

An Evaluation of the Highland Lao Initiative

Teng Yang Shoua Vang Paoze Thao David
North John Finck Bruce Downing

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By early 1983, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) recognized that the Highland Lao refugees in the United States needed special assistance. Scattered in small groups around the nation and often ignored by human service agencies, they suffered more than usual unemployment because they had a lower level of literacy and experience with urban life than other refugees. Many, reacting to their situation, were migrating to the Central Valley of California to which they were attracted by family reunification, prospects of agricultural employment, a supportive welfare system and the climate.

In early 1983, ORR initiated an approximately \$3,000,000 emergency effort to bolster and provide employment and community stability to Hmong and other Highland Lao refugee communities outside California. This effort, the Highland Lao Initiative (HLI) was primarily intended to increase employment, decrease welfare dependency, stabilize the Highland Lao communities and stem secondary migration, particularly to the Central Valley of California.

Following an intense round of data collection and consultations with refugee leaders, refugee serving agencies and State officials, ORR funded specific programs for the Highland Lao in 44 locations after specific needs were identified and proposals were submitted and approved. During the process, ORR encouraged the use of Mutual Assistance Agencies (MAAs) in the HLI.

In August of 1984, ORR contracted with Coffey, Zimmerman and Associates, Inc. (CZA), of Washington, D.C., to evaluate and determine the effects of the HLI in 32 of 47 funded programs, with particular attention to Highland Lao employment, welfare dependency, community

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stability and secondary migration. The following narrative summarizes briefly the major outcomes of the HLI as reflected in the evaluation report:

EMPLOYMENT

Increasing employment was the most important aspect of the HLI program. Of the 32 programs examined in the evaluation, 22 offered employment services. In the 14 programs that kept complete job placement records, a review of those records showed that 286 Highland Lao, most of whom were unemployed or on welfare, received employment as a result of job placement services funded by the HLI. Most jobs were entry level, paying average hourly wages in the \$3.70—\$4.00 range. It was found that Highland Lao job developers had better placement rates than their American counterparts. An analysis of project data indicated that the job placement projects produced more in benefits than in costs; the average return per project in terms of earned income for a single HLI dollar invested in job placements ranged from \$2.60 to \$48.68.

Seven HLI projects provided on-the-job training (OJT); approximately 71 Highland Lao received employment as a result of OJT. Wages for workers placed in OJT were similar to those

p. vi for direct placements. The cost-benefit ratio for OJT programs, however, was less: an average return of \$5.17 in earnings for every HLI dollar invested.

Vocational training, the lesser utilized employment strategy, produced 129 job placements. The average cost of placement through vocational training was somewhat less than for OJT. Further, those placed in jobs following vocational training had received substantially more training than those placed in OJT.

WELFARE

Among the critical focuses of the study was the effect of the HLI on welfare utilization. Overall, Highland Lao utilization of welfare programs fell by more than one quarter, from approximately 41 to 30 percent, between the spring of 1983 and the fall of 1984 when the HLI had its greatest impact.

A number of outcomes on welfare dependency were observed during the course of the study, most notably a reduction in welfare utilization in sites with successful placement programs. In sites where the HLI did not affect the economic status of Highland Lao refugees, no changes in welfare utilization were observed. The most significant reductions in welfare utilization occurred in states with AFDC-U programs, with the exception of Wisconsin, where welfare utilization remained high.

p. vii **SECONDARY MIGRATION**

Though reliable data on the effects of the HLI on secondary migration were limited, available evidence suggests that the HLI slowed secondary migration away from the funded locations by

enhancing the viability of these small Highland Lao communities. The estimated Highland Lao population increased in seven communities. The most significant population increases occurred in the Wisconsin sites, while the Highland Lao population in the 26 non-Wisconsin sites declined by an estimated 436 persons between the fall of 1983 and the fall of 1984.

RETURNS ON THE HLI INVESTMENT

Data from two projects illustrate the returns to the government on its HLI investment. Two moderately successful job placement programs in Chicago and Toledo, that were funded at \$96,000, produced an estimated return of \$192,000 in additional taxes and welfare savings in a 12-month period as a result of job placements and corresponding welfare terminations.

OTHER PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The HLI expanded some Highland Lao-staffed outreach programs in various sites, and enabled others to continue to exist. It supported a series of gardening projects which were helpful to their communities and produced benefits in terms of

positive public relations. It enabled a number of Highland Lao communities to expand their sales of hand-embroidered cloth (pa ndau). It failed, however, in its efforts to promote small business enterprises. However, in each venture, whether successful or not, the amount of funds invested was small.

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INSTITUTIONAL OUTCOMES

Eight previously unfunded MAAs received their first external funding directly or indirectly through the HLI. However, there were instances where newly funded MAAs received too much money too soon. Many of the HLI funded programs needed more technical assistance than they received.

NEXT STEPS

While Highland Lao communities benefitted from the HLI, and secondary migration was slowed to some extent, all of the problems of the Highland Lao were not solved by the HLI. These refugees will continue to require the attention and assistance of ORR for some years to come. However, there is no need to provide continued special funding to every Highland Lao community originally served by the HLI. For example, as a result of the HLI, there are now a number of MAAs that are capable of competing for mainstream funds; and service providers are more aware of Highland Lao issues and better prepared to provide the services that the Highland Lao need. This should eliminate the need for the continuation of a large scale HLI in the future.

Gaps in service remain, however, in an estimated dozen communities; these communities will require special attention. It is recommended that ORR conduct an annual inventory of Highland

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Lao refugee communities, their needs, and the services available to them, to identify communities needing further assistance.

Future programs for the Highland Lao should focus strongly on job placement and other employment related activities.

The lessons learned during the HLI by ORR and the Highland Lao refugee populations should be utilized in future planning and implementation of programs for similar populations.

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INTRODUCTION

This evaluation is of a specific program for a specific group of refugees. The program is the Highland Lao Initiative (HLI). The refugees are those from the Highlands of Laos, largely Hmong. The funding agency is the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The time period is primarily fiscal year (FY) 1984. The funds are from the FY '83 budget, but some continuation grants were awarded in FY '84.

Several years after their arrival in the United States, it was clear to ORR that the Highland Lao refugees needed special assistance. Many were scattered in small groups around the nation. They were often ignored by human services systems. They had a lower level of literacy and experience with urban life than other refugees; and many of them, reacting to these and other problems, were migrating to the Central Valley of California. The attractions of California included family reunification, the prospects of agricultural employment, a supportive welfare system and the climate.

ORR decided, in the spring of 1983, to mount a special program to provide this population with badly needed services in order to increase employment and strengthen community stability where the Hmong were located. The HLI was directed to approximately 32,000 Highland Lao refugees located in some 44 communities throughout the United States, with the exception of California.

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The HLI was an unusual program. Unlike other ORR programs, it was designed to meet the needs of a specific ethnic group. For reasons outlined later, it was funded through a series of small-scale grants without competitive bidding or the use of an allocation formula. It was one in which special efforts were made to fund Mutual Assistance Agencies (MAAs) some of which had never been funded previously. Twenty-two HLI grants were made to states, with the states then contracting with local service providers. Four grants were made directly by ORR to local agencies.

A contract was awarded on August 16, 1984 to Coffey, Zimmerman and Associates, Inc. (CZA) of Washington, D.C., to evaluate the HLI which had begun in September, 1983. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the effects of the HLI on welfare dependence, community stability and secondary migration, with particular attention to Highland Lao employment; to advise the ORR on whether additional actions need to be considered for this population in fiscal

year 1985 planning; and to make recommendations on how similar situations should be treated in the future.

In two rounds of site visits and lengthy telephone reviews, the CZA staff contacted 32 of the 47 funded organizations in 22 of the 24 states where the program was active. The methodology for the study, which included the use of three study teams, each consisting of one Hmong and one non-Hmong, is described in the Appendix.

The evaluation consisted of four parts. The first is a review of the background in which the HLI operated. Second, the origins, goals and implementation of the program are described. Third, a description and an analysis of the specific outcomes of the program, how it affected the lives of the refugees, is made. Fourth, an assessment of the program, together with some suggestions about how such a program could be operated were it to be done again, is made. p. 3

Many people are owed debts of gratitude from the authors of this report; most notably those employed in the HLI projects. (A two-person evaluation team can ask a lot of questions during a four-or-five-day visit.) The authors thank the ORR Central and Regional staff, the state refugee coordinators, and a variety of people in state and local government, and in various public and private refugee-serving agencies, all of whom were gracious and cooperative. The authors are particularly indebted to the Highland Lao refugees who helped with the research. Whether the conversations were in English, Hmong or Lao, they were open and frank with us, responding often on short notice to our requests for meetings with them.

Project Officer for the HLI evaluation was Toyo Biddle, a competent, effective and creative ORR official. Research and production assistance was capably provided by CZA's Leyla Vural 1, while Nina Williams typed and retyped the text, and

prepared the numerous exhibits. Research was conducted by the six authors listed on the title page, with most of the writing being done by David North. As is the case in works of this kind, the findings reported and the assessments made are those of the evaluation team, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the ORR. p. 4

HIGHLAND LAO CHARACTERISTICS AND DISTRIBUTION p. 5

This chapter covers the characteristics of the Highland Lao refugee populations, their geographical distribution in the United States, and the governmental context in which the Highland Lao Initiative (HLI) was launched.

A. The Highland Lao Populations.

Among the staunchest supporters of the United States during the war in Indochina were the hill tribes of Laos. Following the collapse of the anti-communist forces in 1975, many were forced to flee across the Mekong River to Thailand; substantial numbers of them ultimately reached the United States, with the largest groups arriving in the years 1979 through 1981.

Of the some 65,000 Highland Lao refugees that were estimated by ORR to be in the States in 1983, about 90% were Hmong. There were also several thousand Lu Mien and smaller groups of Lao Lue and Lao Theung. These were among the most severely disadvantaged refugee populations to have arrived in the United States. Having lived in small villages, and practiced slash-and-burn farming, they had had virtually no contacts with industrialized or urban societies prior to about 1950. Since their alphabets were not created until recently, most of the Highland Lao were illiterate in their own languages, and few knew English before their arrival. Their

p. 6 resettlement experience was a predictably difficult one as has been described elsewhere.¹

B. The Geographical Distribution of Highland Lao Refugees in the U.S.

Complicating the resettlement of many of the refugees, and the work of the HLI, was the geographical distribution of the Highland Lao. The two largest concentrations of the Highlanders were in California (home to an estimated 30,000 in 1983) and the Twin Cities (Minneapolis-St. Paul) of Minnesota, where there were about 9,000 at that time.²

The HLI was not active in California where other ORR funds were used to assist that population. Similarly, the HLI played only a minor role in Minnesota where other ORR funds provided services to the Hmong. In Minnesota, the services supported a major agricultural enterprise for a relatively small number of Hmong families (a project not covered in this evaluation).

While some 60% of the Highland Lao refugees were concentrated in California and Minnesota, the 40% or so affected by the HLI were scattered in 43 locations in 23 states (if one excludes the Minnesota farm project). The HLI-affected part of the Highland Lao population:

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- 1 lived in small ethnic clusters, averaging 600, located in
 - 2 middle-sized cities (mostly between 50,000 and 500,000) which were concentrated
 - 3 in the northern half of the nation, including many in the Middle West, and which tended to
 - 4 have declining populations and above-average unemployment rates.

Further, the Highland Lao constituted, on average, no more than a quarter of the Southeast Asian population in those areas.

Dispersed populations have been found difficult and expensive to serve, as have populations living in declining areas. Many of the Highland Lao refugees fell into both of these categories. Further, small non-citizen populations often have difficulty gaining access to programs operated by state and local governments.

The distribution of the four Highland Lao refugee populations in the HLI-funded sites is shown in Exhibit 1.

¹ See the various volumes of the ORR-sponsored *Hmong Resettlement Study*, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Ore., 1984.

² These population estimates are drawn from the Hmong Workgroup files in ORR.

The Highland Lao clusters in Exhibit 1 were compared to the total populations in those areas. The range of percentages was from a low of 0.02% in Chicago, Illinois, to highs of 1.46% in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and 2.72% in Decatur, Georgia. In Sheboygan, and other places in Wisconsin, there were large enough concentrations of Hmong to attract attention to their needs. In Sheboygan, the Hmong were the most visible

ethnic minority. The local MAAs made good use of the Hmong visibility to mobilize people-serving resources in the community. Most of the Highland Lao refugee communities were not in this favorable position, however.

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One of the reasons why many Highland Lao refugees had been underserved was their demographic posture in the communities where they lived. Not only did they constitute a miniscule-to-tiny minority in their places of residence, they usually found themselves in a minority within the Southeast Asian refugee populations, as Exhibit 2 shows. (Note that in Exhibit 2, and in several other exhibits, data are presented only on the 30 studied sites, not the total of 44 funded sites shown in Exhibit 1.)

In 11 of the studied HLI sites,³ the Highlanders were the third or fourth largest refugee group; in another seven sites, they were the second largest group; and in ten, they were the largest group among the refugees. They constituted a majority of the refugee population in eight sites.

There was a correlation between the size of the host community and the size of the Highland Lao refugee community with respect to other refugee groups. The smaller the host community, the more likely that the Highland Lao refugees were a major refugee population. For example, in the eight cities

where the Highland Lao refugees were a majority of the refugee population, the average population of the host city was 37,623 in 1980. In the 11 locations where the Highland Lao refugees ranked third or fourth in size, the average host city population was 719,301.

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The 30 studied HLI sites were not areas of general population growth. Two-thirds of the sites lost population between 1970 and 1980. Generally, the HLI sites were in areas with above-average unemployment rates during the periods examined in the evaluation. In March, 1983, the national unemployment rate was 10.8% while the average rate for the studied HLI sites was 11.5%. By June, 1984, the national rate had dropped to 7.4% while these HLI sites averaged 7.7%. (See Exhibit 3.)

The original distribution of the Highland Lao in the United States had more to do with the operations of the voluntary resettlement agencies (volags) than with the wishes of the refugees. Strong volag networks in the northern half of the nation, at the time of the refugees' arrival, were reflected in the north-south distribution of the 44 funded HLI sites.⁴

³ Data on Highland Lao and non-Highland Lao refugees were available in 28 of the 30 studied sites.

⁴ Of these sites, 34 are north of a line drawn along the northern borders of Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Utah, Nevada and California; and only ten are south of that line.

In addition to the primary settlement pattern noted above, there were patterns of secondary migration as well, which increased the Highland Lao populations in Wisconsin, Minnesota and California.

C. The Context of the Highland Lao Initiative.

One of the background factors against which the HLI was evaluated was the set of characteristics of the Highland Lao communities outside California. Another equally important factor was the governmental context in which the HLI had to operate.

The Highland Lao refugees had many problems but ORR had limited leverage as it sought to help resolve them. Many government programs which impacted the refugees were beyond the power of ORR to change; many, in fact, were beyond the power of the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government to change. There were three systems which inhibited ORR's efforts: the welfare system, the U.S. labor market, and the refugee resettlement system itself.

The welfare system was not designed to meet the needs of refugee populations. However, it was decided some years ago to use it to provide low-income refugees with cash and medical services. The welfare system is composed of a complex interweaving of scores of systems and professionals who have lived in the United States all their lives and have had difficulties

working with it. Understandably, this system was confusing and frustrating to Highland Lao and other refugees who found their eligibility and benefit checks varying by time, space and family structure.

Refugees initially encountered Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), a comprehensive program in which all low-income people regardless of family composition, were paid a monthly benefit. This program has little current impact on the Highland Lao refugees because it expires 18 months after the refugees arrive in the United States, and most Highland Lao refugees have been resident for four years or more. The program once provided benefits indefinitely. Between April 1, 1981 and the spring of 1982, the beneficiaries were eligible for three years. Since 1982 eligibility has been restricted to 18 months. Although RCA is 100% federally-funded, the benefit levels vary dramatically as set by the states. Refugees generally tend to fare better in states that have liberal standards. Once the refugee's eligibility for RCA has expired, they continue to face the state-by-state variations in benefit levels as well as the question of categorical eligibility. Stated simply, in some high-benefit states, an intact family of father, mother and children can receive benefits if there is no income. In others, the simple presence of an able-bodied adult male in the home means that

there will be no benefits. The first system is called Aid to Families with Dependent Children (Unemployed) or AFDC-U; the second, AFDC-FG (family group).

Most Americans receiving AFDC of any kind live in homes where the husband or father is absent or disabled. Most no-or-low-income refugees live in intact families. While the AFDC-FG provides benefits to a small number of Highland Lao families where the husband is absent or

unable to work, an intact refugee family living in an AFDC-FG state such as Oregon or Texas will receive no cash assistance. Under these circumstances, refugee families, when RCA ends, are pressed hard to either find jobs or move to a state with AFDC-U. Some states have relatively generous general assistance programs for low-income people who live in households without children, but some states have no general assistance programs or very parsimonious ones. In summary, monthly benefit levels in

AFDC-FG and general assistance programs vary from state to state. One or more of these variables have sometimes influenced refugee decisions regarding secondary migration.⁵

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Assistance programs are established by the Congress of the United States and ORR has no control over and little to say about them. State legislatures, on the other hand, set the categorical eligibility rules for AFDC, and the benefit levels for AFDC and SSI. General Assistance eligibility rules and benefit levels are set by state or local governments. If ORR wants to encourage refugees to become self-sufficient, it must try to assist them towards self-sufficiency despite a welfare system that often appears to have other goals.

The American labor market is also beyond the control of ORR. The Highland Lao refugee population is afflicted with many disadvantages in the American labor market. They have found it more difficult to secure jobs than other Americans because of their newness to American language and culture. During times of high unemployment, such as in 1983, employers had large numbers of job applicants, and the Highland Lao had difficulty competing.

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Two aspects of the labor market were significant during the period of the evaluation: on one hand, the HLI sites had generally higher rates of unemployment than the nation as a whole; but on the other, the national employment picture brightened considerably between March of 1983, when HLI was first discussed, and June, 1984, when the HLI projects were, on average, halfway through their funding period.

The third system in which ORR operates is one in which it has some influence: the overall U.S. refugee resettlement program. This complex, decentralized set of systems began its evolution

⁵ The other two major assistance programs apparently do not encourage secondary migration nor are they as likely to discourage work; these are Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Food Stamps. One must have a low income *and* be over 65, blind or disabled in order to collect SSI; few refugees qualify, and it is unlikely that there is any real possibility of their working for wages. Food Stamps has a benefit formula that is designed to ease the state-by-state variations in the AFDC programs. The more generous the AFDC formula, the smaller the Food Stamp check, and vice versa. Food Stamps, further, provide partial benefits for those working, and create less of a disincentive to employment than some aspects of the AFDC programs, such as the relatively new 100-hour rule. The latter says that if the head of the household worked more than 100 hours in a month, no matter how low the pay, AFDC benefits end. It would be possible for a worker to make the minimum wage, \$3.35 an hour, for 100 hours and secure gross earnings of \$335 for the month and, because of these earnings, lose \$600-\$800 a month in AFDC benefits for a large family and lose medicaid as well. This rule obliterates the incentives for low-wage work in situations where benefit levels are high and families are large, such as among the Hmong in Wisconsin and California. The 100-hour rule is not a problem where benefit levels are so low that any job, even for only 100 hours, produces more income than AFDC does.

long before ORR came into being. There are three types of organizations in the overall U.S. refugee resettlement system:

- 5 the volags,
- 6 units of state and local governments, and
- 7 the Mutual Assistance Agencies (MAAs).

p. 18 The volags are funded largely by the U.S. State Department, through its reception and placement program, to provide services to newly-arrived refugees. They are private, non-profit organizations and are often decentralized themselves. They are largely New York-based and Atlantic-facing. They guard their independence fiercely as they work increasingly with refugees from the Pacific and the Carribean.⁶

Then there are units of state and local government that administer refugee programs. These are largely funded by ORR. The programs include the provision of cash, medical assistance and social services to refugees. These programs, particularly the services, are generally administered through a state refugee coordinator, often a middle-level official in the state welfare department.⁷

p. 19 The medical and cash assistance programs are usually run through the mainline welfare system. The social service⁸ funds are generally contracted out to a variety of service providers. The contractors usually fall into three categories: units of local government, private service providers who are often local affiliates of the national volags, and in recent years, MAAs.

The emerging element in the refugee field consists of the MAAs which are locally-focused organizations, usually growing out of a single ethnic group, seeking to help members of the group to adjust to American life. They are usually led and staffed by bi-lingual members of the ethnic community. The MAAs have only recently begun to be funded to provide services. Some state coordinators and traditional social service organizations have resisted the notion of an expanded role for the MAAs because of the diminishing flows of refugees, and a consequently diminishing flow of refugee social service funds. Despite this situation, the HLI was initiated on the premise that more Highland Lao MAAs should be funded to work with

p. 20 their refugees. It was felt within ORR that providing empowerment to the Highland Lao communities through MAA grants would enhance community stability and provide needed services in a cost-efficient manner.

⁶ For more on the volags, see D.S. North, L.S. Lewin, J.R. Wagner, *Kaleidoscope: The Resettlement of Refugees in the U.S. by the Voluntary Agencies*. New TransCentury Foundation Washington, D.C., 1982.

⁷ Although the Food Stamp program serves many refugees, and SSI a few of them, these are not refugee-specific programs and refugees are simply treated like other American applicants. Thus, the refugee coordinator plays no direct role in either of these programs.

⁸ The term "social service funds," as used here, covers all ORR expenditures in the states for social service programs though they may bear internal ORR distinctions such as Enhanced Skills Training Program, MAA Incentive Program, State-Administered Refugee Services Program, Targeted Assistance Program, etc.

The characteristics and the distribution of the Highland Lao refugees, as well as the nature of the U.S. welfare and refugee resettlement systems, and the depressed state of the U.S. labor market in early 1983 having been reviewed, we now consider the following questions: What happened when that population and those systems interacted with each other? Was the total situation as grim as one might predict from looking at the component parts?

These were among the questions explored by the ORR in a process described in the next chapter.

THE HIGHLAND LAO INITIATIVE

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The origins and the goals of the Highland Lao Initiative are discussed in this chapter. This is followed by a description of the services offered, the nature of the grant-receiving agencies, the participation (or non-participation) of the Highland Lao refugee communities in the decision-making process, and the start-up processes experienced in grant implementation.

A. Origins and Goals of the HLI.

Although the special problems faced by the Highland Lao refugees had been known generally for some time, they came into sharp focus in the early months of 1983. At that time, it became clear that there was a strong movement of Hmong and other Highland Lao refugees from elsewhere in the nation to the Central Valley of California; that the resettlement resources in the Central Valley were overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of the new arrivals; and that the movement reflected an attempt on the part of the migrating refugees to escape from serious problems of poverty. Within this setting, two events occurred which stimulated the Office of Refugee Resettlement into what became the Highland Lao Initiative. One event took place in Washington, and the other in some of the cities where the Hmong had settled.

In February, 1983, ORR funded the first government-sponsored meeting of the nation's Highland Lao leaders. They met in Washington, DC, with Phillip Hawkes, Director of ORR, James Purcell, Director of the State Department's Bureau of Refugee Programs, and Ambassador Eugene Douglas, the Refugee Coordinator. The Indochinese Refugee Action Committee (IRAC) handled the arrangements. At this meeting, the refugee leaders spoke of the problems of their people. They expressed their concerns about the lack of employment, about the need for additional services and about their own desire to play a larger role in the delivery of services to their people. They were particularly concerned about secondary migration; on a national level, they worried about the movement to states with high welfare-benefit levels; and on the local level, they realized that continuing out-migration could weaken, and eventually destroy a refugee community's ability to function effectively.

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Meanwhile, field work was being conducted in a number of Hmong communities as part of the previously mentioned ORR-funded study of Hmong resettlement in the United States. The research team reported informally to ORR that there were many small Hmong communities struggling towards self-sufficiency with little or no help from any source.

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Stimulated by these inputs, ORR, on April 12, 1983, created the Hmong Workgroup (later the Highland Lao Workgroup) to conduct an informal but widespread information collection effort in order to assess the extent and depth of these problems. Within a few weeks, ORR's Central and Regional Office staff, and state refugee coordinators had assembled demographic information on 57 Highland Lao communities outside California.

The picture was not an attractive one. In many locations, very high levels of unemployment (some nearing 100%) were reported. Welfare utilization was proportionately high. Often, the refugee-serving agencies were not addressing the problems of the Highland Lao since many of them lacked staff members with the needed linguistic skills, and many of the Highlanders spoke little or no English.

The Highland Lao Workgroup examined the specifics of resettlement in 57 communities. It determined that some locations, such as Spartanburg, South Carolina, and Dallas-Fort Worth, were in fairly good shape and did not need additional federal attention. It also determined that in several locations, the economic conditions in the Highland Lao communities made life untenable, and the best approach would be for the refugees to relocate elsewhere. In the remaining 44 locations, it decided that ORR should take steps to assist the communities toward stabilization.

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With this information in hand, ORR was faced with four policy issues:

1. Could ORR support, as it had never done in the past, an effort to provide special services to a single group of refugees?
2. If so, what kinds of activities should ORR fund? (The Highland Lao communities had suggested a wide-range of programs that they would like to see supported.)
3. What level of funding would be appropriate?
4. What institutional framework should be used to fund the programs?

The Workgroup's information indicated clearly that the then current system was not adequately serving the Highland Lao refugees, and therefore, a special approach was appropriate and necessary. Based on discussions with Highland Lao community leaders and state refugee coordinators, and on assessments made by both Regional and Central Office ORR staff, a decision was made to provide special funding for Highland Lao-focused job placement, OJT and vocational training programs, outreach, English as a second language (ESL), crafts and farm/garden programs as appropriate to the needs in local situations.

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Within this framework, the Workgroup reviewed the information available on each of 44 communities, the requests made by the refugee leadership, and the recommendations of the state coordinators and ORR Regional and Central staff. On this basis, ORR constructed individualized service prescriptions for each of the communities, and suggested funding levels related to the estimated costs of the prescribed services, the level of community need, and the size of the population to be served. In order to encourage the Highland Lao communities to work through normal governmental channels, ORR utilized its traditional network of state agencies to implement the HLI but urged the states to consider funding MAAs. Only a few states

had previously funded MAAs. ORR staff felt that funding MAAs would be helpful for three reasons: first, these organizations would be able to offer knowing and costeffective assistance to the Highland Lao; secondly, operating their own, small-scale refugee placement and service programs would give members of the community a useful learning experience; and thirdly, it would give the Highland Lao organizations some empowerment in the broader community.

When the process of analysis and planning was completed, the Workgroup on May 31, 1983 had a list of projects by location for which funding was recommended, a funding level for each project, and a list of services to be provided. The Workgroup's decision memo to ORR Director, Phillip Hawkes, recommended that \$2,778,000 be allocated for local programs.

The Director agreed to the recommendations and the HLI, the first program within ORR to focus on the needs of a particular ethnic group, was underway. Unlike other programs in ORR, HLI was neither a formula nor a competitive program. (The nature of the mass migration to the Central Valley constituted a crisis/emergency which resulted in the Department waiving the usual competitive grant requirements.) p. 26

Following the Director's sign-off in early June, letters went to the state refugee coordinators telling them that ORR stood ready to receive proposals from the states to perform the needed work at the selected sites. The letter suggested that other channels might be explored in the event that the states did not apply for the money.

Twenty-two states applied for grants, seeking money for 43 specific contracting agencies; four other organizations received direct grants from ORR (two in Ohio, and one each in Arkansas and Pennsylvania). By September 30, the last day of the fiscal year, grant awards were made, and the stage was set for the implementation phase of the HLI program. The 47 funded programs are listed in Exhibit 4.

B. Services Provided.

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The HLI projects were funded to perform a variety of services. For the sake of analysis, the services have been placed in eight categories:

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- 8 outreach (*i.e.*, interpretation, transportation and advocacy services for individual refugees)
- 9 job placement
- 10 on-the-job training (OJT)
- 11 vocational training
- 12 craft development
- 13 English as a Second Language (ESL)
- 14 farm and garden; and
- 15 other (business development and day-care)

Exhibit 5 shows the service mix provided by the 32 programs evaluated. The most widespread service offered was job placement (18 instances) which was in keeping with ORR's stress on self-sufficiency. Next, was outreach (17), a program highly regarded within most Highland Lao

refugee communities. (Outreach consists of a range of services designed to ease the individual refugee's encounters with the host community; interpreting, counseling, completion of forms, taking sick refugees to the hospital, intervening with the landlord and the like.) Eleven of the projects provided ESL, with the

- p. 29 programs usually specially designed for Highland Lao refugees. Nine of the projects had farm/garden programs, while seven had craft-related activities. Seven programs had OJT
- p. 30 components and only six provided vocational training (while many others referred refugees to such programs). In five cases, the projects provided other services including small business development and day-care for the children of ESL students.

With one exception, the services provided meshed well with what the Highland Lao communities wanted. The exception was vocational training. In at least 13 sites, the community indicated a strong desire for vocational training during the project design phase. Refugees wanted such training so that they could secure something other than low-paid, entry-level jobs. In only six of the 13 locations, however, was vocational training actually funded by the HLI, and in three of these the amount of vocational training secured was minimal. Only the Toledo project focused solely on vocational training. The seven locations in which there was a thwarted interest in HLI-funded vocational training were: Fitchburg, Memphis, Akron, Milwaukee, Des Moines, Kansas City and Seattle.⁹

- p. 31 Exhibit 5 indicates that a total of 80 services were provided by the 32 studied projects. Ten offered a single service, 12 offered two to three, and nine offered four or more. Fitchburg had none. The largest mix of services was the six offered by the ambitious Marion-Morgantown program in North Carolina.

The outcomes of the provisions of these services are described in Chapter 3.

C. The HLI Program Operators.

There were 32 HLI-funded projects among the programs evaluated. Twenty-nine awards were made through the states to subgrantees and three were direct grants from ORR. Direct grants were awarded to the Hmong United Association of Greater Philadelphia and the Laotian Assistance Organization (of Akron, Ohio), both never-previously-funded MAAs. The third was to a Lutheran church near Akron which agreed to accept ORR funds to run a farm project which was of interest to the Akron Hmong and several American volunteer church members. A fourth project which was funded directly, the Fort Smith, Arkansas MAA, was not among those evaluated because the project was in an inactive status at the time of the evaluation.

⁹ ORR-funded vocational training is available in Milwaukee and in other Wisconsin locations through the Technical Institutes which apparently made a substantial effort to reach out to the Highland Lao communities. There are, however, entrance requirements to these programs which make access difficult for those with limited English; it may be this factor which caused the Milwaukee community to request HLI-funded skills training.

Fifteen of the HLI-funded projects were MAAs and 17 were service providers. Of the MAAs, five were newly-funded and ten had been funded previously.

Of the service providers, 13 were private and four were government agencies. Ten of the 13 were local affiliates of national volags. The four governmental units included school systems in Syracuse, New York and Toledo, Ohio; the County Board of Commissioners in Selma, Alabama, and the State of Iowa. Characteristics of the grantees and subgrantees are shown in Exhibit 6.

p. 32

A review of Exhibits 6 and 7 shows that most of the refugee communities were able to identify with the programs operated by the MAAs and with several run by service providers,¹⁰ while the seven projects with communications problems were non-Highland Lao service providers.

Most of the volag affiliates and many of the previously-funded MAAs were familiar with the social service networks and knew how to access hospitals, food stamps and other helping programs for their clients. The newly-funded MAAs, however, appeared to have relatively little contact with such networks, and in fact, four of the five newly-funded MAAs were housed in physical locations which were isolated from other social service organizations, while some of the older MAAs (such as those in Chicago and Sheboygan) were in the same building with other social service organizations.

The grants made to the 32 studied HLI projects were modest. The program operators received from a low of \$18,000 in Kankakee, Illinois, to a high of \$193,600 in Portland, Oregon, with most of the grants falling into the \$20,000—\$100,000 range.

p. 33

p. 34

The size of the grants was related to several factors: the program objectives of the project; the size of the Highland Lao population in the area, and the presence or absence of other funds for the refugee population. Generally, when the population was large enough, other programs were available. Grants tended to be larger, per capita, in locations where the Highland Lao populations were small. On a per capita basis, the grants ranged from \$49 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to \$778 in Montgomery,¹¹ Alabama, with most being in the \$50 to \$150 range.

p. 35

The per capita estimates are for the budgets of the project year, and are based on the entire Highland Lao population in those communities, not just those Highland Lao refugees who received services.

D. The Role of the Highland Lao Communities in Designing the HLI Projects.

ORR had decided, as noted earlier, to provide special programs for the refugees, and to seek to do so

p. 36

¹⁰ Such as the school systems of Syracuse and Toledo, and the volag affiliates in Memphis and Montgomery.

¹¹ Less than half of the Montgomery allocation was spent during the project year.

through maximum feasible participation of the refugee communities and the MAAs. ORR had also decided that it would be appropriate, wherever possible, to make the grants through the previously described state mechanism. How did that process work?

In some locations, the state coordinator, local service agency and Highland Lao community worked well together, as in Syracuse, New York. In other locations, the subgrantee-to-be was a previously funded MAA and the refugee community played a major role in the design of the project, as in Omaha, Nebraska. In other locations, the grants were awarded directly to service providers with the knowledge and consent of the state coordinators, as in Akron, Ohio; Fort Smith, Arkansas; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In these three locations, the refugee communities worked directly with ORR staff on program design.

These then were the settings in which the Highland Lao communities played major roles in the design of the HLI projects, and subsequently had a sense of identification with the programs. The evaluation team perceived that in a large majority of the cases (19 out of 32), the Highland Lao communities identified with the HLI projects from the start. (See Exhibit 7.) In another four, those studied in Illinois, the perception was that while some inter-organizational relations were turbulent in the beginning, by the end of the HLI project, the refugee communities identified with the programs.

- p. 37 In two other instances, the team was not able to perceive a clear picture of how thoroughly the refugees had participated in the project planning. Also, there was a group of seven projects which were designed, and often operated, with little refugee community input. Among these were Fitchburg, Massachusetts and Tulsa, Oklahoma, where reluctant state coordinators were unable, after a year of effort, to work out agreements with the Highland Lao communities.¹² In the other five locations, a series of complications marred the implementation of the HLI grant, and in some cases, blunted the effectiveness of the program.

In Iowa, the ORR support of MAAs and its emphasis on the needs of the Highland Lao refugees ran counter to the posture of the state government which is, itself, virtually the only refugee-serving organization in the state. Iowa assumed the same role as other state governments regarding cash and medical assistance for refugees, but also ran a reception-and-placement program for newly arrived refugees with U.S. State Department funds, and was the sole service provider, providing services directly through Iowa State Government employees. Iowa did not plan the HLI with input from the Highland Lao community, nor was there significant evidence that services to these refugees were expanded or enhanced through the state's use of HLI funding.

- p. 38 In Kansas City, divisions within the Hmong community resulted in minimal refugee participation in project planning. On the other hand, in three other situations (the two Michigan locations and the International Institute in Akron), the service providers (as well as the Michigan State Coordinator's Office) had difficulty interacting with the local Highland Lao communities.

¹² In Tulsa, however, some funds were spent on OJT contracts for Highland Lao refugees.

Complicating these relationships were a series of communications problems. Some of the refugee leaders, particularly those in never-previously-funded MAAs, had the impression that the HLI moneys were to be turned over to the refugee communities directly. They were upset to learn later that most of the funds were to be channeled through the states. Other communication problems occurred in Michigan in which ORR regional staff consulted with refugee community leaders more extensively than with state staff, or the service providers.

While in most of these seven locations the refugee communities could not identify well with the HLI programs, there were some helpful by-products. Both of the Michigan service providers and the International Institute (II) in Akron appeared to have developed better communication with and understanding of the Highland Lao refugees at the end of the program.

These seven locations constituted less than 25 percent of the programs that were evaluated. In about 75 percent of the locations, Highland Lao refugee leaders were consulted in the development of the HLI funded programs and made major contributions to program design. This was particularly true with the Lu Mien, Lao Theung and Lao Lue populations of Seattle who, because of their small populations and educational handicaps of their leaders, had been virtually excluded earlier from participation in program planning and development. As “minorities within a minority,” the three smallest Highland ethnic groups were particularly pleased that for the first time members of their groups were involved in program design and subsequently hired by the HLI grantee to perform placement functions. p. 39

E. Program Implementation.

All of the HLI grants were made as of September 30, 1983. However, some of the projects did not get underway until many months later.

Exhibit 8 shows that twelve of the projects began activities within three months of the grant letters: twelve started up in the fourth through sixth months of the fiscal year; and the other six became operational after April, 1984. In Tulsa and Fitchburg, where there had been poor communications, the projects had not been implemented when fiscal year 1984 ended. Poor communications also delayed the start-up of the program of the Akron International Institute (II) project.

Many of the institutional factors that caused delay in start-ups were benign or neutral in nature. For example, the state of Wisconsin had previously secured funding through the end of calendar 1983 for four MAAs. Thus, the January 1 start-up date there, simply marked the day that one set of ORR funds expired and a new set (from HLI) began. In Illinois, it took some time to establish a working relationship between the statewide Hmong MAA and each of the seven HLI projects, four of which were evaluated. p. 40 p. 41

The two direct grants in Akron and the one in Philadelphia started up quickly due probably to the absence of interfacing bureaucracies. On the other hand, it took longer to start two of the three projects funded through the counties. The Toledo project was delayed until February, and the Akron II program until April, 1984.

A review of Exhibit 8 shows that there was little difference, overall, in the speed with which MAAs or service providers began their programs. Of the 12 quick-starting agencies, six were MAAs; of the 12 in the middle category, six were MAAs; and of the slowest six, two were MAAs.

Some delays were caused by the handling of the terms and conditions stipulated by ORR. In many places, the HLI-funded agencies either met the ORR terms and conditions quickly, or started up as they moved through that process. In others,

p. 42 however, a cautious state coordinator would not let projects get underway until the process was concluded. This was the case in the Michigan sites: Detroit and Lansing.

Generally, the delays in implementation did not harm the Highland Lao communities; the services provided were needed and used at the time they became available. An exception was Tulsa, where the lack of timely implementation of the HLI project apparently resulted in increased migration away from that city.

p. 43 **OUTCOMES**

This chapter describes the outcomes of the economic, educational and community services provided by the HLI programs and then seeks to identify some of the consequences of those outcomes. The latter subjects include the apparent changes in welfare utilization patterns, in community stability, in secondary migration and in institutional structures.

A. Economic Services.

Economic services included the following: job placement activities, on-the-job training (OJT) and vocational training; craft promotion programs (largely for women); farm and garden projects (mostly for the older members of the communities, and the children); and a few attempts at small business promotion.

1. Employment Services.

Of the 32 studied projects, 22 offered one or more employment services. The combinations of those services offered, with HLI funds, were as follows:

p. 44 ***Job Placement Services.***

Before describing the job placement programs, a note of caution is appropriate. Getting jobs for refugees was clearly one of the most important, if not *the* most important, aspect of the HLI programs. A great deal of time and energy in telephone calls and site visits were spent examining this subject. Placement records were excellent in some locations, passable in others and hard to interpret in a few. Therefore, some of the data presented below reflects the evaluation team's estimates based on partial records systems such as incomplete follow-up

files.¹³ The authors feel that they had a good grasp of what happened in the placement field, but regard the findings as only roughly correct. The discussion that follows is based on the records examined in 14 of the 18 sites where job placement services were offered; at the other four locations data were too incomplete to analyze.

Most of the employment services provided by the HLI projects were direct, or "cold-start" placements. In these actions, workers were successfully sent to employers for jobs without prior related vocational training, and without the subsidy which accompanies an OJT placement. A placement, in the best of worlds, is defined as one that has passed the 90-day job-tenure test.

In the 14 projects with adequate records, 286 people received continuing, full- or part-time jobs as a result of direct placement services funded by HLI. (See Exhibit 9.) In most, but not all, of these cases, the authors know that the placements met the 90-day test. These totals do not include persons placed in temporary jobs, although a significant number of such placements were made. p. 45

Most of the placements were of workers who were unemployed; many had been on welfare. When people with existing jobs were put in higher-paid or otherwise better jobs, they were called, "upgrades."

Most of the jobs in which the refugees were placed were at the entry-level. Although detailed occupational data were not collected for all the direct placements, most of them were blue-collar jobs in factories or in the service industries; the jobs tended to be in non-union shops even in strong union cities such as Detroit, Michigan and Chicago, Illinois. The jobs tended to be physically demanding and repetitious, and did not require a mastery of English (there were few sales jobs in retailing, for example). Although the jobs were usually in the lower part of the wage spectrum, they usually were *not* at the minimum wage (of \$3.35 an hour). The range of the average hourly wages in the studied sites was from \$3.42 to \$6.40 an hour, with the median of these averages being \$3.75.

16 *Hartford*: Col. 2: Ten full-time placements, four part-time; Col. 5: assumes \$3.35/hr. and 1,000 hours for three of the part-time workers. p. 46

17 *Marion-Morgantown*: Col. 2: 26 full-time placements, four part-time; Col. 3: assumes 50% of job developer's time for 11 months. p. 47

18 *Memphis*: Col. 3: assumes six months of one full-time job developer's time.

19 *Akron*: Col. 3: assumes 50% of project director's time for 11 months; Col. 5: assumes 50% retention rate and \$3.35/hr.

20 *Detroit*: Col. 3: assumes 70% of job developer/outreach worker's time.

21 *Dixon*: Col. 2: three full-time placements, one part-time; Col. 3: assumes two part-time job developers for 7.5 months; Col. 5: assumes one part-time job of 1,000 hrs./yr. at \$4.35/hr. and three full-time jobs at \$4.56/hr.

¹³ Further, given the timing of some of the field work, when many of the placements were quite recent, it was not possible to secure 90-day confirmations of job retention.

- 22 *Kankakee*: Col. 2: 15 part-time job placements are not included because both wage and job duration data are lacking; Col. 3: assumes six months of one full-time job developer's time; Col. 5: assumes \$3.50/hr. for five of the full-time job placements.
- 23 *Lansing*: Col. 3: assumes 17% of seven months of project director's time and 38% of eight months of the outreach worker's time.
- 24 *Wheaton*: Col. 3: assumes six months of job developer's time.
- 25 *Des Moines*: Col. 3: assumes 32% of 2 1/2 staff members' time; Col. 5: includes nine full-time and one permanent job placement. There were also a few very temporary job placements which are not included here.
- 26 *Kansas City*: Col. 2: There were up to 90 full-time, part-time and temporary job placements initially, but only 22 survived a 90-day retention test; Col. 3: assumes six months of one full-time job developer's time.
- 27 *Salt Lake City*: Col. 2: assumes that five men placed in custodial jobs remained employed, eight youth summer jobs are not included.
- 28 *Seattle*: Col. 3: assumes four full-time job developers for eight months; Col. 5: there were 75 job placements initially, but only 50 survived a 30-day retention test.

p. 48 If the assumptions spelled out in the notes to Exhibit 9 are correct, the 286 placed workers earned \$2,253,242 in the 12 months following placement. This gross income estimate may be compared with the estimated HLI investment in direct placement in the 14 sites of \$185,051. Thus, each HLI dollar produced a return for the following year of \$12.18. Although these dollar figures, and those used in Exhibit 9, may appear to be precise numbers, the reader is cautioned that many of these numbers (particularly cost data) are partial estimates and the benefits data are based on fairly sweeping assumptions (spelled out in the footnotes to Exhibit 9). Nevertheless, the exhibit is useful on an order-of-magnitude basis, showing that all programs produced more in benefits (as they have been defined here) than they experienced in costs, and that some programs were considerably more productive than others.

Regarding differential levels of achievement, the number of refugees placed in a given location ranged from two in Memphis to 53 in Detroit. Further, using the cost-benefit measure, the return for a single HLI dollar invested in direct placement varied from \$2.60 in Dixon to \$48.68 in Detroit.

Why such wide variations in both of these measures?

The first and most obvious answer is the size of the pool of the unemployed. Small populations of refugees, all else being equal, have fewer unemployed than larger populations.

p. 49 In some communities (particularly in the South), virtually all the employable persons already had jobs when the HLI funds arrived.

Another variable was the availability of jobs with health benefits. Where health benefits were available, placement rates were higher. Refugees think twice before leaving welfare-and-Medicaid for jobs without medical benefits. (Welfare benefit levels are another factor discussed elsewhere in another connection.)

A third, and extremely important variable was the ability and motivation level of the job developer. In most studied sites, the developer was a single person whose performance made a large difference. These job developers, incidentally, were usually paid in the \$12,000—\$15,000-a-year range, approximately the pay of a GS-04 clerk in the federal system.

Some factors which had been hypothesized as significant turned out to be of little importance. While rising employment in the nation and in the studied sites, was clearly helpful to the refugees and others, the level of unemployment in a specific location did not seem to affect the number of refugee placements or the cost-benefit ratios. The authors speculated that perhaps American job developers — with their American employer contacts — would do better than Highland Lao job developers, but the opposite proved to be the case:

in five of the six projects with the best cost-benefit ratios, the job developers were Highland Lao p. 50 refugees. It may be that a Highland Lao job developer can be more persuasive in convincing a refugee to accept a particular job, and sometimes in medium-to-high-welfare-benefit-level states, such persuasion is needed.

Two placement strategies developed by the HLI-funded agencies are worthy of comment. Many job developers established or exploited previously-established relationships with employers whose operations were such that knowledge of English was not essential. These were typically labor-intensive assembly or manufacturing operations where a single bi-lingual refugee could translate for the rest of the working refugees. Examples included a salad-making plant in Atlanta, a typewriter-ribbon factory in Connecticut and an electronics firm in Denver. The advantage of this approach was that once the employer found that the refugees were good workers, he would hire more. Given the nature of the jobs, there was substantial turnover providing numerous opportunities for refugees. Further, the refugees placed in the jobs had other refugees to socialize with, and they were not isolated in the workplace. There was a potential disadvantage to the community, however, should such a business collapse or suffer a downturn. A large number of refugees could lose their jobs at the same time, as occurred in Denver in early 1985.

Another strategy, potentially useful in many places, was found in Omaha. This was the use of p. 51 the Targeted Job Assistance tax break as a device to encourage the employment of refugees qualifying for that benefit. This arrangement is complex enough, however, so that *both* job developer and employer must be sophisticated enough to complete the arrangements.¹⁴

b. OJT Programs.

HLI projects made limited use of the On-the-Job-Training concept. Seven of the studied projects used this technique. It appears that 71 Highland Lao workers got their jobs through OJT, compared to 286 in the 14 studied direct placement programs.

¹⁴ The tax break is considerable, but it applies only to for-profit employers paying substantial federal corporate income taxes who hire specific kinds of workers identified as eligibles *before* hiring. Refugees in the 18—24 age group, or in AFDC families, are among those eligible for the program.

While the OJT approach was attractive to some employers because of the wage subsidy there were also substantial draw-backs. The employer is required to enter into a formal contract with a government-funded agency, such as one of the HLI providers; the employer must agree to a number of stipulations and submit government-specified billings to the sponsoring agency. We were told at one site that the employers must keep their books open to the government for the ten years following the contract. OJT was thus more burdensome to the sponsoring agency than a direct placement.

p. 52 The name of the program was also somewhat misleading, as many Highland Lao observers told the evaluation team. There was precious little training. The employer simply accepted a subsidy in return for hiring a hard-to-place worker.

Three general observations can be made about the use of OJT by the HLI-funded projects: (1) wage levels for OJT-placed workers were about the same as those for direct placements; (2) the cost-benefit ratios for OJT were considerably less attractive than in direct placements; and (3) OJT was used often to secure placements for the more disadvantaged workers in the refugee community.

Regarding wage levels, it was found that the average hourly wages for direct and OJT placements in the seven OJT and the 14 direct placement sites were as follows:

Given the small number of observations, and the fact that one category had twice as many sites as the other, about all one can say is that there does not appear to be a meaningful difference in the wage levels.

The contrast in costs is obvious because in addition to the staff time spent on placement, the HLI-funded agency paid the employer a portion of the placed worker's wages, usually

p. 53 for a number of months. The subsidy was usually half the placed worker's wages. But we found in one case that all the workers' wages were covered for a month.

The mean cost-benefit ratio for the direct placements, as noted in Exhibit 9 was 1:12.18. Thus for every dollar spent on that program, the newly-placed worker earned \$12.18 over the following 12 months. In contrast, the mean cost-benefit ratio for OJT programs (shown in Exhibit 10) was 1:5.17.

In addition to the cross-site comparisons outlined above, a comparison was made between the two placement programs in Seattle. The following data were gathered from program files in that city:

p. 54 In this location, the dollars-and-cents program results were more than twice as high in the direct placement program than in OJT. But the individual workers in the OJT program were about
p. 55 ten percent more likely to hold onto their jobs and to be paid about ten percent more than those in the direct placement program.

The financial returns for the OJT program were more significant when OJT dealt with totally unemployed workers than when it was used as an upgrading tool. The experience of the Memphis and Lansing programs, as shown in Exhibit 10, illustrates this situation. The net return ratio in Memphis, for example, was 31 cents for each dollar invested. This was the case because the two OJT placements in that city (a jewelry worker and a dental lab technician) increased their wages by 50 cents and 25 cents an hour respectively when they went into the OJT program. In the case of the dental lab worker, the government invested \$1,800 in wage subsidies so that the worker could earn an additional \$520 a year.

In Lansing, on the other hand, OJT slots were assigned to three people who had been working part-time. The OJT assignment not only increased their hourly wages from an estimated \$3.35 to \$3.87 per hour, but also increased the number of hours they worked each week. The net cost-benefit ratio in Lansing was calculated at \$2.79 for each dollar invested. Had the workers in Lansing been totally unemployed, the ratio

would have been still higher. Unfortunately, it was not possible in some locations to secure before-and-after wage data on OJT trainees. Similarly, data were generally not available on the relative levels of advantages and disadvantages of OJT and direct placement workers in the job market. The impression was, however, that OJT was often used to secure jobs for older, less skilled, or otherwise less attractive would-be workers than those placed directly. It would make sense, one could argue, to spend more for such placements.

p. 56

OJT, in summary, was a tool used in less than a quarter of the studied programs, and used extensively only in Seattle. Of the workers placed by the studied Highland Lao programs, about 15 percent were assisted by OJT. It would be difficult to argue that the HLI agencies were at fault for not using the program more widely.

c. Vocational Training.

Of the three employment strategies, vocational training was the least utilized. HLI projects in Portland, Toledo and Omaha invested heavily in vocational training. Marion-Morgantown, Eau Claire and Decatur did so to a lesser extent.

The Portland program was the largest, most varied, and most expensive, costing \$126,650. It sought to teach seven skills: light factory work, janitorial work, building maintenance, power sewing, landscaping, horticulture and nursery

work. A total of 186 refugees signed up for the classes, and 112 were placed in jobs, most of them apparently in jobs related to the training. The two most successful classes were in power sewing (41 placements) and janitorial work (43 placements).

p. 57

The thrust of the Portland programs was to make the training as close to the actual work experience as possible. Four to six hours of vocational training, five days a week, were followed by two hours of vocational ESL. The vocational training was in English though sometimes translations were made by a bi-lingual aide or a member of the class.

One unexpected by-product of the Portland program came from the delayed response by a number of employers contacted by the program. Several replied that they had no jobs at the moment, but would call when they did. Some responded with job offers months after the initial telephone calls by the HLI provider.

Vocational training constituted the entire program in Toledo, where three skills were taught: power sewing for women, and welding and auto mechanics for the men. The program, unlike the one in Portland, was designed in detail by the community leadership. The grantee, the Toledo Public Schools, was selected by the leadership as were the subjects of instruction. The Toledo program was unique in that all the classes were taught in English, and all were translated into

p. 58 Hmong by a bi-lingual worker hired with HLI funds. The total cost of the program was budgeted at \$52,000 with HLI providing \$40,000 of the money, and \$12,000 coming from another ORR source. The opening enrollment was 44, (17 in sewing, 13 in welding and 14 in auto mechanics). About a dozen of the students were ethnic Lao; and the interpreter spoke that language as well.

The Toledo training programs were long term, covering 12 hours of instruction per week over 40 weeks for a total of 480 hours. (In contrast, a typical high school course is an hour a day or 180 hours a year.) Retention was good, with 33 of the 44 students finishing the course, and with several of the dropouts leaving to take jobs. The interpreter also provided placement services to the students. Only 14¹⁵ of the 44 trainees secured lasting jobs, however; and only six of the jobs were in fields related to the training (two welders and four sewers). The auto mechanics course turned out to be a mistake because to work at this trade one must not only know how to fix the car, but also how to talk in English to the car's owner about the car's problems. In contrast, knowledge of English is considerably less important in welding and power sewing. Another problem, affecting the women among the students, was that there is only one clothing manufacturer in

p. 59 Toledo. It is The Common Thread, a newly-established organization which is seeking to introduce pa ndau, the traditional Hmong needlework, into high fashion.

Despite these problems, it should be noted that all 14 of those who secured post-training jobs had been on welfare before the HLI-funded program, and all 14 came off the rolls as a result of the jobs.

The program in Omaha, like the one in Toledo, was designed by the Highland Lao community and had interesting, innovative features. The premise was that retailing, particularly food retailing, was a significant field and that the refugees should become skilled in it. Unlike Toledo, however, where the unemployment rate was 15.1% in March, 1983, it was 4.8% in Omaha, making skills training less significant there.

The Hmong MAA, being the only ORR-funded service provider in Omaha, did not need HLI funds to set up outreach, placement or ESL activities, these were in place. Therefore, the Omaha MAA

¹⁵ All Hmong, incidentally.

decided to seek to encourage the creation of a refugee store. About \$40,000 was set aside for the operation of the Hmong store and a training program that covered retail store operations and some other instruction in U.S. business and consumer practices. The training program was more successful than the store, which sold some \$10,000 worth of goods and then went out of business. (The funds for the stock were advanced by members of the community.) The training program

had 52 enrollees, including some Afghans and Vietnamese, and 25 graduates, mostly Hmong. Eight of the students of this evening course were upgraded into better jobs than the ones held previously. p. 60

In Marion-Morgantown, at the time of the site visit, nine women were in the middle of a six-months course of five hours a week in power sewing. In Eau Claire, a dozen Hmong men were taught to drive tractors in a month-long course. At least one of them subsequently secured a job on a tractor. In Decatur, ten Hmong studied electronics assembly which led to jobs for three of them. Two women were enrolled in a beautician's course at the time of our inquiry.

Cost data were available in Portland, Toledo and Decatur; and are shown in Exhibit 11. Unit costs of both training completion and subsequent job placements varied substantially from site to site, but on average, job placements cost \$1,398 each. (This figure was secured by dividing the entire cost of the vocational training program by the number of job placements; thus, for these purposes, attributing no value to completed training that did not lead to employment.)

When similar calculations are made of direct placement and OJT, we find the following: p. 61

Thus, OJT and vocational training both cost more than twice as much as direct placement in dollars per job placement, with vocational training being somewhat less expensive than OJT. Further, those who were placed in jobs following vocational training had a substantial amount of classroom training in a work-related subject, something that those in the OJT program lacked. p. 62

d. Returns to the Government.

Unit costs for job placements are shown above, but were the investments sound? It is clearly a good idea to spend \$607 to secure a job for an unemployed person, but is a program like Toledo's cost effective? Does it make sense for the government to spend as much as \$3,714 on a single placement as it did in Toledo?

Fortunately, in two locations, the authors found detailed economic data to help answer these questions. In Toledo's vocational training program, and Chicago's direct placement

program, data were available on post-placement income, and pre- and post-placement welfare status. With this information supplemented by some careful estimates, it was possible to measure the financial consequences to the government, as well as the families, of their post-placement increase in incomes. p. 63

As Exhibit 12 shows, the government did remarkably well on the investments in Toledo and Chicago. The Toledo program cost \$52,000 but caused a return to the government of an estimated \$98,398 in non-utilized welfare benefits and increased federal taxes from employed refugees during the first 12 months after job placements. Similarly in Chicago, the direct placement program cost \$44,000 in HLI funds and produced an estimated \$94,438 in non-utilized benefits and increased federal taxes in the 12 months after placement. Thus the government, in the first year after the placements, received from Toledo and Chicago \$192,836 from an investment of \$96,000.

These two-for-one returns within 12 months came from two moderately successful — not brilliantly successful — HLI programs. Several other programs cost less per placement, made more placements, and exceeded the goals of the program operators. In Chicago, only 21 continuing placements were recorded against a goal of 60; in Toledo, less than a third of those enrolling in the classes secured continuing jobs. Yet,

p. 64 the costs of these programs were low enough, and the payoff high enough that even programs that failed to meet their goals were cost-effective.

p. 65 Worthy of note, too, is the distribution of the gross income of the refugee families. More than two-thirds of the money earned by the Toledo families either replaced welfare benefits or was paid in taxes. In Toledo, all families were on welfare before the placements. In Chicago, the percentage of payback to the government was less because some of the Chicago families were not on welfare at the time of the placements.

2. Craft Programs.

Eight of the 32 studied programs sought to stimulate sales of the traditional Hmong handwork, *pa ndau*, to provide, among other things, supplemental income for Hmong families. These were modest ventures with modest results. The combined investment in all eight programs is estimated to be in the neighborhood of \$35,000, about \$4,000 less than the average cost of each of the much larger projects in this field described by Fass and Bui in Volume II of *The Hmong Resettlement Study*.¹⁶

p. 66 The craft programs are grouped in this report with the economic activities; however, they also have objectives that are non-economic. At one level, the crafts programs are designed to preserve a treasured folk-art which might otherwise be lost in the resettlement process. At another, it is an effort to recognize and utilize the women of the Hmong community who traditionally remain at home. At still another level, these programs can produce favorable publicity for the Hmong communities and bring Hmong and American women together because of their mutual interests in crafts. Further, the promotion of *pa ndau*, made in the camps, helps bring income to relatives of American Hmong still in Thailand. This being the case, it is not

¹⁶ For a more detailed analysis of sewing programs than can be presented here, see S.M. Fass and D.D. Bui. *The Hmong Resettlement Study: Volume II: Economic Development and Employment Projects*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ORR. October, 1984. Chapter 2.

appropriate to view dollars invested in craft programs in the same way that one views dollars invested in placement, OJT and vocational training programs.

The eight programs which used HLI funds to promote crafts were in Chicago, Decatur, Marion-Morgantown, Dixon, Wheaton, Denver, Kansas City and Omaha. Although the exact level of investments in this component is hard to determine with precision, the evaluation team estimated that from \$2,000 to \$9,000 was invested in craft promotion in each of the programs. Sometimes, a staff member would work part-time on promoting the production and sales of pa ndau. Sometimes, American consultants were hired on a short-term basis to help organize pa ndau sales activities. Sales results from these activities for six of the sites are as follows:

These data are for the HLI-funded period: 12 months in most places and 14 months in Kansas City. p. 67

A number of different techniques evolved for the sale of pa ndau. In North Carolina, a local museum was enlisted to display and sell the craftwork. In Denver, some \$10,000 worth of pa ndau was stored and on display in the local MAA office. In Chicago, no inventory was kept, but sales events were arranged from time to time, generally at fairs. In Omaha, the craftwork was sold in the MAA's store (downstairs from the MAA offices). Generally no commission, or a low one (about 15%) was charged. Most of the work was done in the United States, but the larger pieces of pa ndau were often produced by relatives in the camps in Thailand and sent to the United States.

3. Farm/Garden Programs.

Nine of the studied HLI projects ran farm or garden programs. The investment of HLI funds was modest, usually \$5,000 to \$16,000 per project, but many of the results were encouraging. There were two types of programs in seven locations. The objectives were to grow produce

for Highland Lao families as well as provide modest amounts of supplemental income. Two were designed to produce more substantial amounts of supplemental income. p. 68

The seven small-scale projects had a number of elements in common. All grew vegetables; none of the projects involved animals, grain,¹⁷ berries or tree crops. The vegetables were a mix of the usual American garden varieties of tomatoes, lettuce, potatoes and sweet corn and some traditional Hmong crops including bok choy, bitter melon, lemon grass, mustard greens and Thai hot peppers, to name only a few.

Most of the projects revolved around an American with technical skills and a Hmong man who played the role of project manager or, sometimes, interpreter. Most of the projects occupied a single plot of land, rarely more than 20 acres and usually much less, where all the families did the gardening. In Decatur and Akron there were communal plots as well as individual ones, all in the same field.

¹⁷ The exception was the successful attempt in Selma to grow a small plot of rice.

Some of the projects served a small number of families (seven in Akron, a dozen in Selma) and were subsidized by public and private funds. Some projects provided transportation from home to farm plot, seeds, fertilizer, land and land preparation.

p. 69 Although many problems plagued the projects much of the time, they were largely horticultural successes. But as Exhibit 13 shows, little cash income was generated. The refugees were more proficient at production than at marketing.

The projects in Iowa and Eau Claire, Wisconsin, were quite unlike the garden projects described above, except that the HLI financial investment was modest in all of them. In these locations, the objective was to provide substantial supplemental income to the Hmong farmworkers, and arrangements were made to sell to processors instead of the fresh produce market.

The Iowa project, which received \$5,000 in HLI funds through the Iowa Refugee Center, was run by a non-profit organization called Volunteers Outreach in Community Enrichment Services (VOICES). Largely funded by other, private sources, VOICES was designed to give experience in managing and working in commercial agriculture to the Hmong. VOICES was in its second year when the HLI funding was received. VOICES grew hundreds of tons of cannery tomatoes and some fresh-market produce. Despite substantial donations of cash, equipment and free land, the project was struggling as its third planting season approached in 1985.

In Eau Claire, Hmong families grew pickling cucumbers with some HLI and other assistance. In 1984, thirty-three families grossed about \$50,000 or about \$1,500 per family for their efforts.

p. 70 The outcomes for the nine projects can be summarized in five categories: cash income for the workers, a healthful outdoor activity for Hmong families, produce for the families, training in
p. 71 American farming, and community interactions.

Cash income (Exhibit 13) was secured for the MAA rather than the families in Decatur, and for the participating families in four other locations: Eau Claire, Des Moines, Akron and Marion-Morgantown. The total amount gained in all five sites was about \$68,000 to \$70,000. These cash returns were considerably less impressive than those in the OJT program and much less than those in the direct placement program. But they were only a small part of the picture.

Hard-to-measure but frequently mentioned to the evaluation team were the benefits of the gardening programs to Hmong families. Older members of the family were provided a useful and productive activity, and family members of all ages could work together (usually on weekends) under the leadership of the elders.

Regarding the produce grown for home consumption, its value was estimated to be worth \$100 per family in the Fass-Bui study of the Providence garden project,¹⁸ while in Akron, where the family plots were larger, they were estimated at about \$400 for the season. If a midpoint between these two

¹⁸ S.M. Fass and D.D. Bui, page 49.

estimates were taken, and if we assumed that the eight projects which provided produce for the Hmong households each served 30 families, produce valued at about \$60,000 would have been grown. p. 72

The garden projects provided a substantial amount of specialized training which should be useful to the recipients for years to come. They learned about soil conditions, fertilizer and pesticide needs in the United States. They also learned about the varieties of vegetables which can prosper and which of their homeland vegetables do not.

The final set of outcomes is considered important, but difficult to quantify. Some of the Hmong projects secured favorable television and newspaper coverage that helped the refugees, the refugee-serving agencies, the volunteers and the media. The stories as perceived were simple, heartwarming, full of pictorial possibilities and accurate. Further, virtually every American, interviewed by the evaluation team, who had anything to do with these projects had a wonderful experience, made worthwhile contacts with the refugees, and had a fulfilling experience. Finally, a series of useful institutional linkages grew out of these projects with agricultural extension services in several locations and a community college in North Carolina.

In addition to the above, four specific lessons appear to have emerged from the farm/garden projects: p. 73

- 29 The message given in the ORR-funded Hmong agricultural conference in Minnesota in 1983 was an appropriate one: smaller is better.
- 30 While the total costs of the garden projects were not large, they were considerable on a cost-per-family basis in the smaller projects, approaching \$2,000 per family in Akron and \$1,000 per family in Selma. On the other hand, several of the programs were managed carefully enough so that two years of operations were squeezed out of one year's funding, which was the case in Akron¹⁹ and Selma.
- 31 Total costs were low, but in some cases, could have been lower. Land that was rented in one site was donated in another; buying land preparation services may be less expensive than buying or renting a tractor; equipment, seeds and fertilizer bought in one place was contributed in
- 32 another. Assigning a paid member of the project staff to work on farm matters full-time, or even part-time, may be unduly expensive. p. 74
- 33 There may be a danger of creating refugee dependence on subsidies for gardening activity. There is probably no need to fund the small-scale garden projects beyond the second growing season; after that, they should be able to be self-supporting.

4. Small Business Programs.

HLL communities in Des Moines, Billings and Seattle used HLL funds to assist non-agricultural small business activities. The funds were used to buy equipment, maintain donated equipment,

¹⁹ The MAA and the farm project have raised \$10,000 from a local foundation to help continue the program.

provide technical assistance to the managers of the business and to train Highland Lao workers (see Exhibit 14).

In Des Moines, HLI funds were used to support a print shop sponsored by the Lao-Hmong Foundation and an MAA-like organization affiliated with the Catholic Church. An enthusiastic American volunteer secured free rent and utilities in a school affiliated with a hospital, and the donation of two expensive printing machines. HLI funds were used to buy materials, pay training stipends to two HL refugees, purchase the services of an electrician to connect the machines, and

- p. 75 more than \$5,000 worth of preventive maintenance arrangements to keep the machines going.
- p. 76 While the refugees were trained in the operations of the machines, and the equipment was in perfect working condition, there were no signs of commercial activity when the HLI evaluation team arrived.

Similarly, the Seattle project sought to create a cooperative sewing project to subcontract with clothing manufacturers. The work to be done consisted of mainstream garment manufacture, not pa ndau. The Seattle project provided training in power sewing to women from each of four Highland Lao ethnic groups. The women found the training process a difficult one. Most of the women had little background for the work; insufficient time was allocated to the training; there were not enough machines; and the training had to be conducted in four languages. The notion of a manufacturing cooperative was new to all concerned, and the project did not materialize.

The Billings project was devoted almost entirely to small business development. HLI funds were used to aid three businesses: a building cleaning and landscaping concern, a restaurant and an auto detailing company. The restaurant failed because there was already one Hmong restaurant in town. The cleaning business never got started. The auto detailing concern, which cleaned cars for used car dealers, appeared

- p. 77 headed for success. Most of the HLI funds in Billings were not well spent, and the failure of the two Hmong businesses created animosities within that small refugee community.

In Philadelphia, there was an attempt to create a Hmong owned-and-operated day care center. A total of \$10,000 was set aside to fund the program, and a Hmong woman was trained in and secured the necessary license for such work. However, securing a state-controlled day care subsidy proved impossible, and the project was dropped.

B. Educational Services.

Many of the Highland Lao refugee communities expressed strong interest in ESL during the design of the HLI even though in many cases it was already available in the community. What the refugees wanted and did not have were ESL programs tailored to meet their specific language needs. Eleven of the studied projects provided instruction in ESL. HLI funds played a significant role in nine projects and a minor role in two. In Syracuse and at the International Institute in Akron, ESL was the only service offered.

The investment of HLI funds in ESL programs varied from a low of \$500 in Eau Claire to a high of \$39,440 in Denver. Dropping the highest and lowest values, the average project spent \$13,427 for ESL. The two ESL-only projects were funded at \$20,000 in Akron and \$30,000 in Syracuse.

The amount of instruction varied from four to 20 hours a week (four-hour classes provided five days per week). The usual pattern was to teach two or three hours a day on Monday through Thursday, although Salt Lake City offered some Sunday morning instruction. Most classes were held in the evenings to enable day workers to attend, but there were morning and afternoon classes as well. p. 78

Those served by ESL programs were adults with limited linguistic skills, including many not literate in any language. Eight of the nine programs were for the Hmong; one was for the Lu Mien.

For a listing of the sites with ESL programs, and some data on enrollment and attendance, see Exhibit 15.

Undergirding the HLI-funded ESL programs was a widespread consensus among Hmong leaders and Americans operating refugee-serving agencies that it was important to provide ESL classes designed specifically for Hmong refugees, particularly since many Hmong were having an especially difficult time learning English.²⁰

Once the basic decision was made to seek funds for Hmong-only ESL classes, three other sets of decisions had to be made. Those dealt with program: p. 79

- 34 management and staffing;
- 35 access; and
- 36 content

p. 80

There were three management/staffing styles in the HLI-funded ESL programs. Two programs were operated by Americans with minimal refugee input; two were operated by the Hmong with little American input; four were operated by Americans and Hmong; and the ninth, in Denver, switched from a Hmong-dominated operation to a Hmong-American operation part-way through the year.

The two American-operated programs were initiated by service providers using American teachers, and had no bi-lingual aides. The two Hmong operated programs were offered by MAAs. The Hmong-American operated programs had several variations, but generally the program design and management was in the hands of Hmong executive directors and much of the instruction was conducted by American teachers.

²⁰ There are sound linguistic reasons for establishing classes for a single-language group, according to the one member of the evaluation team who is a linguist; if a member of the class has a problem with pronunciation, or with sentence structure, the chances are good that the others in the class have the same problem. Further, if there is no bi-lingual teaching aide, the most advanced student in the class can explain something in the native tongue to the others.

The Denver program attempted two approaches. At first, the MAA decided that it would use Hmong instructors and seek to create a “Hmong Way” to teach ESL. However, those recruited for the teaching task had limited backgrounds in education and less knowledge of English than some of their

- p. 81 students. Class attendance dropped. A new project director (the second of the three in that city) polled the students and found that they wanted American teachers to participate in a team-teaching venture. The project director redesigned the program accordingly and attendance increased immediately.²¹

Access issues are related to when and where the classes are held and what supportive services are available. Since the HLI-funded ESL programs were new and in the hands of refugee-serving organizations, the opportunities for making the classes easily accessible to the refugees were present and some interesting arrangements were made. Finding that the target community was scattered, the Hmong MAA in Hartford decided to issue a contract to the Literacy Volunteers of America to provide small classes in several Connecticut towns. The “volunteers,” often highly-credentialled retired teachers, were paid \$5 an hour for their work.

The service provider in Montgomery made day care available so that mothers of young children could study ESL. Similarly, the agency in Kansas City provided transportation to and from ESL classes, with a Hmong driving the van. However,

- p. 82 access issues were not always decided to the advantage of the refugee community. In Akron, for example, the service provider used its own office, some distance from the center of the Hmong community, for its ESL classes rather than a more convenient location for the students. This occurred even though convenient class location was a specific issue discussed before the award was made.

Although staffing, management and access issues sometimes created controversy, there were relatively few disagreements over the content of the ESL programs. The early attempt to create a Hmong Way of ESL in Denver was dropped and the Akron program made use of a curriculum written specifically for the Hmong.

Three sets of observations can be made about the HLI-funded ESL programs on:

- 37 the utility of Hmong-American management/staffing;
- 38 the need for better attendance records; and
- 39 the problems caused by the seasons.

On the utility of Hmong-American management and staffing, the evaluation team sensed that attendance was a little higher, and complaints a little less frequent in the Hmong-American

²¹ In the second month of the Denver program, average daily attendance per class was at the 7.0 level, by the sixth month, it had declined to 3.0; then the new program was introduced and the attendance increased to 5.0 in the seventh month and to 7.1 in the eighth month, slipping 5.9 in the tenth and final month. These are unpublished data from the Colorado Refugee Services Program.

operated programs than in either the all-Hmong or all-American programs. That the Denver MAA moved from an all-Hmong approach to the use of teams of American and Hmong teachers, buttresses this point; as does the positive reaction of the Hmong students to the second approach. Mixed programs

tended to be more sensitive to access issues than all-American programs while Hmong-only programs had a more difficult time recruiting capable teachers than did the mixed programs. This was the case because the supply of qualified Hmong teachers with good English skills was limited, and those with good English skills make more money elsewhere than they can teaching refugees. On the other hand, the supply of qualified American teachers willing to accept low salaries was much larger. p. 83

Attendance-reporting systems ranged from the non-existent in Philadelphia and Salt Lake City, to good manual systems in Akron and Hartford, to a computerized system in Denver. (See Exhibit 15.) In many places, the evaluation team had to compile attendance records from daily records maintained by the teachers. ORR should insist that accurate records be kept and mailed to monitoring offices at regular intervals.

If such records were available, it would be possible to better evaluate the unit costs of the ESL programs than is done in this report.

Three of the four dollar figures in Exhibit 15, the cost per student instructional hour, are considerably higher than the median costs reported last year in another ORR study.²²

Only in Denver was it possible to compare HLI-funded ESL costs per student hour to other local ORR-funded ESL costs. In Denver, the HLI-funded costs came to \$4.05 per hour, as opposed to \$1.80—\$2.00 per hour in the other ESL programs. p. 84

Another reason for requiring regularly submitted attendance records is the need to monitor the impact of seasonal influences. The evaluation team received numerous reports of low class attendance during the summer gardening season. In Philadelphia, the distraction from classroom learning was the opportunity to earn money harvesting blueberries in New Jersey. Suspending ESL classes during the summer may be an appropriate option in some locations.

C. Outreach Services.

Outreach services are those provided to help refugees cope with American systems. Outreach often includes interpreting, completing forms, transporting the refugees to the hospital and intervening with landlords. These services are more important for newly arrived refugees and those with limited or no English. The very young and very old are the ones most likely to need and seek these services.

²² The median reported cost per student instructional hour in ORR-funded ESL classes in FY '81 was \$2.00, rising to \$2.31 in FY '81, according to *A Study of English Language Training for Refugees* by Reder, et. al., 1984. The three HLI-funded programs costing over \$4.05 per student per instructional hour were in the upper quartile of ESL hourly costs reported in the Reder study.

Outreach services are the basic activities for all MAAs and for most service providers. As Exhibit 16 indicates, Highland Lao-specific outreach services were available during the HLI in 29 of the 30 sites, and in 28 of these cases,

p. 85 through the HLI-funded agencies. The exceptions were Fitchburg, where there was no program
p. 86 during the evaluation, and Toledo, where outreach services were available through a non-HLI-
funded agency.

The Highland Lao Initiative had a substantial impact on the extent, quality and quantity of outreach services available to Highland Lao refugees. As Exhibit 16 shows, outreach services were continued in eight locations where they might have been dropped or reduced without HLI funding; in another seven sites, outreach services were enhanced. Only in Akron and Decatur, however, did the HLI *initiate* Highland Lao-specific outreach programs to communities that had lacked them completely.

One innovation encountered in outreach was set in motion by the Decatur MAA. It swiftly became obvious to the MAA staff that a request to take a refugee to the Grady Memorial Hospital usually meant that a whole day would be consumed by the service caseworker. The typical refugee was limited in English, and could not be left alone in the hospital for fear that a monolingual American doctor would find time to interview the patient at the very moment the case worker left the room. The MAA staff then asked itself an appropriate question: what should we do with this waiting time? It decided to encourage the case worker to conduct one-on-one training

p. 87 during those hours. Sometimes the subject was household maintenance and sanitary
practices; sometimes, care of infants and small children; sometimes, family planning;
sometimes, an ESL drill. The approach should probably be tried in other refugee communities.

What happens when funding for Highland Lao-specific out-reach ends? Some refugees tried to get along without outreach services and some continued to seek those services from the member of the community who had been funded to provide them. Often, these services continued to be given after the funding stopped as was the case of a placement worker in Seattle who found jobs for three of his countrymen after he had lost his own HLI-funded position. But sometimes, the burden on the exstaffer was too great and he, and often some other families as well, sought relief through secondary migration.

There is no question but that Highland Lao communities wanted to continue to receive outreach services from bilingual members of their own community. We heard this argument in many places: "If there is a case worker in the community, he can save the man in the family a day's pay by taking the wife to the agency." The question is, how much outreach is enough? Too much assistance in this field, as in welfare or even in farming, can lead to dependence. The evaluation team heard the subject raised inside and outside the Highland Lao communities, but rarely heard any proposed solutions.

p. 88

D. Welfare Utilization Outcomes.

What happened to Highland Lao welfare utilization rates in the studied sites? What impact did the HLI have on those rates?

Three generalizations can be made:

1. Welfare utilization rates declined by about 25 percent.
2. Welfare utilization Rates varied radically from site to site.
3. The HLI helped reduce welfare utilization rates in many sites, but not all.

Exhibit 17 shows that welfare utilization among Highland Lao refugees fell from an average of 41% in the spring of 1983 to 30% in September of 1984, when the HLI was nearing the completion of its year. The data on which Exhibit 17 is based are admittedly crude. In most cases, the data are community leader estimates of the percentage of families on AFDC, though a handful of SSI cases are included as well. In a few instances, data were drawn from local welfare offices. But generally Highland Lao-specific data were not available.

Despite the methodological problems, the downward trend seems plausible. The average unemployment rates in the host communities fell from 11.5% to 7.7% in the same time period occupied by the HLI. Nationwide unemployment rates for all

Southeast Asian refugees declined from 18% in the fall of 1983 to 14.6% in the fall of 1984.²³ p. 89
Further, though Robert Bach's research suggests that this factor has been over-rated, the Highland Lao had been in the United States for another year and a half.²⁴ p. 90

Exhibit 17 also reflects the impact of the country's welfare system, a factor independent of the HLI. The exhibit compares the relative attractiveness of welfare programs at the 30 sites (a variable not previously examined) with welfare utilization rates.

The first 11 sites are those without AFDC-U programs. In these locations, intact families without income can draw no cash benefits. Benefits are paid only when the head of the household (usually the man) is either missing or disabled. The next 19 sites have AFDC-U, and usually pay benefits to no-income families where the man in the house is present, but both parents are unemployed. In no-income Highland Lao families, the second situation is much more common than the

first. The sites within these two categories are then arrayed in the exhibit by benefit levels. p. 91
Wisconsin had the most generous of the programs, with an AFDC-U program and a monthly

²³ Office of Refugee Resettlement, *Report to the Congress*, January 31, 1985, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC, 1985, page 91.

²⁴ Robert L. Bach, "Labor Force Participation and Employment of Southeast Asian Refugees in the United States," paper written for the Office of Refugee Resettlement, August, 1984. Bach makes the point that the 1983 national survey of refugees, which presented longitudinal as well as cross-sectional data on refugee labor force and unemployment rates, suggested that the factor of mere presence in the U. S. had been overstated as a force causing increased employment rates.

benefit of \$760 for a no-income family of six. Food Stamps and Medicaid would be added to the \$760 grant level.

A casual examination of the data suggests a number of sharp variations but generally higher welfare utilization rates at the bottom of the page than at the top. In order to stratify the sites, a three-way division was made: the first category was no AFDC-U, the second was all AFDC-U states other than Wisconsin, and the third was the four Wisconsin sites, with these average utilizations:

The differences over time were minor compared to those among the states. In both time periods, the non-AFDC-U states reported about one-fifth as much welfare utilization as did Wisconsin (whose benefit levels are comparable to those in California).

These data suggest a correlation between easy access to AFDC (*i.e.*, AFDC-U) and high benefit levels, on one hand, and high welfare utilization, on the other. Two other ORR researchers have faced this issue, Robert Bach to a larger

p. 92 extent than Nathan Caplan. Bach has written about the low labor force participation rates he noted among California refugees:

“A more plausible explanation involves the structure of public assistance programs in California. According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, most of those on public assistance in California are on the AFDC-U program, which covers two-parent families with minor children. Under this program, the principal wage earner cannot be required to accept a job if it pays less than the amount received from public assistance. In addition, if the principal wage earner worked more than 100 hours a month, the family would lose all assistance. Although little evidence exists to demonstrate the effect of these rules, it seems likely that they provide an alternative means of support for those who are likely to be able only to secure employment at essentially poverty level wages.

The public assistance system in California may well be a factor in the low labor force participation rates. But over-simplistic contrasts to the more niggardly Texas system do not capture the mechanisms that cause this distinctive pattern. Until better data are available, the uniqueness of the California experience will probably remain a mystery.²⁵”

Caplan and his associates conducted a five-site survey of Southeast Asian refugees, and ran a regression analysis of the results.²⁶ One of the variables of interest was household

p. 93 receipt of transfer income. Another variable studied was “Site,” which in turn included “availability and types of welfare programs.”

²⁵ Bach, *op cit.*, pp. 53—54. The HLI evaluation team, incidentally, encountered reports in Wisconsin that the 100-hour rule (that Bach describes above) discouraged many Hmong from working.

²⁶ Nathan Caplan, John K. Whitmore and Quan L. Bui, *Southeast Asian Refugee Self-Sufficiency Study: Final Report*, The Institute of Social Science Research, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1985, page 198.

In explaining why 81 percent of the refugees in four studied sites received transfer payments compared to a 44 percent utilization in Houston (where benefit checks are, in fact, one-fourth as large as they are in California), Caplan wrote, "The variable accounting for the largest percent of explained variance [in household receipt of transfer income] is Site...."

How did the HLI affect welfare utilization among the Highland Lao? There appeared to be four kinds of effects on welfare utilization:

1. Direct reduction of utilization in those sites with successful placement programs (e.g., Toledo, Chicago, Detroit).
2. Avoidance of the increase in nationwide utilization by slowing out-migration to California and other high-welfare utilization states; an indirect effect.
3. No effect either way in several locations where the HLI did not, for a variety of reasons, affect the economic status of HL refugees (e.g., Des Moines, Billings).
4. Perhaps, an indirect encouragement of higher national utilization rates by enhancing the supportive qualities of the MAAs in Wisconsin.

p. 94

These four statements are made more tentatively than the ones made earlier about the drop in utilization rates between the spring of 1983 and the fall of 1984, and about the sharply different utilization rates by state. It is difficult to document cause and effect.

The direct reduction of welfare utilization because of HLI-funded placement programs took place primarily in the AFDC-U sites outside of Wisconsin. As noted earlier, utilization rates declined only slightly in the non AFDC-U states where they were close to an irreducible minimum, and in Wisconsin where AFDC-U provides "an alternative means of support." Case-by-case data, in both Toledo and Chicago, showed how even moderately successful placement programs reduced welfare utilization. More generally in the 11 sites which had placement programs of various kinds, and good data, it was found that the estimated number of Highland Lao families on welfare declined by 189 from 470 to 281. In those 11 sites there were 225 placements.²⁷ These two events are assumed to relate to each other.

Welfare utilization rates are known to be high in California and were found to be high in the four studied Wisconsin sites. Highland Lao families moving to states with high welfare utilization rates probably will use welfare as much as the resident Highland Lao refugee population in those states. Hence, families moving from areas where utilization rates are low to areas where they are high, tend to increase utilization nationwide. Further, while a Highland Lao family which lived on welfare in Illinois does not affect the overall utilization rate by joining the welfare rolls in Wisconsin, moving does increase public costs because the benefit checks are higher in Wisconsin. For all of these reasons, encouraging people to stay where they are (outside of California and Wisconsin) would tend, at the very least, to avoid increases in rates.

p. 95

²⁷ The 11 sites are Hartford, Akron, Toledo, Detroit, Lansing, Chicago, Dixon, Kankakee, Wheaton, Des Moines and Kansas City. The 225 placements included direct ones, OJT and those following vocational training.

In order to estimate the financial savings realized by refugees in HLI sites *not* moving to California, we counted the population not on welfare in the 30 studied sites (2,193 families). We then assumed that the families had an average of six members and would have no income in California.

Were all these families to move to California and file for AFDC-U, the annual cost would be \$21,105,432 (or about seven times the total cost of the HLI for all 44 sites).

p. 96 While the HLI clearly reduced welfare utilization in many states, it did not do so in Wisconsin. During 1983—84, the Highland Lao population in four studied sites increased by more than 1,000 while the welfare utilization rate dropped a few points. If anything, the HLI helped make the Wisconsin studied sites more attractive to potential migrants, funding as it did the core services of the MAAs in those cities. The HLI did not fund placement services in Wisconsin. The state, at that time, used ORR social service funds to buy placement services from the State Job Service instead of the MAAs.

Despite the Wisconsin complication, however, it appears that on balance, the HLI served to reduce welfare utilization among Highland Lao refugees.

E. Secondary Migration.

The changes in the size of the 30 studied HL communities were affected by two major factors (births and secondary migration within the United States) and by two factors of less statistical significance (deaths and arrivals from the camps). In some communities, particularly the smaller ones (Syracuse, Selma and Akron), demographic statistics were excellent, with the leaders keeping close track of the incidence of each of the four factors. In many locations, the demographic data were not good, and the best available data consisted of estimates of the number of families in the community at different points in time: the basis for Exhibit 18.

p. 97 There was substantial anecdotal evidence regarding migration from 26 of the studied, non-Wisconsin sites to California and Wisconsin. But reliable statistics were not available. Further,
p. 98 there was a lot of migration that did not relate to either of the magnet states, people moving from Fort Smith to Atlanta as well as to California, refugees leaving Seattle for Michigan, and the like.

What is clear, however, is that despite the high birth rates, the total estimated population, in 18 of the studied sites outside Wisconsin, declined during the HLI period from September, 1983 to September, 1984. The population of Syracuse remained stable, and seven locations increased in size. Each of the four Wisconsin sites increased their populations during fiscal year '84. Stated another way, the total population of the 26 non-Wisconsin sites declined from an estimated 15,302 in the fall of 1983 to 14,866 in the fall of 1984 while those of the four Wisconsin sites increased sharply from 2,882 to 3,936. Thus, it appears that secondary migration away from most of the non-Wisconsin sites proceeded slowly.

In many places, according to the leaders of the Highland Lao communities, HLI-funded programs helped to hold the refugees together and to diminish, if not end, out-migration. This was done primarily by providing the services described earlier which in some places were used by all or virtually all

the families in the community (e.g., Selma, Toledo, Hartford and Syracuse). Further, and less directly, the HLI was an indication that the government recognized the presence of the Highland Lao community and was trying to do something about the needs of the refugees. p. 99

In at least three of the studied sites, the HLI made no impact on secondary migration, with unemployed families continuing to leave these areas. In Tulsa and Fitchburg, the HLI programs were inoperative during the evaluation; in Des Moines, the HLI funds (with the exception of the small contribution to VOICES) were not used to provide additional services to the Highland Lao.

F. Institutional Outcomes.

Thirty-two different institutions (17 service providers and 15 MAAs) received HLI funds in the studied sites. The moneys were for single year activities though in many cases no-cost extensions were secured to continue some programs for a few months or an additional year. What were the consequences of the one-year-ness of the grants? The evaluators, aware of the results of one-year funding in other social service programs, approached this question with concern. Would institutions start up, flower briefly, and then be cut-off just as they developed momentum?

There were some negative experiences. However, for many of the agencies, the one-year-long grants produced positive institutional results.

A six-part typology was used to analyze the impact of the HLI on the 32 institutions, with the beneficial effects being listed before the negative ones: p. 100

These categorizations, which are explained subsequently, were made by the evaluation team based on their judgments of what happened *to the institution* during the HLI. Determinations are shown for each of the agencies in Exhibit 19.

The principal institutional results was that the organization with the HLI funds used them to buy a particular service during the year, and that at the end of that time, the agency resumed its usual role (serving refugees with other funds, as in the case of the Chicago MAA, or continuing to provide vocational education, as in the case of the Toledo schools). In four instances, the HLI funds appeared to have been seed

money for organizations that apparently will continue operations after the HLI funds are exhausted. In just two cases did it appear that the HLI funds had been used to start a new p. 101

agency, and that the agency might go out of business when the funds were exhausted. p. 102

The other three institutional impacts were:

- 40 Temporary funding between other sources of money. (This was the situation in Wisconsin, for instance, where HLI funds were used in replacements of other ORR funds, to continue funding MAA core services.)
- 41 One more year of funding for an endangered program. (Here, HLI moneys kept a small program going which would have died otherwise.)
- 42 No program. (The situation in Tulsa and Fitchburg.)

This institutional analysis, however, does not reflect some end-of-the-program problems in several places where programs died but the agencies continued to operate, albeit on a smaller scale. Highland Lao staff were laid off when the funds ended, and some promising programs had to be terminated. This was the case, for example, in Seattle where four placement workers (representing four different Highland Lao populations) ran a very useful employment program right up to the

p. 103 last day of funding. Similarly, the end of the HLI funds in Memphis did not endanger the local affiliate of the Catholic Migration Service, but it created fears that the agency would have to lay off its Hmong staff (a subsequent HLI continuation grant solved that problem).

The HLI impacts on the institutions varied according to predictable factors. In Wisconsin and Illinois, where institutional arrangements were made to the satisfaction of all to serve the Highland Lao refugee community, there was no need to create new agencies, and extra funding could be provided to the existing networks. In other settings such as Toledo and Syracuse, one-shot purchases of educational services could be arranged without institutional risks. But in areas such as Denver and Salt Lake City, it was decided to fund Highland Lao MAAs for the first time. The Salt Lake City project has since been terminated, and the Denver project appeared to be facing a similar fate at this writing. First funding is always a risk for both the fledgling agency and for the funding source.

Another institutional impact did not emerge until the HLI year ended. Although mon-MAA service providers received FY '83 HLI funding in Detroit, Syracuse and Fitchburg, in the subsequent fiscal year, MAAs in each city secured ORR funding for the first time. So, while the HLI provided first-time funding to five MAAs during FY '83, it ultimately led to seed funding for eight.

p. 104 **ASSESSMENT**

This chapter has three parts: some retrospective observations regarding the Highland Lao Initiative; some recommendations about what ORR (and other agencies) should be doing now vis-a-vis these refugees; and finally, some forward-looking suggestions should a similar program be mounted in the future.

A. Observations Regarding the HLI.

1. HLI: A Program with Many Variations.

The HLI sought to reach its goals of serving and stabilizing Highland Lao communities outside of California in a number of different ways making generalizations about it difficult. A summary of some of the more important variables would include the following:

- 43 Population size. Some of the projects served a dozen to 20 families, some thousands of people.
- 44 Refugees served. Most of the projects served all-Hmong communities, but a few others served several Highland Lao refugee groups.
- 45 Grant recipients. Different institutions were used, MAAs and service providers, public and private agencies, established agencies and a few new ones.
- 46 Contracting arrangements. Most contracts were administered by state agencies, but a few were administered through counties and a few by ORR directly. p. 105
- 47 Services. Although employment-related services were stressed, different service mixes were funded, reflecting both different situations within the host community and different perceptions of those situations by the refugees and by the refugee-serving system. In some places, a single service was provided, in others a combination of services.
- 48 Refugee involvement. The extent of refugee involvement ranged from total control to near total exclusion from decision-making.
- 49 Economic settings. The nature of local economies varied as did unemployment rates, although the latter were generally above the national average.
- 50 Host community receptivity. Some communities welcomed the refugees warmly, others accepted them, while in others the thought of refugees running a program with federal funds was dimly regarded. A few incidents of violence and vandalism were at the bottom of this spectrum. p. 106
- 51
- 52 Welfare benefit levels and rates. As noted earlier, these varied dramatically.

2. HLI: A Needed Intervention, Rapidly Implemented.

The HLI evaluation team examining retrospectively the levels of needs within the studied sites, and the pre-HLI level of services available to meet those needs, concluded that in most locations, ORR's decision to provide additional Highland Lao-specific services was an appropriate one. Usually, implementation was rapid, more rapid than many other federal programs. (A planning process, begun in the spring of 1983, resulted in the provision of services in many locations by the fall of that year, and in most others by the winter.) The availability of services to the Highland Lao refugees did, in fact, increase in virtually every instance.

3. HLI: Fiscal Considerations.

Government agencies usually do not like to make small grants. If something needs to be done and will cost \$500,000, it is better to make a single grant, not ten. This is often the government philosophy. The amount of staff time used in making and monitoring small grants can be

substantial. ORR chose the labor-intensive route in the HLI and is to be commended for doing so.

p. 107 These were small grants. They carried with them low salaries and modest overhead rates. Project directors were generally paid in the range of \$14,000—\$17,000, and full-time case workers were often paid as little as \$12,000 per year. Further, in some cases the salaries paid took payees off the welfare and Food Stamps rolls so that the *net* cost to the government (bearing in mind these savings) was substantially less than the actual salary paid the workers.

In retrospect, it appears that there were some problems with the distribution of funds to the 30 studied communities:

- 53 Some communities received too much money, too quickly (e.g., Denver, Memphis). A smaller grant or, better, a two-year-grant, would have been appropriate in several instances. A suggested rule of thumb, based on an examination of a number of MAAs receiving their first funding: \$50,000: the largest digestible first-year grant for an MAA, covers two full-time salaries, fringe, overhead and other direct costs.
- p. 108 54 Some communities either did not need HLI funds, or chose to spend them in marginal ways. Billings' unfortunate experience with small business development fits this category, as does the Selma garden project.
- 55 Further, there appeared to be a tendency to dole out funds more or less evenly, thus providing some small communities with relatively generous funding, and skimping on some larger communities (this was particularly true in Wisconsin). Finally, one rough measure of community needs was not used in the allocation process, and that related to the number of full-time equivalent (FTE), government-funded persons working locally with the Highland Lao refugees. Exhibit 20 shows that in two locations, there was one FTE person for every six families, and in six others, one for every 10 to 13 refugee families. The employees counted in the exhibit include those employed in HLI-funded agencies as well as non-HLI organizations. In some communities, for example, there were several
- p. 109 56 bi-lingual teachers working with Hmong children in the public schools; similarly, some public health organizations had Hmong staff.
- p. 110 57 While total costs and staff salaries were low, some unit costs were high. The \$20,000 grants for garden projects in Selma and Akron assisted 12 families and seven families, respectively.

On the other hand, the return on the HLI investment, when dealing with even middlingly successful placement programs, was remarkable. As noted earlier, \$96,000 invested in Toledo and Chicago brought estimated financial returns to the government of more than \$192,000 in additional taxes and non-utilized welfare benefits in the first year after placements, with additional returns expected in the years to come.

4. HLI: Highland Lao Recognition.

One of the objectives of the HLI was to enhance community stability among the refugees by recognizing their needs, providing services, and doing so wherever possible through direct

community participation in the decision-making process. It was hoped that after the HLI year, the refugee communities would be better equipped to deal with government agencies specifically, and the broader society in general.

In most locations, this goal was achieved. The refugee communities played a major role in the design of the programs in many areas. In 15 of the 32 programs studied, the HLI funds went to MAAs; and in three other programs, MAAs were subsequently funded with HLI funds. In eight programs, including the three just mentioned, the HLI made it possible for never-previously funded MAAs to receive federal moneys. But not all of the newly-funded MAAs are prospering, which leads to the next observation.

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5. HLI: The Need for Technical Assistance.

The five MAAs newly-funded during the HLI (in studied sites) needed more technical assistance than they received. They needed technical assistance in program development and management, in resource development, in governance and in recordkeeping. But technical assistance, unlike funding, cannot simply be begun or terminated at will. It must be (1) desired by the recipient, (2) offered by a provider, (3) supplied in a culturally sensitive manner, and (4) delivered in a forthright fashion.

In some instances, the HLI-funded agency resisted or ignored technical assistance.²⁸ The principal problem, however, was either the complete lack of such help, or the diffidence with which it was given. The newly-funded Akron MAA

received no assistance at all; the service provider in Selma was not aware that it was permissible for the families to sell some of their garden produce. Where technical assistance was provided, it was uneven. The Wisconsin state coordinator's office assigned one of its senior staff to the task, who did excellent work. In many places, however, the helping Americans were so worried about refugee sensitivities and cultural traditions that they did not help the MAAs learn about U.S. organizational processes²⁹ and the responsibilities that go with the receipt of federal funds. As a result of this leaning-over-backwards attitude, some avoidable conflicts-of-interest resulted (paid staff serving on boards of directors, a tractor owned by board members being rented by the MAA, etc.).

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While some MAA executive directors became skilled at securing funding from a variety of sources, most did not. Additional technical assistance in this area would be very useful.

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²⁸ For example, the Billings MAA ignored warnings about the prospective fate of the Hmong restaurant it aided, and the Denver MAA, early on, resisted an educational consultant's suggestions regarding ESL.

²⁹ The evaluation team encountered a number of governance anomalies: election of all board members for terms of the same length (overlapping terms assure some continuity); a board with an even number of members (inviting tie votes); an agency in which the chairman, alone, was elected — he had the power to appoint the rest of the members, etc.

6. HLI: Recordkeeping.

Three sets of records were important to the HLI, and were often found wanting. These were counts of the Highland Lao population, placement data and ESL enrollment information. Generally, the MAAs were more likely than service providers to have accurate counts of the refugee population, while the reverse was true regarding ESL and placement data.

Records on direct job placements were often faulty; so much so that data from four sites in which there were placement programs (two of them quite active) had to be excluded from this report. The 90-day confirmation of employment requirement was ignored in some places, or replaced with a 30-day test. Sometimes, two placements were recorded when an individual was placed in two successive jobs.

A suggestion to be made in this regard is that given the fact that refugees are often of necessity placed in high-turnover jobs in the secondary labor market, it might be useful to record two kinds of placements, initial placements (putting someone in any kind of a job) and continuing placements (putting someone in a job that lasts for more than 90 days). In this way, both temporary and permanent job placements are noted. And although temporary placements are not as valuable as permanent ones, they are useful to both the worker and the community and should be included in the recordkeeping system.

p. 114 ESL records were simply missing in some instances, but quite precise and available in other locations such as Denver and Akron.

Recordkeeping should be improved, and program managers should understand that statistics are not maintained to please the funding source, but can help the executive directors manage the activities in question. A number of the MAAs did not seem to realize the inherent utility of their own record-keeping systems.

7. HLI: Communications Problems.

Throughout the Highland Lao Initiative, the communications networks of ORR and the Hmong were active. ORR's system was multi-layered,³⁰ mostly in writing, and in English. The Hmong grapevine was, one-on-one, mostly by telephone, and in both Hmong and English. The ORR system gave due weight to the role of state governments. The Hmong system noted that refugees and refugee organizations were treated differently in different states. All of this is probably inevitable but perhaps some additional efforts could have been made within *each* communications system to note the presence and the validity of the other system and the other set of values that it represented.

p. 115 A combination of serious communications problems and basic disagreements over project ownership occurred in a number of locations, such as among the Hmong and state and ORR officials in Kansas City; and among the local, state and ORR participants in Michigan. Such

³⁰ In most places, there were four levels: ORR-Washington, ORR-Regional, State and HLI-funded agency; in Ohio and Kansas, the County Human Resources Agency was an additional player.

problems exist to some degree in all governmental programs (and in all human activities) but additional efforts to minimize them would have been useful.

HLI: Unexpected By-products.

Many HLI activities produced unanticipated results. And while none of the outcomes noted below were of overwhelming significance, they are worth noting:

- 58 In some sites, some or all of the HLI funds produced a larger pool of resources. The resources were handled by the local service providers in ways that extended additional benefits for all refugees, not just Highland Lao refugees. This was the case generally in the Michigan sites. In Toledo, some Lowland Lao joined the vocational training programs.
- 59 In many places, the arrival of the HLI funds stimulated a flow of new resources, both governmental and non-governmental, to Highland Lao refugees. There was the
- 60 donated tractor in Salt Lake City, gardening hoes, seeds and fertilizer in Kansas City; technical assistance from the agricultural extension service in several places; educational p. 116 services at a college in North Carolina; time on public radio stations and church funds for newsletters in Wisconsin; and help from scores of volunteers. The garden projects were particularly popular and attracted much favorable media attention.
- 61 In Salt Lake City, Memphis and Decatur, there was some resentment among other refugee groups that the Highland Lao had been singled out for special attention. This was not, however, a wide-spread by-product.
- 62 The evaluation team encountered one situation in which an on-going ESL program for the Hmong, funded through unknown Lutheran sources, was abandoned when the HLI-funded ESL program began in Philadelphia.

HLI: Deviations from the Original Proposals.

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In several locations, the services actually delivered by the contractors differed from what ORR had funded. In some cases, this resulted when a planned project turned out to be impossible to implement, e.g., the sewing cooperative in Seattle and the day-care program in Philadelphia. The funds allocated to these purposes were usually re-programmed into other activities acceptable to ORR.

In other instances, moneys designed for one purpose were used for others that would not have been approved had ORR known of the change in plans. In Billings, for example, funds that were assigned to training and technical assistance were converted into subsidies for small businesses (including the purchase of equipment for two firms, and food for a restaurant).

A third kind of deviation was a change in emphasis, with staff time being used more or less extensively for a given activity than had been proposed. In Kansas City, a consumer education program that had been proposed and funded, did not materialize and the resources were used in unauthorized ways. In Salt Lake City, the proposed program was to provide a wide and balanced menu of services; while in fact, most of the project energies were focused on various farm and garden activities, particularly in the latter months.

HLI: Using the Lessons Learned.

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Although it was not designed to be a social science experiment, the HLI produced some of the results of such an experiment by setting in motion as it did, a number of small projects under a variety of conditions. Some of the projects, such as the small business activities and the farm in Iowa, were not successful. But many projects such as several direct placement programs, craft sales in Kansas City, and pickling cucumbers in Eau Claire, flourished. These are Highland Lao success stories capable of replication elsewhere. But the how-to-do-it-again story is more effectively told by Hmong speaking to Hmong, rather than by reading about it in English. ORR might well consider selecting a dozen exemplary projects capable of replication, and organizing a conference of MAAs and service providers to discuss what was learned from them.

B. What Should Be Done for the Highland Lao Now.

1. A General Approach.

All the problems of the Highland Lao refugees were not intended to be solved by the HLI. The Highland Lao population will continue to need special attention from ORR for several years to come. This is the case because of the disadvantages that the adults in the population brought with them from Southeast Asia: limited contact with written languages and urban societies. The need for special programs is accentuated by the geographical distribution of the Hmong outside California in small, essentially

p. 119 powerless groupings. This need, however, should begin to diminish when Hmong youngsters, now in junior and senior high schools, enter the job market.

In many places, the next round of services for the Highland Lao refugees should focus on the labor market, preparing and placing the refugees in jobs. It is equally important, however, to provide basic community organization and outreach services to clusters of totally-employed refugees, primarily in the South. Grants, albeit small ones, are needed for the next few years to hold these communities together where they are. Spending \$30,000 or so to keep 30 working families in a given community is far better than spending ten times that much on cash assistance following a move to California. Cash assistance for 30 six-member, no-income families in California comes to \$288,720 at current benefit levels.

While the weight of the evidence reviewed in the evaluation argues for a specific federal program for these refugees, that program can be more narrowly focused than the HLI. There certainly is a need to continue to provide Highland-Lao-specific services. This is shown in the overly high rates of unemployment and welfare utilization still encountered in the studied HLI sites (for specifics, see Exhibit 17). There is, however, no need to operate 47 Highland-Lao-specific programs in 44 sites. This is the case because there are many ORR

p. 120 programs in the social service field. In at least some locations, these programs can meet the needs of the Highland Lao refugees without a special program like the HLI. Further, because of the HLI there are a number of MAAs that are now capable of competing for mainstream ORR

funds, as well as some service providers who are now comfortable with a Highland Lao-specific program. There are likely to be gaps in this fabric, however, and it is to fill these gaps that a smaller special program is needed.

The recommendation is that ORR conduct an annual inventory of the Highland Lao refugee communities; determine the level of services available; and with adequate lead-time, make funds available where needed. Further, ORR should continue to feel comfortable about making direct grants to service providers and MAAs in circumstances where the states and the refugee communities cannot reach agreement.

With this in mind, it is useful to divide the studied projects into four categories: the securely-funded ones, the small ones, the Wisconsin sites, and the rest (each of which should be approached a little differently).

Exhibit 21 shows the distribution of the 30 sites into four categories: the securely-funded programs are those that appear capable of securing mainline ORR and other funding. These programs probably will not need special HLI-like funding in the future.

The next, small programs, are found in two fairly well-defined geographical areas: southern New England and down-state Illinois. Given ORR's limited ability to monitor and assist its many small programs, it might make sense to merge some of them. Certainly, this has been the approach of other parts of the Federal Government ranging from the Postal Service's continuing program of closing small post offices to the Labor Department's technique for delivering services to migrant farm workers, *i.e.*, operating several of its programs on a multi-state basis. A step in the direction of merging the Illinois programs was taken during the HLI when the Chicago MAA was charged with coordinating the work of the downstate entities. In New England, the Hartford and Fitchburg MAAs could operate as branches of the larger program in Providence, Rhode Island though the leaders of the two smaller MAAs probably would resist such a suggestion.

The Wisconsin MAAs present a real dilemma. They have dealt skillfully, for the most part, with their own refugees, with the host communities, and with the social service networks; but they have had little economic impact. ORR should probably not use Highland Lao specific funds for these organizations except to operate highly specific placement programs.

This leaves a balance of one dozen communities in which there are enough Highland Lao refugees to warrant consideration and in which it is not clear whether appropriate levels

of service will be provided without special funding. It is these (and similar unstudied) sites that would be the subject of the previously mentioned annual inventory.

2. Other Specific Recommendations.

In addition to the basic recommendations to ORR on its approach to the continuing needs of the Highland Lao refugees, the following suggestions are made to the Congress, the Department of State, and to ORR.

To the Congress: One of the principal reasons why refugees in the high-benefit-level states remain on cash assistance is the all-or-nothing 100-hour rule. While most income transfer programs encourage part-time or temporary employment by trimming benefits as wages increase, the 100-hour rule wipes out all benefits (including Medicaid in many situations) once 100 hours of work are performed by the primary wage-earner in a month. The rule is counter-productive and should be repealed.

To the Bureau of Refugee Programs, U.S. Department of State: While the flow of Hmong refugees out of the camps in Thailand is much lower now than in the past, there presumably will continue to be some movement to the United States. The reception and placement program for these new refugees should be managed in such a way as to take advantage of the experiences of the Highland Lao with the HLI. Specifically, newly arriving Highland Lao refugees should be strongly

p. 124 encouraged to settle in Highland Lao communities where employment rates are high and welfare utilization rates are low. The newly arriving refugees will want to locate near family members, but given the nature of Highland family relationships, many will have relatives in high employment areas as well as in California.

Further, the volags handling Highland Lao refugees should be strongly encouraged to subcontract these placements to existing, already-funded Highland Lao MAAs.

To ORR: When funding HLI-like programs in the next few years, these specifics could be borne in mind:

1. At least some outreach services will be needed for some time to come in all Highland Lao communities. Direct placement and vocational training proved to be good investments during the HLI. Modest farm-and-garden projects were appropriate, but only for a year or two. Small business assistance did not work well.
2. Agencies serving Highland Lao, and other small refugee communities, should be required to conduct an annual census to determine the size and the nature of the community, and to insure at least one annual contact between each family and the ORR-funded agency. Similarly, simple placement and ESL enrollment and attendance records systems need to be developed and their use should be mandated.
3. Technical assistance should be provided to these agencies, particularly the newly-funded MAAs.
4. Refugee participation in decision-making, in cases where service providers are funded, should be mandated. In this connection, ORR might insist, for example, that agencies

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receiving HLI-like funds must employ one full or part-time Highland Lao refugee, and have one or more on the agency's board of directors.

What Should Be Done If There is a Similar Challenge in the Future.

If there is to be another refugee population (scattered and substantially disadvantaged) and if there is a need to mount a specific program for them *i.e.*, replicate the HLI, the following points should be noted:

1. *Remember the HLI!* Not a catchy slogan but appropriate advice. Data were gathered swiftly, decisions made quickly, and a number of grants were made in a short time for a group of communities in real need. That was a major accomplishment and should replication be needed, the history of the HLI should be studied.
2. *Do Not Re-invent the Wheel.* Whatever the background of the refugees, and whatever the extent and content of their needs, the government will be asked to support something that the government has done again, and again. A
3. language will be taught, skills acquired, jobs sought. Existing knowledge on these subjects should be used as the new program is designed. p. 126
4. *Gather Data with a Grain of Salt.* The HLI was designed against an adequate data base, but there were several instances in which the size of the grant was based on what turned out to be an exaggerated population (*e.g.*, Decatur) or an understated existing level of services (*e.g.*, Billings and Sheboygan).
5. *Make the Ground Rules Clear from the Start.* Communications problems complicated the implementation of many of the HLI grants as different participants received different signals about a complex and varied program. In the future, it might be helpful to draft a simple statement of program principals and translate it into the appropriate language or languages. It certainly would be a good idea to let refugee leaders know that there are strings (and sensible ones) attached to federal money.
6. *Consider the Inherent Tradeoffs.* There is a predictable tension between creativity and order, between local autonomy and central control, between ethnic self-government and traditional government procedures. The HLI opted for the first of each of these paired options with the results that have been described. Such were probably the appropriate choice, and those who choose similarly in the
7. future should recognize from the start that the price will be some failures, some waste, and some displeasure by some American officials in the process. p. 127
8. *Avoid Too Much Too Soon.* Public-service organizations, like private sector organizations, can grow safely only so fast. This is particularly true if the organization is in the hands of newcomers to a nation. This should be remembered as initial grants are distributed. Similarly, if at all possible, allowances should be made for a funded planning period, and the grants or contracts should run for two years.
9. *Provide Plenty of Technical Assistance.* The newly arrived refugees from country X, like the Highland Lao, probably do a lot of things very well, but providing services with federal money and within the context of American rules and procedures, will probably not be one of them. A lot of careful, thoughtful, but firm assistance will be needed. MAAs will need to learn about American organizational methods and the service providers will need to

encourage the refugees from country X to participate in decision-making and service delivery.

p. 128 APPENDIX

Methodology

Two elements in the study's methodology are described for readers interested in such matters; these are the site selection process and the organization of the field work.

There were two rounds of field work, the first during the late summer and early fall of 1984 while the HLI was still in operation in all sites and the second some six months later. Generally, the objective was to contact a majority of the sites on the first round, and to select a smaller group of sites where additional information was needed for the second round.

It was clear from the start that ORR had funded a study/evaluation that would reach out to most, but not all, of the HLI-funded projects. Further, the budget was such that some sites could be visited, and others would have to be covered by telephone. It was decided to conduct 13 field visits, and cover 17 additional sites by telephone during the first round. In this way, approximately two-thirds of the locations were covered. There were 47 funded projects, one with a state-wide focus, and 46 with a local focus in 44 different localities.

The first round site selection process consisted of four steps:

p. 129 Step One: Four sites were eliminated for various reasons. The major farm project in Minnesota was dropped because it was being evaluated extensively through other means; the state-wide economic development project in Wisconsin was barely underway. The Fort Smith project was not included because the Hmong had left that city and the project was not in operation. Providence was eliminated because it had been covered in another study and was regarded as a non-crucial site. This left 43 projects.

Step Two: There were seven somewhat similar projects in Illinois, and seven somewhat similar projects in Wisconsin. It was decided that four of each would be sufficient, producing, at this point, eight selected projects, ten eliminated ones, and 29 still to be considered.

Step Three: It was decided that the three remaining direct national grants (one in Philadelphia and two in Akron) should be examined. Since there was a third project in Akron, it was decided that the Akron field visit should cover all three projects. At this point, 12 projects had been selected, ten eliminated and 25 remained.

Step Four: Here the task was to select 20 projects from the remaining 25. The five eliminated were Columbus, Saginaw, Missoula, Spokane and Salem. Each represented a project in a state in which one or more other projects were scheduled to be studied; and each represented a smaller Highland Lao cluster than could be found elsewhere in the state.

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Another factor borne in mind during this step was the presence of non-Hmong Highland Lao refugees in the selected sites. Seattle, Portland, and Montgomery, all with non-Hmong Highland Lao refugees, were among the selected sites.

It was determined that the second round of interviewing should consist of eight site visits and nine telephone reviews. Each of the eight visited sites had been covered by telephone previously, and seven of the nine telephone sites had been visited previously. The complete listing of first and second round sites is shown as Exhibit 22.

The field work was organized on a bi-lingual basis with each team of visitors, or telephone interviewers, consisting of one Hmong and one non-Hmong. Background data kits prepared for each site to be studied included materials drawn from ORR's files on the project, copies of the original proposal, correspondence between ORR and the projects, Bureau of Labor Statistics and Census data, and project progress reports. Before the teams entered the field, they made calls to both the regional offices and the state coordinators concerned, to alert those offices to the visits and secure insights and recent information on the projects. Appointments were also made with key personnel before the team's arrival.

The first round site visits lasted five days, and included some weekend as well as weekday time so that grantee staff and other social service professionals could be interviewed in their offices during business hours, and refugees

could be interviewed when they were neither working nor attending class. The evaluators spoke in English, in Hmong and sometimes in Lao, with refugees using the HLI services and with refugee community leaders. Community meetings were often called to facilitate group input.

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In addition to a series of interviews with personnel in the HLI-funded programs, in other refugee-serving agencies and in welfare and employment agencies, the teams examined the reports and case files of the HLI programs. In many cases, the program records were not well organized to facilitate research, and the teams had to tabulate data from whatever material was available. (In one case, the project director kept all of the records in his diary.)

The teams subsequently assembled their notes, shared them with the other teams, and held two two-day meetings in Washington to discuss their findings.

Most of the exhibits are based on the teams' field work. In a few instances, data from ORR, from the Census and from the Bureau of Labor Statistics were used.

An excellent background source, which is cited occasionally in the body of this report, is the series of reports which were produced during *The Hmong Resettlement Study* by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory under contract with ORR. Two of the researchers on those reports, Messrs. Downing

and Finck, are among the authors of this report. Four of the authors, Messrs. Finck, Thao, Vang and Yang, have worked, or are currently working, in programs that serve Highland Lao refugees.

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