consultation.

Conflict, War, and the State

The Secret War, the walk to Thailand, Ban Vinai, dispersal, secondary migration, and a United States that recruited then delayed asylum — that is the political event. Later: policing, youth violence in some 1990s neighborhoods, and deportation of people with records. A DHS badge is not automatically help.

Not a personality

1975 is not a personality. A veteran is not a narrator of killing for your professional development.

Adjacent Peoples — Do Not Mash

Not Karen. Not Lao as a synonym. Not Vietnamese. Not Chinese. Not “Asian American” as the file.

Open the right page

Open the Karen brief for Karen. Open this for Hmong. Some households are mixed. Ask this household.

Miao in China is a related but not identical administrative story. A St. Paul family does not need a lecture on Chinese taxonomy.

Counts, Dated

Minnesota Compass, ACS 2019–2023, Hmong cultural community: about 99,912; Twin Cities 94.4%; Greater Minnesota 5.6%; age 17 or younger 38.3%; 65+ about 3.7%; foreign-born 33.4%; language other than English (age 5+) 77.3%; English less than “very well” 31.1%; high school or higher (25+) 80.3%; bachelor’s or higher 26.4%; median household income about \$90,000 (2022 dollars, averaged); poverty 9.1%; owner-occupied 63.2%; average household size 4.40.

Other counts

Pew, May 2025 (2021–2023 ACS / 2023): U.S. Hmong-alone about 330,000; including combinations about 360,000; Minnesota about 95,000 on that count; median age about 26.8.

Counts disagree because definitions disagree. Date the number. A young age structure is not a personality. A poverty rate that fell over decades is not proof the gates closed.

Doors and Sources

Minnesota Compass Hmong profile (ACS 2019–2023). Pew fact sheet on Hmong in the U.S. (May 2025). Minnesota Historical Society / MNHS Hmong in Minnesota; MNopedia. Hmong Cultural Center of Minnesota. Hmong Museum. Hmong American Partnership. Center for Hmong Studies, Concordia University, St. Paul. MDH 2014 qualitative autism study with community partners. Chaxiong 2022.

EthnoMed Hmong page for clan-name spellings — a clinical literacy door, not a bible.

Learn on your own time

CECLC is a door, not the whole community. Learn on your own time. A Hmong colleague is not an unpaid tutor. Pay partners.

Services, opportunity, and participation

Education

Compass (ACS 2019–2023): among Hmong Minnesotans 25 and older, about 80 percent high school or higher; about 26 percent bachelor's or higher. A majority of children are U.S.-born and in English-dominant schools. The IEP still has to reach the parent who does not read it.

Language at the door

White Hmong and Mong Leng are not always interchangeable on an interpreter line. English-only parent forms are a gate. A parent who speaks fluent Hmong and limited English is not illiterate.

Second-generation educational mobility is real. So is a gap that a room which treats everyone the same will call “culture” instead of language access plus poverty plus a school that never learned the name.

Other Considerations

Unvarnished, because Minnesota Nice is how a room that treats everyone the same deletes facts.

Marriage, disability, status

Early marriage and bride-wealth patterns exist in history and in some present families. Minnesota age-of-consent and forced-marriage law still stand. You follow the law. You still see a family, not a crime scene walking in.

Disability stigma and late autism identification are documented (MDH 2014; later qualitative work). Under-identification is the Hmong pattern in Minnesota autism surveillance; Somali over-concern is a different page. The two are not the same.

Deportation to Laos of people with certain convictions — including people who have lived here since childhood — is current structure, not folklore. It changes who opens the door, who signs, and who will not put a relative's name on a form. Collect the status the work requires, not more. Fear is not noncompliance.

History that still sits in the room

1990s youth violence in some St. Paul neighborhoods is a history some families carry. A clan last name is not a gang file.

LGBTQ Hmong Minnesotans exist. You use the name. Outing someone to kin is not culture.

Employee groups may fact-check this page. A hard fact still belongs here.

Health

MDH 2014 qualitative study with Hmong community partners: parents unclear what autism meant, delayed sharing concerns, stigma, professionals who were not responsive. Late identification is the finding. Identification is not a community personality. Date the study.

Under-count

Later Minnesota ADDM-style work has reported lower autism prevalence among Hmong children than among white and non-Somali Black children. Under-count, measurement, and meaning can sit together. Inventing a rate does not help. Skipping screening because “Hmong families don’t have that” does not help.

Chronic disease, trauma, and aging veterans of the Secret War sit in the same clinics as U.S.-born children. Traditional healing and biomedicine are often both in the household. Ask. Co-create. An altar is not a joke. A healer in the story is not a reason to skip the waiver.

Gender match may be requested in maternal and intimate care. Offer it.

Believe reported pain. This history is not Tuskegee and not a generic “Asian stoicism” slide.

Work, Markets, and Government

Factory, farm, small business, professional second generation, public employment. Hmongtown and Hmong Village are commercial hubs. Hmong staff inside the department are not unpaid interpreters and not the community. Identity is not a staffing plan.

Relationship and the notice

Relationship may precede a signature. That is not permission to skip a notice. It is a reason the first visit may not be the decision.

Health-care and Human-service Encounters

Language and dialect. Who is in the room. Gender. An altar or a pastor in the story. Late developmental concern. Deportation climate. A nuclear form that cannot see clan.

In the encounter

Confirm the variety. Offer gender match. Ask who should hear. Staff are not the interpreter. If they name a healer, listen. Mandated reporting still exists.

Connections to human services

Workplace culture and service delivery are both candidates.

Language: an interpreter labeled Hmong who does not speak White Hmong or Mong Leng as this household speaks it is a closed door. Gender match may be requested in maternal and intimate care.

Names: the last name is a clan name. The database that cannot see unmatched last names without a fraud flag is a gate.

Hour caps, exception processes, and life-sharing matches without language are not culturally neutral.

Child welfare and disability: late identification and stigma are documented. Help-seeking that becomes a report is part of why people wait. Mandated reporting still exists. So does the duty not to treat a whole community as a risk score.

Deportation climate: people skip clinic, school, and waiver meetings when a relative can be moved. That is not noncompliance. Do not collect status you do not need.

Notices and comment: an eList and an English PDF is not how this community was reached. Empty follow-up calls are theater.

Workforce: Hmong staff are not the interpreter pool and not the community.

Legislation, funding, rule: you cannot advocate for a channel you will not study. This cultural intelligence exists so the 40% has a household in it — not a paternalistic program designed in a building that never learned to say mung.

Practice considerations

A broad 'Asian' category does not provide enough information to meet a person's needs. White Hmong and Green Hmong are not always interchangeable when arranging an interpreter. Clan may shape who speaks and who helps, and Hmong naming practices may not fit forms built around first, middle, and last names.

What to ask

- Which Hmong should we book: White Hmong or Green Hmong?
- Who should be in the room for this decision?
- Are there traditional healers or church leaders the family wants involved? Do not add them unless named.
- How are names written on your documents?

Access considerations

- Interpreter request specifies the dialect.
- Written Hmong literacy varies; do not assume a translated notice is readable by every household.
- Family definitions on forms may miss who actually cares for a child; note the gap.
- Timing around Hmong New Year (late fall) and family obligations; ask.

Who to involve

- Language access lead or interpreter services, with the dialect written on the request.
- Equity Director for the administration or the person responsible for the program.
- Community partner organizations identified in this brief, with a clear purpose, role, compensation, and plan to report back.
- Hmong-serving organizations the family names, as partners with purpose and compensation.
- Do not expect Hmong-speaking colleagues to teach others about the entire community.

Assumptions to examine

- Do not assume that nodding or a quiet response means agreement; a person may remain quiet even when a plan does not fit their household.
- Do not use clan as an icebreaker or collect it as data.
- Do not treat Hmong New Year as Chinese New Year.
- Do not assume deportation or profiling anxiety is folklore; it is current structure for some families.

More context for your work

Healing and disability

Traditional healing and shamanism shape what illness means for many families; Christianity is also widespread. Hmong parents of children with autism have described late identification, unclear meaning of the word, stigma, and professionals who were not responsive. Under-identification in one community can exist alongside over-concern in another; both service systems and cultural understandings matter.

Family, ancestors, and respect

Family and clan reputation matter. Respect for elders and ancestors is expected. Treat resilience as lived history, not as a slogan.

Observances at work

Observance	When	At work
Hmong New Year	Late November to December in St. Paul	Public celebrations; attend respectfully as a guest rather than treating the event as a research opportunity.

Continue the connection

- **Community engagement or co-design effort** — program page </paths/gp-3>
- **Policy, form, or notice change** — program page </paths/gp-2>
- **Equity Analysis Toolkit** — program page </learn/equity-toolkit>
- **Community engagement and connections** — program page </learn/community-connections>
- **Learning and resources** — program page </learn>

Sources

- **Minnesota Compass, Hmong cultural community profile** — Counts and geography; include the source date when citing this information. <https://www.mncompass.org/>

- **Minnesota Department of Health, 2014 autism qualitative study (Hmong parents)** — Verify the current citation.