

# Bridging Cultures with Policies through Congregate Meals

*Asian Media Access' Balanced and Nutritious Approach with Asian Temples*

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA, UNITED STATES, April 22, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- AMA is collaborating with Asian Temples in the area to enhance the design of the balanced and Nutritious Congregate Meal, in alignment with the Federal Food Service Guidelines.

The project is funded by CDC REACH funding (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health), which aims to address racial and ethnic health disparities by supporting community-driven strategies to improve health outcomes.



Asian Media Access' Project SUPPORT (Supporting Under-served through Produce/Park Prescription, and Opportunities to Recreation-activity & Tobacco-control) has received the funding, to address below 4 culturally tailored strategies and promote Bicultural Healthy Living within immigrant and refugee communities, through:

- Nutrition
- Physical Activity
- Tobacco Control
- Adult Vaccinations

Through Project SUPPORT, AMA plans to work with area Asian Temples to conduct Food Service Guidelines (FSG) assessments and update Congregated Meal Plans and Policies. This involves considering various meal plans tailored to meet the specific needs of each community, including daily plans for monks, weekly plans for followers, and meals for festivals.

AMA aims to identify policy gaps within the current Federal Food Service Guidelines, particularly in areas where non-Western dietary preferences and practices are not adequately addressed. By

documenting the benefits of Cultural Diet and Fermented Foods with these communities, AMA seeks to underscore the importance of alternative cultural diets in promoting health and well-being, especially within the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) community, and advocate for their inclusion in dietary guidelines and policies, and vice versa. Through these efforts, AMA aims to support the health and cultural vitality of these communities while advocating for greater inclusivity and recognition of diverse dietary traditions.

The current setup with Asian Temples typically involves volunteers cooking daily meals for the monks, while on weekends, members contribute meals to offer to the monks and community, followed by communal eating within the community. This arrangement fosters a strong sense of community among temple members, encouraging fellowship and social interaction through shared meals. It also reflects the value of hospitality within the community, demonstrating care for others, particularly those in need.

The congregate dining in various temple settings provides a good bridge to enhance the cultural factors in FSG. However, sometimes meals from followers may not consist of the healthiest dishes, often due to heavy use of cooking oils and limited options from diverse food groups.

AMA is actively engaged in several actions to support congregated meal settings at Asian Temples for example. Firstly, we conduct assessments of religious entities in the area where congregated meals are provided, utilizing the Federal Food Service Guidelines (FSG). We then analyze the findings in collaboration with the religious entities, aiming to optimize meal plans and food operation policies to maximize nutritional benefits.

Food service guidelines, as defined by the US Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, are standards for healthier food and beverages, and food service operations in worksite and community settings. These guidelines serve multiple purposes, including enhancing the health and wellness of employees, establishing social norms that prioritize healthier choices, and bolstering local food systems.

Accompanying the guideline, is the Assessment Tool to assess the current status of food service process and nutrition standards. The assessment evaluates factors such as "Agency background," "Setting and food service venues," "Nutrition policies, standards, and practices," "Authority," "Contracting process," and "Environment and capacity." The FSG Assessment tool covers organization type, food service venues, existing policies, procurement procedures, and implementation capacity.

AMA plans to work closely with temple coordinators to ensure effective assessment and coordination. We would love to have more Temples, Churches, and Mosques connect with us to provide additional cultural diet cases.

This will further improve internal policies aimed at enhancing nutrition, as well as improving the FSG Assessment Tools to better integrate with cultural factors. Currently, we are in

communication with Watt Dhamma Visudhikaram, Buddhist Support Society, Cambodian Temple in Rochester, MN, we welcome more religious groups to connect with us for potential collaboration. For more information, please contact us at [info@amamedia.org](mailto:info@amamedia.org) or call us at 612-376-7715.

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