



Asian American LEAD

VPP Investment Partner Series



■ Asian American LEAD

Asian American Leadership, Empowerment, and Development for Youth and Families (AALEAD) is a bridge between several worlds. It links Asian and American culture, and is a bridge that connects Asian youth and their elders.

AALEAD was founded in 1998 by a young woman whose family fled Vietnam and lived in refugee camps for several years before coming to the United States. While she longed for a place to call home, she grieved what was lost and left behind in her homeland. In starting AALEAD, Sandy Dang turned her losses into gains for many Asian children in Washington, DC. “I want to help Asian American children who are struggling like I did to realize that they can become successful citizens. Through education, they can make their dreams come true.”

AALEAD is a place of discovery. It is a place where children are tutored and supported so they can succeed in school. It is also a place where Asian parents and their children learn to build a community based on shared values and common goals. And it is where Asian Americans discover that they have the power to improve their own lives and the lives of the people around them.



■ Profile

ASIAN AMERICAN LEAD (AALEAD) provides after-school programs, leadership training, mentorships, and family-support services for Asian American youth.

Facts

Founded: 1998

Executive Director: Sandy Dang

Chair, Board of Directors: Teresa L. Lee

2005:

Staff: 14 full-time, 18 part-time

Budget: \$1.2M

Children Served: 156

Mission and History

AALEAD promotes the well-being of Asian American youth and families through education, leadership, and community-building.

AALEAD was founded in 1998 by Sandy Dang, a young Vietnamese woman whose family fled their homeland in the 1970s. The family lived in several refugee camps before coming to the United States. Dang was a survivor. She did well in school, won a scholarship to Duke University, and earned a graduate degree from Catholic University. But she never forgot what she and so many others had left behind in their homelands. Dang began AALEAD to help Asian children and their families bridge cultural divides and develop a strong community of people based on shared values, tradition, and history. The organization is located in Columbia Heights. In 2003, AALEAD relocated to a facility on Girard Street that it purchased for renovation.

Services

AALEAD serves children ranging in age from 6 to 18. The organization has developed a holistic and multi-faceted approach to helping students achieve academic success and go on to college. The organization delivers educational enrichment through four programs:

- **The After School Academic Enrichment Program** provides academic enrichment, homework support, arts classes, and recreational activities to elementary school students each weekday. Youth also participate in group projects and field trips. The program continues into the summer through a six week Summer Enrichment Program. Elementary and middle school youth are invited to participate in our Tutoring Program, held every Saturday afternoon at the AA-LEAD Community Center. This For Love of Children designed program has proven to significantly improve student ability to master grade appropriate math and reading skills.
- **The Family Strengthening Program** provides case management services to families to increase their access to services, manage family crises, and increase parents' knowledge and use of appropriate parenting practices. AALEAD uses educational advocacy to increase parental involvement in their children's education and to increase parents' awareness of available school choices. Activities include informing parents about the American educational system, teaching them to understand report cards and standardized test scores, and helping them apply to out of boundary, charter and private schools on behalf of their children.



- **The Mentoring Program** recruits, selects, matches, and trains adult volunteers to mentor students one-on-one, helping them to develop the academic and life skills necessary to succeed in school. Each mentor receives a detailed handbook, undergoes a two-day orientation, and is supervised regularly by the Volunteer Coordinator.
- **The High School Academic and Leadership Program** offers multimedia projects, one-on-one tutoring, community service activities, guidance, counseling, homework support, and educational advocacy to high school students. High school seniors receive individual assistance in completing college applications, financial aid forms, and fee waiver requests. In the summer, AALEAD provides employment opportunities for youth through the District of Columbia Summer Youth Employment Program.

Notable Awards and Honors

- Received the Annie E. Casey Foundation Families Count Award, 2004
- Sandy Dang, one of the 100 Washingtonian to Watch in the Millennium by the *Washingtonian*, 2001
- Linowes Leadership Award, from Community Foundation for the National Capital Region, 1999



■ Performance Summary and Fact Sheet

Summary

Asian American LEAD (AALEAD) is a stronger organization than it was in 2002 and is positioned to expand into Maryland and triple the number of youth served by 2010. Its overall effectiveness has improved; however it is too early to determine their overall sustainability until recurring funding for Maryland expansion is secured.

Key Information

- *Date, years, and stage of VPP Investment:* November 2002; 2.75 years (later-stage; partially funded)
- *Capital committed and disbursed by VPP:* \$425,000 committed; \$325,000 disbursed
- *Estimated children to be served in 2010:* 487
- *Revenue increase & % budget growth:* \$750 thousand to \$1.2 million – 60% in four years
- *Leveraged funding:* \$1.1 million
- *Expansion to new places and coverage:* One new school-based program site

Aspiration and Goals

One of the critical objectives and benefits of the planning process was to help AALEAD clarify its aspirations, goals and plans for serving the Asian community of this region. Given that this was a pilot investment to build the organizational capacity elements of an early stage organization, the aspirations and goals of AALEAD were not clearly defined with the level of clarity and specificity that has been the “first step” with VPP’s other investment partnerships.

The planning work was framed around the following general goals and objectives that AALEAD defined for the organization and the youth and families they serve.

The organization:

- Sought to motivate low-income Asian American children and families to maximize their potential and become self-sufficient productive and civically engaged citizens who contribute to their families, their communities and society. AALEAD sees parents and children as agents of change and supports to them to utilize their talents and abilities work toward positive outcomes.
- Sought to educate law makers and change national and local policies to benefit Asian American children by strengthening the voices of Asian American children and families so that they can be tell their stories to influence these results.
- Aspired to see its high standard and high quality programs become a national model that benefits low-income Asian children and families.
- Build a new generation of youth and parent leaders who invest their talents and abilities to improve living conditions and education of low income children, families, and communities

Based upon the results of the business planning process, AALEAD has endorsed its five year objective to serve over three times as many youth in DC and Maryland programs while doubling staff and operating expenses to \$2 million. Specific goals going forward in 2006 include:

- Serve over 500 youth and families in sites in DC and Montgomery County
- Maximize growth in DC by reaching 50% more youth through increased outreach and increased participation by youth in multiple programs over time;
- Build presence in Montgomery County by serving approximately 260 youth by 2010 as a foundation for continued growth in this area and evaluate expansion prospects in Annandale, VA beginning in 2008
- Provide a full set of services to Vietnamese and Chinese youth and families;
- Expand the after school program by filling the middle-school service gap and using a mix of site and school-based programs, extend the tutoring program to middle and high school students and continue offering mentoring to middle and high school youth;
- Offer family strengthening programs to help families better support their children
- Serve as a voice for the Asian American community by increasing visibility and ability to influence change in the DC metro area.

Investment Rationale

Sandy Dang is an impassioned and dedicated leader. She is a voice that is heard in the community representing the Asian American population; her leadership qualities are an impressive asset to significantly advance the organization. AALEAD has a committed board that has provided strong leadership, direction, and resources to advance the work of AALEAD. The organization has developed a holistic and multifaceted approach to helping students achieve academic success and go on to college. The approach involves a four-pronged team effort directed toward each family and child including academics, mentoring, leadership development, and family strengthening. AALEAD is the only organization in the community serving this specific population; the need is tremendous while the current reach is limited. AALEAD is at a very formative stage in the organization's development. After nearly five years of providing services to the Asian community, AALEAD recognizes that enhancements to their management team, programs, infrastructure, and systems could initiate dramatic improvements in the delivery of its services and impact on children and families in the community.

Innovations and New Thinking

The co-investment of VPP and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation have been transformative for Sandy Dang and AALEAD. As a leader, Sandy sees new possibilities, has different expectations of senior talent and her board, plans and acts strategically about her organization's future, including developing a succession plan. She has successfully built a senior team and learned how



to work well with them and delegate operations functions. Her board is transitioning from a family, founding board to a professional board. Business planning gave them the data and information, particularly on changing demographics in the region, that they needed to make thoughtful decisions about how to grow. Their extensive work over multiple years with the support and expertise of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation on their theory of change and outcomes measurement system have helped them develop a new way of tracking and managing their programs, and provided them with an ability to demonstrate the impact of their work.

Key Accomplishments

AALEAD built a stronger senior management team, board, and robust measurement system to ensure outcomes accountability and performance. Other noteworthy accomplishments that contributed to improved capacity and increased effectiveness include:

- **Planning and Focus:** Completed business planning in May 2005, facilitated by Monitor Group, resulting in a well-defined expansion plan for growth in new DC and MD communities, based on detailed data of regional demographic shifts.

- **Human Capital—Board and Management:**
 - Recruited and integrated Deputy Director and Director of Development positions.
 - Added six new board members with needed expertise, shifting composition of board from founding board to a board with diverse professional areas of expertise, providing stewardship and governance.
- **Capitalization/Revenue:** Secured recurring source of revenue totaling \$200 thousand from local public funding source (OECD) and qualified for an additional continuing source of per student funding through the Supplemental Education Services program in DC and Maryland. Increased capacity to secure public funding, resulting in \$250 thousand for 2005.
- **Outcome Assessment:** With support and expertise in the form of a co-investment with VPP from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, AALEAD developed a system of outcomes and performance assessment and management and implemented in all program areas.
- **Raised Expectations for Talent:** Executive Director Sandy Dang deepened knowledge and understanding of resources and time necessary to recruit and secure leadership talent and increased her ability to work with senior talent like the Deputy Director and outside consultants.



■ Leaders

Sandy Dang

Executive Director, Asian American LEAD



AALEAD Founder and Executive Director Sandy Hoa Dang has dedicated her life to the thousands of overlooked immigrant Southeast Asian families living in Washington, DC. In 2001, Dang was selected as one of 100 “Washingtonians

to Watch in the Millennium.” She received the Mayor’s Neighborhood Action Award and the 1999 Linowes Leadership Award for Community Services. Dang earned her BA from Duke University and her master’s in social work from Catholic University.

Teresa L. Lee

Chairman, Board of Directors

Board Chair Teresa L. Lee is an Associate Vice President in the Payment and Health Care Delivery Department of the Advanced Medical Technology Association. Lee is an AALEAD mentor and has in the past served on the boards of Asian Pacific American Bar Association of Washington, DC, the APABA Women’s Forum and the APABA Educational Fund. She has a BA in Rhetoric and Economics from the University of California-Berkeley, a JD from George Washington University, and a MPH from Harvard University.





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