HMONG RPA
Writing System Project

December 30, 2025

Conducted by Dr. Zha Blong Xiong and Members of the Research Team, Core Team, and Community Advisory Council

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A Project of MN Zej Zog

December 30, 2025

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This activity is made possible by the Minnesota Legacy Amendment's Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund.

HMONG RPA Community Advisory Council

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Higher Ed Student

Jennifer Thao
Dance Instructor/Cultural Expert

Kachsia Vue
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Ed.D.

Therese Jasperson
Doctoral Student
Community Expert/HMONG Linguist Consultant

Yer Her
Educator

Zang Vang-Lee
Career: Educator/Executive Director of Hmong Early Childhood Coalition

Mission of MN Zej Zog

MN Zej Zog empowers the Hmong community by nurturing the Hmong language, healing through the arts and wellness, and education across generations.

What we do at MN Zej Zog

MN Zej Zog grew out of extended grassroots efforts over the last decade and has finally turned our passionate work into a nonprofit in 2020. The board at MN Zej Zog is 90% Hmong-led, made up of dedicated educators, parents, and youth leaders. Our grassroots network has over 200+ Hmong professionals and has impacted 10,000+ Hmong people from all across the United States for the last decade.

Our collaborations are amongst six primarily volunteer-based programs, which emerged in response to direct calls from Hmong youth, parents, and educators for resources related to Hmong language revitalization through Hmong language and culture education (The National Coalition of Hmong Language Educators), Hmong arts and cultural education (Voice and Power with the Arts), Hmong youth leadership and power-building (C.L.I.M.B. Youth Program), Hmong community mental health and wellness education (Project Tshav Ntuj), Hmong MN Educators Support (MN Hmong Educators Coalition), Making the Brooklyns Our Home, and our latest initiative—iStrive Hmong Summer Camp.

The thread that connects these efforts is recognition of the power and impact of Hmong language and culture revitalization and sustainability in recognizing and healing the mental and emotional impacts of intergenerational traumas experienced by the Hmong community's survival of genocide, family separations through refugee displacements, and socioeconomic and racial barriers experienced as multilingual immigrant people of color in the United States.

MN Zej Zog

MN Zej Zog's primary concern is bringing Hmong community visions for social transformation to life by supporting community-driven initiatives and leveraging the extensive social fabric of the Hmong community to organize, communicate, teach, and strengthen in ways that support Hmong language and cultural knowledge, hope, healing, and mental-emotional wellness.

Some of our 2021 activities to create social transformational changes this year include national and local initiatives: arts and healing sessions, virtual Hmong film showing, healthy eating at the Brooklyn Center Thursday's Farmer's Market, virtual kwv txhiaj/lug txhaj class, national professional development training on Hmong Ethnic Studies and Hmong Leng/Ntsuab curriculum, collaboration with the City of Brooklyn Center & Brooklyn Park to make the Brooklyns more like home to the Hmong people, Hmong New Year celebration in Brooklyn Park, QPR training, and virtual mental health concert, amongst many other projects.

Furthermore, MN Zej Zog's community organizing efforts leverage the commitments shown across the community and are led by Hmong community member leaders who have long-standing relationships with and investment from youth, parents, and educators to shift narratives and make changes to the fabric of inequality and harms the Hmong community has experienced since being settled as refugees in the United States.

Nonetheless, the connecting thread of these is the role of language revitalization and reclaiming cultural knowledge. Not only are bilingualism and intercultural knowledge kept strong in the community, but they also create space to recognize the mental health impacts of intergenerational trauma within the community, because Hmong educators and parents are the first line for identifying warning signs and efforts to self-medicate.

Our WHY

When people think of Minnesota, they may think of beautiful lakes, the Iron Range and North Shore, the Mall of America, or its innovative arts and theater. But Minnesota is also home to a rich and diverse culture and heritage of people.

The state's 78% White/European American population has a rich heritage with the cultures and traditions of England, Ireland, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Russia, Ukraine, and other smaller European nations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

The other 22% of Minnesotans enrich the state with the cultures, languages, and heritages of its Indigenous peoples (i.e., Dakota and Ojibwe peoples), African Americans (including recent refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, Liberia, Congo and the Republic of South Sudan, and Eritrea), Asian Americans (including South Indians, Burmese, Cambodians, Chinese, Hmong, Filipino, Japanese, Karen, Korean, Lao, Thai, Vietnamese, and other smaller groups), Latino Americans (i.e., Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Ecuadorians, Cubans, and Colombians), and the newest Minnesotans such as Afghans and Syrians (Gutierrez & Richmond, 2021; Katsiaficas & Park, 2018; Ronningen, 2000; Taylor, 2002).

This diversity is also reflected in the fast-growing dual language learner (DLL) population in Minnesota. According to Katsiaficas and Park (2018), between 2000 and 2015, the DLL population grew by 77%, with languages from Central America, Somalia, and Southeast Asia being most common. Minnesota is home to the largest urban Hmong population in the world, the largest Somali population in the country, and the second largest population of Tibetan refugees in the US (Kohnert et al., 2003).

Like most immigrant groups in the US, the Hmong language is dying. Research shows that by the third generation, most children of immigrants (i.e., 90% of Asian American children) will speak only English at home (Alba et al., 2002). Studies suggest that many young Hmong parents in contemporary society are speaking only in English to their children (Lee, 2002), and most second-generation Hmong children are more likely to speak English to their parents and family members (Xiong et al., 2018). Recently, this language shift has prompted several dissertations to call attention to this urgent need in the Hmong community across the US (Moua, 2018; Xiong, 2019). Indeed, McLit: Marathon County Literacy Council, Inc. (2020) predicted that by the end of the twenty-first century the Hmong language will completely disappear. This proposed grant is an attempt to elevate the importance of the Hmong language and to continue the vital work that schools across the state are doing (Lor, 2021; Xiong et al., 2023), since research shows that maintaining the heritage language is beneficial to families, including children, and society. For example, speaking in the heritage language has been linked to intergenerational relationships and children's psychological and educational development (Cho & Krashen, 1998).

The Hmong language is on the verge of extinction. More and more Hmong children are speaking English at home and school (Lo, 2023; Panoo, 2023; Xiong et al., 2018). However, in In recent years there has been a concerted effort to preserve the Hmong language, particularly from educators across the state. For example, since 2000 there have been a handful of Hmong-centric charter schools authorized to teach Hmong language and culture as part of the school curriculum (Lor, 2021; Xiong et al., 2018). Additionally, in St. Paul, several Hmong educational programs have been initiated to offer the Hmong language to Hmong students based on the dual language immersion model (St. Paul Public Schools, n.d.). At the University of Minnesota and Concordia University, Hmong language classes continue to be offered to Hmong students at various levels. However, little is known about these efforts and whether they include various dialects of the Hmong language.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

AMOUNT & SOURCE FUNDING

$288,000 FY24
$292,000 FY25
This appropriation is available until June 30, 2028
Additional funding from the community: $2,000.00

DURATION OF THE PROJECT

June 24, 2024-June 30, 2028

NUMBER OF FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS FUNDED UNDER THE PROJECT

3.38 FTE

The direct expenses and administration costs of the projects in FY 25:
No indirect or administration costs in this project.

Direct expenses—$168,644.08

Not applicable for pass-through, noncompetitive grants, the entity acting as the fiscal agent or administering agency, and a point of contact for additional information.

Thank you to our donors for supporting this project: Shongleng Yang and Nou Fue Cha

Overview

*This research report covers accomplishments from June 24, 2024 to December 2025

Informed by the pioneering work of previous researchers, educators, and community leaders, the project is centered around education and outreach in the Mong/Hmong and HMoob/Hmong communities. The project respects cultural accuracy, historical continuity, and community relevance by acknowledging and drawing on the scholarship that precedes it. This work is deeply shaped by these pioneer scholars. Some areas and issues were addressed.

The key problems that this project seeks to solve are cultural identity and terminology, specifically the use and understanding of Mong/Hmong and HMoob/Hmong. Informed public awareness, which prioritizes respectful representation and self-identification.

This project addresses the issues of the preservation and transmission of knowledge, creating access for community members and the public at large to perspectives both historical and contemporary.

These topics have been core to previous conversations and still frame the project’s educational aims.

Further, to make the education surrounding the project areas and issues more accessible across a variety of audiences, it is delivered through multiple venues:

- Website: Provides a master resource for education and project updates. It offers access to the existing scholarship in written form. Where practical, it adds visual images (maps or geographic references) to where projects or associated initiatives have occurred.
- Radio and Television. Applied for the purpose of extending reach beyond the online community. Enables talking about Mong/Hmong and HMoob/Hmong issues in bite-sized formats. It engages elders and community members who would prefer oral or broadcast media.
- On the phone, with personal contacts. Facilitates education and communication based on relations. Informs community consultations, clarifies the language, and shares the project's goal.

Overview

All these means of initiatives support and boost trust that helps ensure accountability in the communities that include the multiple perspectives and voices.

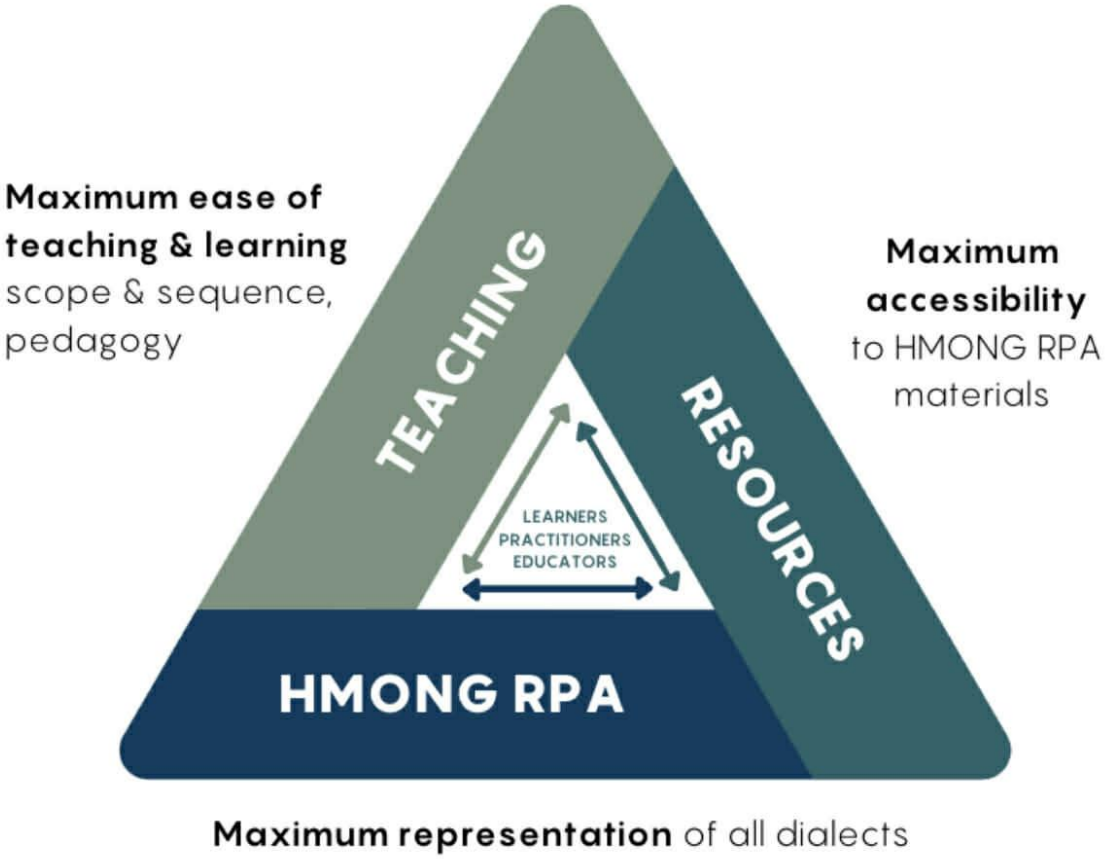
In terms of scoping as well as mapping (when feasible), which shows where actions and efforts have been taken or projects have been carried out, it helps to illustrate:

1. Geographic sites for local involvement, such as in areas where there's a high density of Hmong residency.
2. Educational institutions that incorporate and have Hmong language programs and have a shared value of investment in Hmong language programs, language reclamation, and preservation.
3. Regional focus areas are linked to the Mong/Hmong and HMoob/Hmong people. The greater reach and influence of the project's educational effort. For example, community organizations that have higher counts of a specific dialect. Connections of national language groups that can support in providing guiding feedback and critical feedback for the improvement and advancement of the Hmong RPA project work.

To conclude this part using a scholarly approach, multisite education, and community-based communication, the project targets the critical cultural and identity-related issues that impact Mong/Hmong and HMoob/Hmong communities. A website, broadcast media, personal outreach, and if possible, maps make it easy to understand important issues, making education about these concepts accessible, respectful, and well-documented.

FRAMEWORK Development

Each component is guided by the Hmong RPA maximums, which make sure that everything remains consistent, understandable, and sustainable over time.



FRAMEWORK Development

In this part of the report, we outline the development of a standard framework for a unified Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA) Hmong writing system and provide guidance for future work.

The purpose of this framework is to strengthen, standardize, and enhance the existing Hmong RPA system while maintaining continuity with current literacy practices. The framework is designed to be additive rather than disruptive, ensuring that reform improves representation and usability without erasing the established writing system.

The proposed framework is guided by established orthographic principles, particularly Smalley's (1965) orthographic "maximums" and Parkhurst's (1993) criteria for transfer and reproduction. Together, these principles ensure that the unified Hmong RPA system is linguistically sound, socially motivated, learnable, and technologically feasible.

As the team progresses forward into the standard framework, this consists of three main components between foundational analysis and the final product. These are all integrated in the Hmong RPA writing system:

Component 1: Phonetics and Orthographic Enhancement
Component 2: Adoption of a Unified Standard Hmong RPA Framework
Component 3: Final Product – A Unified RPA Hmong Writing System.

FRAMEWORK Development

We start with the first component: phonetics and orthographic enhancement. Which is to perform phonetic analysis and specifically improve the current RPA writing system. It helps determine what sounds, contrasts, and pronunciations throughout Hmong dialects are incomplete or inaccurate in the existing orthography.

Key objectives include:

1. Consolidating phonetic representation without dismantling the Hmong RPA system as it currently stands.
2. Using additive changes to allow sounds previously unknown to be easily written. Making sure that suggested changes are methodical, intuitive, and supportive of existing literacy practices.

The second component: Adoption of a Unified Standard Hmong RPA Framework establishes a standardized framework that unifies dialectal representation under a shared orthographic system. This framework serves as a guiding structure rather than a rigid replacement, allowing for inclusive representation of major dialects.

Key objectives include:

- Aligning phonetic improvements with a standardized set of orthographic rules.
- Ensuring consistency across dialects while maintaining readability and usability.
- Promoting community acceptance through clarity, motivation, and ease of learning.

This stage bridges phonetic refinement with broader standardization, ensuring that reforms are scalable and socially viable.

FRAMEWORK Development

The last component in this stage produces a structured and standardized set of frameworks for a unified RPA Hmong writing system. This product combines phonetic improvements and standardization principles into a coherent orthographic model suitable for education, publication, and digital use.

The ultimate result has the following goals.

- Serve as a reference model for future curriculum development and literacy efforts.
- Support cross-dialect communication and literacy.
- Enable long-term sustainability through technological compatibility and ease of reproduction.

Digital resources to support this work are still in development and will be available to share on the Hmong RPA project website shortly.

RPA Maximums

The main scope of the standardized work was informed by this model of the orthographic maximums, initially pioneered by Smalley in 1965.

C1 Maximum Motivation

The orthographic reform recommended should exert maximal appeal to the speakers to discover and utilize the writing system (Smalley, 1965).

C2 Maximum Representation

The reform must maximize and faithfully represent the language for both of those predominant dialects, with phonological distinctions as close to the individual dialects as possible (Smalley, 1965).

C3 Maximum Ease of Learning

It is ideal that students of speech or linguistic background be able to learn and use the writing system easily and efficiently (Smalley, 1965).

C4 Maximum Transfer

The symbols that could be used in this reform would resemble those of the national language (e.g., English), helping transfer literacy to Hmong and to the national language (Parkhurst, 1993).

C5 Maximum Ease of Reproduction

This writing system should be easily reproducible using typing and printing, drawing on the tools of computers (Parkhurst, 1993).

C6 Maximum Additive Orthographic Reform (Revised)

The reforms should complement, and not eliminate, the existing written form. It should include sounds and spelling that the present Hmong RPA system fails to capture and make improvements, not change or substitute the orthography that is already present.

The Framework

Can serve as a systematic, principled tool to support the advancement and development of a unified RPA Hmong writing system. Which is centered around additive reform, phonetic accuracy, learning simplicity, and technological viability, the model underlines the importance of continuity and innovation in the model.

In the future, work will have to be more focused, and greater attention will have to be given to the following needs:

1. Consultation and feedback with the community.
2. Pilot testing in educational and digital contexts.
3. Incremental approach that aligns with literacy goals.

This unified Hmong RPA framework can be used to build Hmong literacy while respecting the historical and cultural foundations of the existing writing system.

Proposed AIMS

AIM 1 Bring together a core team of experts in Hmong culture, clan system, history, language, teaching, curriculum development, and research to review and improve the Hmong RPA writing system. The team will collaborate with the community to develop and adopt a standards framework for a unified RPA system. **Revised AIM** To bring experts from various fields to engage the Hmong community to improve, develop, and/or adopt a standards framework of the unified RPA writing system. **We achieved 100% of AIM 1 of the proposed outcome.**	**AIM 2** Engage stakeholders (Citizen Advisory Committee and focus groups) to review existing teaching materials and curricula to help shape a preliminary standards framework for a unified Latin alphabet-based Hmong RPA writing system. **Revised AIM** To engage specific stakeholders to review existing teaching materials and curricula to develop the preliminary standards framework of the unified and standardized Hmong RPA writing system. **We achieved 50-99% of the proposed outcome in AIM 2.**
AIM 3 Refine the preliminary standards framework by conducting community listening sessions (by dialect, religion, gender, age, and generation) to determine key components (language use, expectations, and proficiency levels), alignment with U.S. contexts, grade clusters, sequence, and feasibility. **Revised AIM** To engage the larger Hmong Minnesotan community to improve the scope, sequence, pedagogy, and feasibility of the standards framework of the unified RPA writing system. **We achieved 10-99% of the proposed outcome in AIM 3.**	**AIM 4** Pilot test the refined standards framework across five sites (elementary, junior high, high school, higher education, and community) to gather feedback and finalize the framework for implementation in the first school cohort. **Revised AIM** To adopt the preliminary standards framework of the unified RPA writing system, pilot test the scope, sequence, and pedagogy of the standards framework of the unified RPA writing system, and gather feasibility data to adjust the final standards framework to be implemented in K-14 and higher education settings. **We achieved 0% of the proposed outcomes in aim 4.**

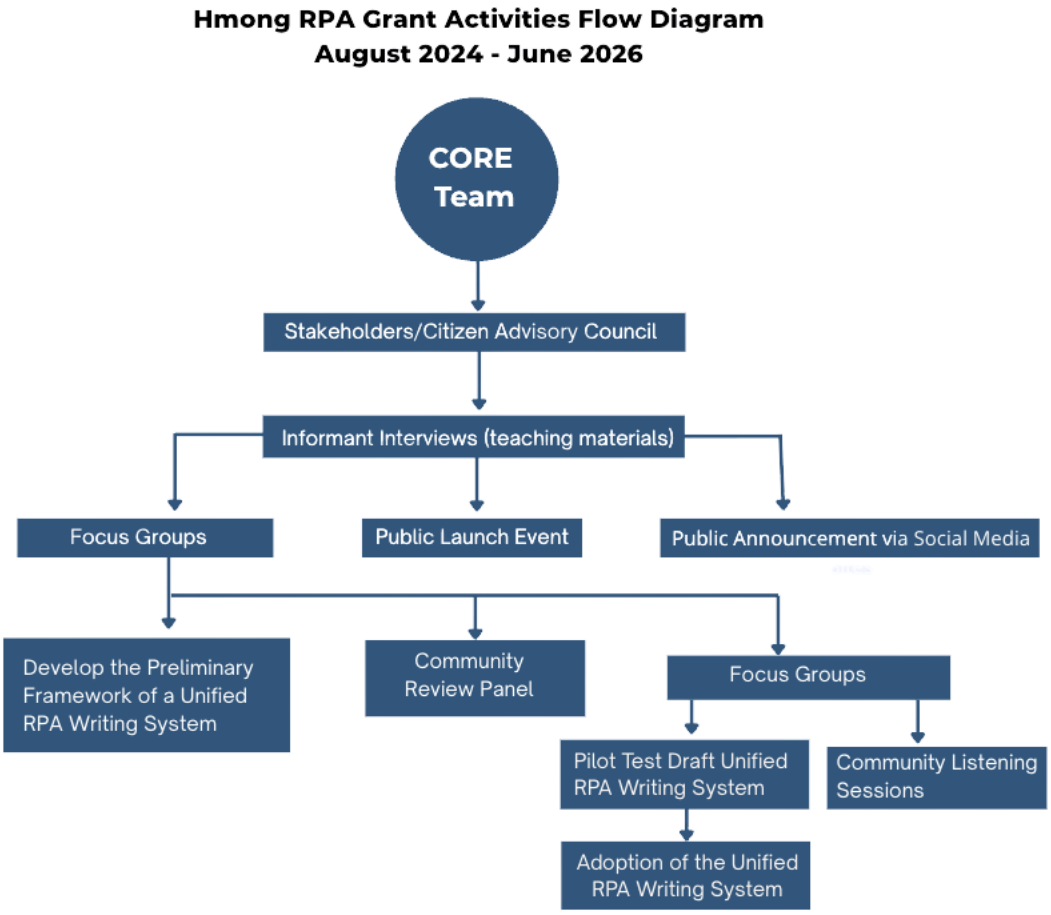
Flow Chart

Hmong RPA Grant Activities Flow Diagram

1. **Core Team**
    a. Staff (MN Zej Zog) and collaborators (University of Minnesota, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, Concordia University-St. Paul, and K-12 Hmong Language system leaders)
2. **Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) members (n=13)**
    a. Community members who have a strong command of the Hmong language from various sectors of the community, including different genders, White Hmong and Green Hmong dialects, and first- and second-generation.
3. **Informant Interviews (n=15-20)**
    a. Samples include CAC members and key stakeholders, especially language teachers, in the community.
    b. Collect teaching materials for review, if feasible.
4. **Public Announcement via Social Media Sites, 3HmongTV, and Hmong Radio Shows**
    a. Communicate to the public about the Hmong RPA Project: what is it, why is it, who is involved, how is the work done, and what is the timeline?
5. **Public Launch Event**
    a. Bring the community together to learn more about the Hmong RPA Project and provide feedback to the core team.
    b. Involve the media to make a “splash” and supporters of the project.
6. **Focus Groups (n= 2 groups)**
    a. Follow up with individuals from the public launch event to gather additional information about the direction of the project.
7. **Develop the Preliminary Framework of a Unified RPA Writing System**
    a. Putting the data together to develop a preliminary framework for the project.
8. **Community Review Panel (n=5-7)**
    a. Work with a small group of Hmong language experts to review, critique, and improve the preliminary framework.
9. **Focus Groups (n=2-3 groups)**
    a. Collect feedback from 2-3 groups of experts about the preliminary framework.
10. **Community Listening Sessions (n=3 sessions)**
    a. Get the community to provide feedback to the draft preliminary framework.
11. **Pilot Test the Draft Unified RPA Writing System (n=5 sites)**
    a. Put the draft preliminary framework to the test (feasibility & outcome-based study with 5 sites).
12. **Adoption of the Unified RPA Writing System**
    a. Revise the preliminary framework, let the CAC members and community review panel review it, and finalize it for implementation.
    b. Submit the final report to the State of Minnesota.

From: Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, Altman DG, The PRISMA Group (2009). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement. PLoS Med 6(7): e1000097. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed1000097

Flow Chart



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INTRODUCTION

To the HMONG RPA (Romanized Popular Alphabet) Writing System Project

Although Minnesota is home to the largest urban Hmong population in the U.S., research suggests that many young Hmong parents are speaking only in English to their children (Lee, 2002), and most second- and third-generation Hmong children are more likely to speak only English to their parents and family members (Xiong et al., 2018). McLit: Marathon County Literacy Council, Inc. (2020) predicted that by the end of the twenty-first century the Hmong language will completely disappear. Although there has been a concerted effort to preserve the Hmong language (Lor, 2021; Xiong et al., 2018), little has been done to develop and adopt a unified and standardized Latin alphabet form of the Hmong Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA) writing system, originally developed in 1952 to preserve the Hmong language. Therefore, the Hmong RPA Writing System Project (hereafter referred to as the RPA Project) aims to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To bring experts from various fields to engage the Hmong community to improve, develop, and/or adopt a standards framework of the unified RPA writing system.
2. To engage specific stakeholders to review existing teaching materials and curricula to develop the preliminary standards framework of the unified and standardized Hmong RPA writing system.
3. To engage the larger Hmong Minnesotan community to improve the scope, sequence, pedagogy, and feasibility of the standards framework of the unified RPA writing system.
4. To adopt the preliminary standards framework of the unified RPA writing system; pilot test the scope, sequence, and pedagogy of the standards framework of the unified RPA writing system; and gather feasibility data to adjust the final standards framework to be implemented in K-14 and higher education settings.

Our gratitude also goes to our editors, Emil Angelica and Ethan Angelica, who have

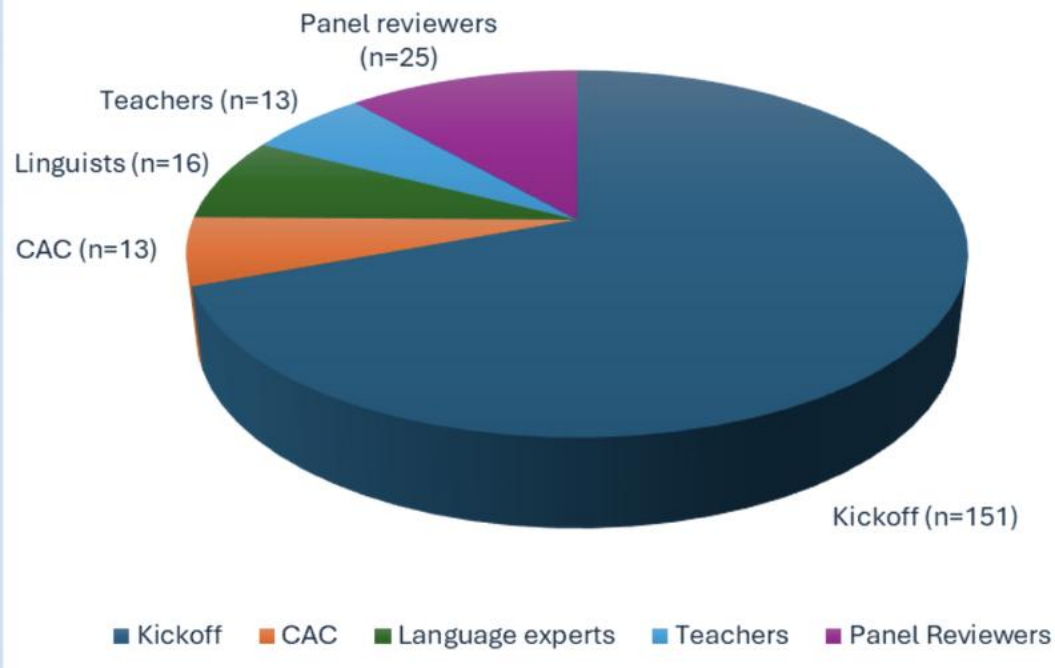
spent countless hours to contribute to this report.

METHODS

Procedures

To engage the Hmong community and bring experts from various disciplinary fields to review, improve, develop, and/or adopt a standards framework of a unified RPA writing system, the RPA Project conducted a series of focus groups and interviews with various community members (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Numbers of Participants in Various Interviews and Focus Groups



Community Kickoff Focus Groups. The first of this series was the Community Kickoff Focus Groups. The Community Kickoff Event was designed to launch the project to the community and tap into people's concerns and opinions about reforming the Hmong RPA writing system.

Participants were invited in multiple ways during the first week of January 2025, including an announcement of the project via Hmong Twin Cities News channel (), Facebook posts, and text messages to family members, friends, and colleagues. For example, the media announcement reached

7,400 viewers with 175 comments.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBHWJAZGP8Q

METHODS

During the Community Kickoff Event (January 18, 2025; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7Vd9iWSH7E; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HO6WQHnRwz4), more than 300 people participated. Of the 300+ people who attended, 236 people were registered, and 151 (64% response rate) individuals chose to participate in 33 small focus groups.

Furthermore, the YouTube videos of the event (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HO6WQHnRwz4; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7Vd9iWSH7E) also reached out to more than 3,700 viewers and 132 comments.

Sample Characteristics of the Kickoff Participants. As can be seen in Table 1, those who attended the kickoff focus groups were diverse, representing different geographical areas, genders, age groups, educational levels, and religious affiliations.

Table 1. Kickoff Focus Group Participants' Characteristics

Participants' Characteristics	**Percentage (%)**
Residence	
Saint Paul	41%
Minneapolis	5%
Other cities	47%
Out of state	3%
Gender	
Male	57%
Female	42%
Age	
Under 35	14%
36-55	42%
56-75	42%
Over 75	.02%
Immigration Status	
U.S.-born	20%
Foreign-born	79%
Education	
HS Diploma or lower	20%

Some college and AA degree	29%
Bachelor's degree	24%
Master's degree or higher	27%
Religious/Spiritual Affiliation	
Animism/Ancestor Worship	32%
Christianity	36%
Other	26%
Marital status	
Single, never married	12%
Married	79%
Divorced & widowed	8%

Language Experts and Teachers. After learning more about the Hmong language, the RPA writing system, and issues related to pedagogy and standardization, interview questions were refined to conduct one-to-one interviews with Hmong language teachers and Hmong language experts (hereafter referred to as linguists). Hmong language teachers were recruited from the Minnesota Zej Zog's listserv, and Hmong linguists were recruited from acquaintances from the community and those who contacted members of the Core Team[1] after learning about the Hmong RPA Writing System Project from the kickoff event and CAC interviews. Tables 2 and 3 describe some demographic information of participants from both interviews.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of Hmong teachers

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Generation	Dialect	Education	Religion
Mai Neng	38	Female	2nd	White	MA	Animism
Kalia	39	Female	2nd	White	MA	Animism
Mai Lee	40	Female	2nd	White	BA	Animism
May	42	Female	2nd	White	BA	Animism
Ka	45	Female	2nd	White	MA	Christianity
Tongneng	49	Male	1.5	Green	MA	Christianity
Sia	50	Female	1.5	White	MA	Christianity
Kue	51	Female	1.5	White	MA	Animism
Sai	53	Female	1.5	Green	MA	Animism

[1] Core Team is the collaborative group that is responsible for executing the aims of the Hmong RPA Project.

Wa Sao	55	Male	1.5	Green	BA	Christianity
Moony	56	Female	1.5	White	MA	Christianity
Nhia Kao	57	Male	1.5	White	BA	Christianity
Tong Soua	58	Male	1.5	Green	MA	Christianity

Community Advisory Council (CAC). After the kickoff event, we conducted one-to-one interviews with members of the community advisory council (CAC), who were selected due to their varied lived experiences and positions in the community. As can be seen in Table 2, the CAC includes 13 members from different parts of the community (i.e., 4 from St. Paul, 1 from Minneapolis, and 7 from other cities) that represent different dialects (6 white Hmong and 7 green Hmong), ages, genders, and generations (see Table 3). Note that all names have been replaced with a pseudonym to protect their identities.

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of CAC Members

Pseudonym	**Age**	**Gender**	**Generation**	**Dialect**	**Education**	**Religion**
Xu	18	Male	2nd	White	College	Animism
Mee	20	Female	2nd	White	College	Other
Teng	25	Male	2nd	Green	AA	Christianity
Song	29	Female	2nd	Green	BA	Christianity
Kao	35	Male	2nd	White	MA	Animism
Kia	38	Female	2nd	White	MA	Animism
Fai-Long	40	Male	2nd	Green	AA	Animism
Chee	44	Female	2nd	Green	MA	Animism
Mo	50	Female	2nd	Green	PhD	Christianity
Ma	50	Female	1st	White	MA	Christianity
Va	50	Female	1st	Green	AA	Animism
Tria	53	Female	1st	White	MA	Other
Ker	70	Female	1st	Green	AA	Animism

Table 4. Demographic characteristics of Hmong linguists

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Generation	Dialect	Education	Religion
Nai Fuam	62	Male	1st	White	AA	Christianity
Nenghue	65	Male	1st	Green	EdD	Animism
Khamphu	64	Male	1st	White	BA	Animism
Liaxa	65	Male	1st	White	Less than HS	Animism
Es	59	Male	1st	White	MA	Animism
Xengxue	79	Male	1st	White	Less than HS	Animism
Nejxeem	81	Male	1st	Green	Less than HS	Animism
Nejtustav	59	Male	1st	White	HS	Christianity
Ncas	63	Male	1st	White	HS	Christianity
Zaumno	69	Male	1st	White	HS	Animism
Hmoovsav	76	Male	1st	White	Less than HS	Animism
Tswvzos	56	Male	1st	White	Some college	Animism
Xajmaim	70	Male	1st	Green	Some college	Christianity
Sijhawm	65	Male	1st	Green	EdD	Christianity
Pabhuas	71	Male	1st	Green	PhD	Christianity
Nyiamlawm	64	Male	1st	Green	PhD	Christianity

AIM 1 FINDINGS

Kickoff Focus Group Results: Concerns Most about the Hmong Language

Based on the demographic survey[2], most participants (65.7%) believed that the Hmong language is moving beyond the vulnerable level to the "threatened" and "endangered" levels (see Table 5). Vulnerable level is when all adults and some children in the community are still speaking Hmong. However, once the community moves toward the threatened and endangered levels, the chance of losing the language is at a much higher risk since children generally are not speaking Hmong in their daily conversations (Lee & Way, 2016).

Table 5. Language endangerment by community members (Frequency = 151)

Language Endangerment Scale[3]	**N(%)**
Vulnerable – All adults and some children are Hmong speakers	31 (20.4%)
Threatened – Most adults in the Hmong community are Hmong speakers, but children generally are not	49 (32.2%)
Endangered – **Some** adults in the Hmong community are Hmong speakers, but the language is not spoken by children	30 (19.7%)
Severely endangered – Many of the grandparents' generation speak Hmong, but the younger people do not	18 (11.8%)
Critically endangered – There are only a few elders in the Hmong community are Hmong speakers or still speak Hmong	3 (2%)

[2] During the focus groups, members of the community were asked to discuss the following questions, along with a short demographic survey that also included a language vitality item that was borrowed from Lee and Way (2016; see Table 5)

[3] (Lee & Way, 2016). Assessing levels of endangerment in the Catalogue of Endangered Languages (ELCat) using the Language Endangerment Index (LEI). *Language in Society, 45*(2), 271-292.

AIM 1 FINDINGS

THEME: Language loss. "The gradual disappearance of the language"

To tap into people's concerns, we also asked 151 participants to share their perspectives during the focus groups. Themes from the focus groups provided nuanced insights into what participants were thinking about regarding the Hmong language and the Hmong RPA writing system.

The analysis revealed that most participants agreed that the Hmong language is gradually disappearing (see Table 6).

First, some participants expressed that the Hmong language is not the dominant or national language. Therefore, it does not incentivize children to use it every day since it has no educational and employment value.

Next, participants believed that as children participate less in day-to-day conversations in Hmong, they become less fluent. More importantly, some participants said that children who spoke in "broken Hmong" with a strong English accent have also been ridiculed by other family members, resulting in less efforts and/or frequent avoidance of conversing in Hmong, especially between parents and children. To these participants, they believed this pattern is what contributes to language loss.

Table 6. Concerns most about the Hmong language (Aim 1)

Theme	**Illustrative Quotations**
Hmong is not the dominant/national language	"The Hmong language is not incorporated into [family's] daily life and work. There is no financial value [to learn it]" (Table 24). "As soon as I entered into Kindergarten, they put me in ESL to prioritize English" (Table 33). Thus, "Parents [especially 1.5- and 2nd-generation parents] are not speaking to children in Hmong at home" (Tables 4, 10, 11, 22, 41, & 44). Thus, "Children don't have the opportunity to use the language at home. [For some families], "parents are very busy" (Table 7, 22 & 41). [For other families], "maybe, parents are not as patient when they have to explain what words mean when their children don't understand, so they resort to English" (Table 22).

Hmong children are no longer fluent in Hmong	“when speaking Hmong, children are not able to say some words because of the different tones” (Table 24). “Menyuam muab lub suav Hmoob los ua Mekas suab lawm [children have an English accent]” (Table 37). [For some children], “they can understand but are unable to speak the words because they can’t form the sounds with their mouth” (Table 41). Thus, “the meaning of the word and context is lost because of word choices” (Table 22).
Children are being ridiculed for their lack of fluency and accent	“Criticism and judgement from others for not knowing how to speak Hmong correctly” (Table 22).
Children are refusing to speak Hmong	“No matter how much we speak to them in Hmong, they respond to us in English, it’s very hard to help them keep speaking Hmong,...” (Table 1). “Children don't have an interest in learning.” (Table 4)
Communications between children and adults are decreasing	“Limited interaction with elders reduces opportunities to use the Hmong language, even if children are learning it in school” (Table 41)
Children are losing the Hmong language	“Hmong children don’t know the Hmong language.” (Table 9). “I’m 1st generation and my children know Hmong, but my grandchildren don’t know Hmong. I worry that after me, our children will no longer speak Hmong” (Table 1). “I am worried about our children, and they are losing our heritage language. This is because our Hmong people do not value our language” (Table 17).

AIM 1 FINDINGS

THEME: Concerns about the Hmong RPA Writing System

To help improve, develop, and/or adopt a standards framework of the unified RPA writing system, participants in the focus groups also asked to share their worries and concerns about the Hmong RPA writing system.

Although several focus group participants believed that the RPA is well designed to write both white and green dialects, easy to learn, easy to write, and is widely used across the globe, several focus group participants also advocated for reforming the Hmong RPA writing system to be more comprehensive and representative of all dialects (see Table 7).

Specifically, participants suggested that the Hmong RPA writing system should be reformed to include grammatical standards when writing, compound words, and an evaluation of the tones, vowels, and consonants to ensure all Hmong sounds (white and green) are represented.

Table 7. Concerns about the Hmong RPA Writing System (Aim 1)

Themes	**Illustrative Quotations**
Lack of grammatical standards	"A concern is that we need to fix the grammar and expand our vocabulary" (Tables 5 & 7). "Using the Hmong language with correct grammar" (Table 23). "Proper grammar should be used in teaching" (Tables 27 & 41).
Compound words	Compound words/combine words, and there's space in between two words when writing. For example, sij hawm vs. sijhawm" (Table 27).
Tones	"Tone marker or cim suab. When to use D tone and when not to use D tone verses the V tone" (Table 27). "Muaj ntau tus cim [too many tones]" (Table 22) "Add more tones to be inclusive"(Table 27)
Vowels	"There aren't enough vowels available to create new words in Hmong" (Table 32) "Some Lao, Thai, etc. sounds we don't have the exact spelling for… we do not have it, so provide it" (Table 30)
Consonants	"Some words we don't know how to write, to expand or add on to the language" (Table 10).

	“How will we fix or design a system that works with shortcuts such as nts → j? Shortening loses the meaning or is too similar to English?” (Table 4). “Children are confident in speaking, but they are having difficulties in writing due to more than one letter consonants” (Table 13). “Clusters such as ntxhw, ntshuag are hard. There was an example on YouTube of someone who can simplify the clusters…Some people have used shorthands to simplify words ‘kj’ for ‘koj.’” [The multiple consonant clusters] take too long to write.” (Table 29)
White vs. Green dialects	“Seems to not have a system to translate white to green. If green Hmong write, it is harder for white Hmong to read and goes both way” (Table 30) “We have a lot of different Hmong dialects and mixing the tones and dialects need to be merged into one” (Table 13).

AIM 1 FINDINGS

THEME: White and Green Dialects

“Seems to not have a system to translate white to green. If green Hmong write, it is harder for white Hmong to read and goes both way” (Table 30)
“We have a lot of different Hmong dialects and mixing the tones and dialects needs to be merged into one” (Table 13).

Note. Although we presented some of the concerns raised by some of the focus group participants here, there were several groups that also believed that the RPA is well designed to write both white and green dialects, easy to learn, easy to write, and widely used across the globe. As such, a few of the focus groups, as well as other elders in the community, advocated for not changing or simplifying the original tones, vowels, and consonants.

AIM 1 FINDINGS

THEME: Questions about combining writing systems

When asked whether other writing systems, such as the Pahawh, Paj Ntaub (Flower Hmong writing system), and the Nyiakeng Pauchue Hmong script (Long & Liu, 2023) should be combined with the Hmong RPA writing system for the reform, most participants did not believe that the Hmong RPA writing system should be merged or combined with other Hmong writing scripts. Table 8 provides specific reasons from the participants.

Table 8. Ideas for combining other writing scripts to improve the Hmong RPA writing system (Aim 1)

Themes	Illustrative Quotations
Do not combine	"Do not agree, cannot combine." "We should not mix the writing systems." "Keep it separate" (Table 6). They are "Too different from each other" (Table 6), and it "will be hard to learn when combined" (Table 10). Thus, "Maintain[ing] the standard Latin writing system" (Tables 1, 6, 10,11, 41). "If we combine, it won't make sense because so many people are already at a disadvantage with the language" (Table 11). "Disagree to combine since the RPA is what is most used. Would be harder to learn a new language when implemented" (Table 7). "Just stick to one writing system and do not add others. Do not combine so there is consistency for added value in all areas of life. It will help keep our identity" (Table 24).

AIM 1 FINDINGS

CAC members' concerns about the Hmong language

The above concerns were also raised when we interviewed members of the Community Advisory Council (CAC; Table 5). CAC includes 13 members from different parts of the community (i.e., 4 from St. Paul, 1 from Minneapolis, and 7 from other cities) that represent different dialects (6 white Hmong and 7 green Hmong), age groups (ranging from 18 to 70), gender (4 males, 9 females), generations (1 first-generation, 3 1.5-generation, and 9 2nd-generation; Van Ours & Veenman, 2003), and religious affiliations (7 Animists, 4 Christians, and 2 with other religions). However, most of the CAC members were college educated (2 college students, 4 with an associate degree, 1 with a bachelor's degree, 4 with a master's degree, and 2 with a PhD degree). Table 9 highlights what participants expressed in detail.

Table 9. CAC members' concerns about the Hmong language (Aim 1)

Themes	Definitions	Subthemes	Illustrative Quotations
Losing the language or language loss	refers to the gradual reduction or disappearance of an individual's or community's ability to speak, understand, or write a language due to decreased use, lack of learning opportunities, or disrupted transmission across generations. It	Decline in language ability Description of forgetting vocabulary or losing fluency. Reduced ability to speak, read, or understand the heritage language. Intergenerational loss Children not learning the heritage language. Younger generation speaking English (or dominant language). Parents/grandparents	"Our oldest, who is now 27. She reads and writes Hmong and can speak and understand Hmong, so she's good. But our second child who is a junior in high school [who] can say a few things sometimes in Hmong, but she's very self-conscious

	includes experiences of forgetting, limited proficiency, or diminished ability to maintain the heritage language over time.	expressing concern that the language is disappearing. Reduced use leading to loss Descriptions of not using the heritage language anymore. Community shifts towards a dominant language (e.g., English). The language being spoken only by elders. Community-level decline Comments about the language in the community. Fewer opportunities to hear or speak the language. Loss of language because cultural or dysphoric conditions make use difficult.	about how her spoken Hmong sounds, so she tends not to use Hmong…And then our third child, which is only a freshman in high school, so that's only two years difference, [but she] does not understand a lick of Hmong. She cannot speak Hmong to save her life." (T12) "The younger generation that I have come in contact with, they don't really understand [Hmong] at all. Even if their parents are in between generations [1.5 generation], and they do speak [Hmong] more fluently, they're not as proactive in speaking Hmong to their kids at an early

			age.” (C7, L184-187) “I lost it [Hmong] because I didn't use it, [and for the Green Hmong dialect] I lost it because the people around me were mostly White Hmong and I think it has a lot to do with who influence you depending on the circle you’re with.” (C8, L95-98) “So it’s like when you don't have that infrastructure or that environment to kind of help teach you, you may remember some of these basic fundamentals, you know, the fundamental elemental words that your mother, your

			parents given you, but you have no connection to it.” (C1, L36-40) “Problem is when you no longer have people who are speaking Hmong, then it's gone forever. And unfortunately, that's the trajectory that we are moving towards, especially nowadays with a lot of our students no longer speaking Hmong at home as their native language. (T7)

AIM 1 FINDINGS: Language Experts

Recruited, interviewed, and analyzed sixteen language experts to improve, develop, and/or adopt a standards framework of the unified RPA writing system

Language experts are elders, all of whom are first-generation, who have spent decades of researching and reforming the Hmong RPA writing system for the community. All of them are men in their 60s (ages ranging from 56 to 76) living across the United States (i.e., California, Florida, Minnesota, North Carolina, Utah, and Wisconsin). Their educational levels ranged from less than high school to doctoral degree (i.e., 2 less than high school, 4 with high school degree, 5 with some college or an associate degree, 1 with a master's degree, and 4 with a doctoral degree).

Most language experts contacted the first author after learning about the Hmong RPA project via YouTube. They were invited to participate in the interview and serve as panel reviewers to ensure express their interest to contribute to the improvement, development, and/or adoption of a standards framework of the unified RPA writing system.

All interviews were conducted using zoom and recorded for later analysis. Note that five of the 16 language experts also provided their written reforms for us to review. All recorded interviews (ranged from 50 minutes to 2 hours) were transcribed by trained research assistants prior to the analysis. All analyses also followed the same protocol described earlier.

AIM 1 FINDINGS: Language Experts

Changes proposed by language experts

Table 10 presents the changes or reforms each language expert made to the original Hmong RPA writing system. Some of these proposed changes were also aligned with other published work (Ly, 2019; Smalley, 1976). Note that yellow highlighted proposed changes were mentioned by one or two language experts, while green highlighted proposed changes were mentioned by three or more language experts.

Table 10. Original & Reformed RPA vowels, tones, and consonants
Vowels (Tsiaj Ntawv Niam/Yub)

Original Vowels Tsiaj Ntawv Naim/ "yub"	**White Hmong**	**Green Hmong**	**Reform**	**Authors**
A	A	(A)		
E	E	E		
I	I	I		
O	O	O		
U	U	U		
W	W	W		
AA		AA		
AI	AI	AI		
IA	Ia			
AU	Au	Au		
UA	Ua	Ua		
AW [Er]	Aw	Aw	Er	A few teachers
EE	Ee	Ee		
OO	Oo	Oo		
OI	Oi	Oi	Oi	Several language experts
IU			IU	One language expert
UI			UI	One language expert
WA			WA	One language expert

Tones (Tsiaj Ntawv Cim (Suab)

Tone Letters Tsiaj Ntawv Cim (suab) or Cov Cim Yuam	White Hmong	Green Hmong	New Additions	Authors
B	Liab	Mob		
J	Liaj	Moj		
V	Liav	Mov		
–	Lia	Mo		
S	Lias	Mos		
M	Liam	Mom		
G	Liag	Mog		
D	Liad	Mod		

Single consonants (Tsiaj Ntawv Txiv/Niam Ntawv Tab – Ib Tug)

Consonants Tsiaj Ntawv Txiv/Niam Ntawv Tab (Single)	**White Hmong**	**Green Hmong**	**New Additions**	**Authors**
A	Av		A	
B [Np]	Biv	Biv	B [Np]	Kickoff; language experts
C	Cav	Caav		
D	Dev	Dlev		
F	Foom	Foom		
G	Gaug	Gaug		
H	Haus	Haus		
I	Iab	Ib		
J [Nts; Nj]	Jes; Njes	Nres	J, Nj	language experts (j); Smalley (nj; 1976, p. 87)
K	Kaus	Kaus		
L	Liab	Lab		
M	Miv	Miv		

N	Niam	Nam		
O	Ob	Ob		
P	Peb	Peb		
Q	Qav	Qaav		
R	Riam	Rua		
S	Sau	Sau		
T	Tub	Tub		
U	Ua	Ua		
V	Voj			
W	Wb	Wb		
X	Xa	Xaa		
Y	Yuav	Yuav		
Z	Zaj	Zaaj		

Two Cluster Consonants (Tsiaj Ntawv Txiv/Niam Ntawv Txooj – Ob Tug)

Tsiaj Ntawv txiv/Niam Ntawv Txooj (Double)	**White Hmong**	**Green Hmong**	**New Additions**	**Authors**
Au	Aub	Aub		
Bl [Npl]	Blong	Blong	Bl	language experts & teacher interviews
Ch	Chua			
Dh				
Dl	Dev	Dlev	Dl	Dr. Choj Ly (2019, p. 7); James B Xiong @ www.hmongdictionary
Ee	Ee			
Fl	Flas		Fl	ZB for illustration only
Dh	Dhuav			
Hl	Hloov	Hloov	Hl, Lh	Teacher interviews
Hm	Hmoob	Moob	Moob, Mhoob	Teacher interviews, language experts

Hn [Nh]	Hnov		Nhov	Teacher interviews
Kh [hK]				
Kh [hK]	Kho	Khu	hK	Language experts
Ml		mlom		
Nc		Ncu		
nK [G]	Nkaub, gaub		Gaub	Language experts
Np	Npe	Npe		
Nq	Nqaim	Nqaim		
Nr	Nres			
Nt		Ntoo		
Ny		Nyuaj		
Ph		Phau		
Pl		Plaub		
Pr	Prwv	Prwv	Prwv	Language experts
Qh	Qhia	Qha		
Rh				
Th	Thov	Thov	Tɒv	Language experts
Ts	Tso	Tso		
Tx	Txiv	Txiv		
Xy	Xyoob	Xyoob		

Three Cluster Consonants (Tsiaj Ntawv Txiv/Niam Ntawv Txooj – Peb Tug)

Tsiaj ntawv txiv/Niam Ntawv Txooj (Triple)	**White Hmong**	**Green Hmong**	**New Additions**	**Authors**
DLh		Dlha	Dlh	Dr. Choj Ly (2019, p. 7)
Hml				
Nch				
Ndl	Ntiav	Ndlav	Glav	Dr. Choj Ly (2019, p. 7); James B Xiong @ www.hmongdictionary
Nkh		Nkhaus		
Nph				
Npl		Nplooj	Bl	Language experts

				& teacher interviews
Nqh		Nqhes		
Nrh				
Nth				
Nts [j, nj]	Ntsuab; njuab; juab		J [Nj]	Smalley (1976, p. 85) used “nj” in writing. “J” used by Hmong linguists
Ntx				
Nyh [Hny]	Nyhav		Hny	Teacher interviews
Tsh		Tshuav		
Txh		Txhuv		

Four Cluster Consonants (Tsiaj Ntawv Txiv/Niam Ntawv Txooj – Plaub Tug)

Original Tsiaj Ntawv Txiv/Niam Ntawv Txooj (Quadruple)	**White Hmong**	**Green Hmong**	**New Additions**	**Authors**
Ndlh	Dawj	Ndlhawj	Ndlh	Dr. Choj Ly (2019, p. 7); James B Xiong @ www.hmongdictionary
Nplh	Nplhaib			
Ntsh	Ntshuag			
Ntxh	Ntxhw			

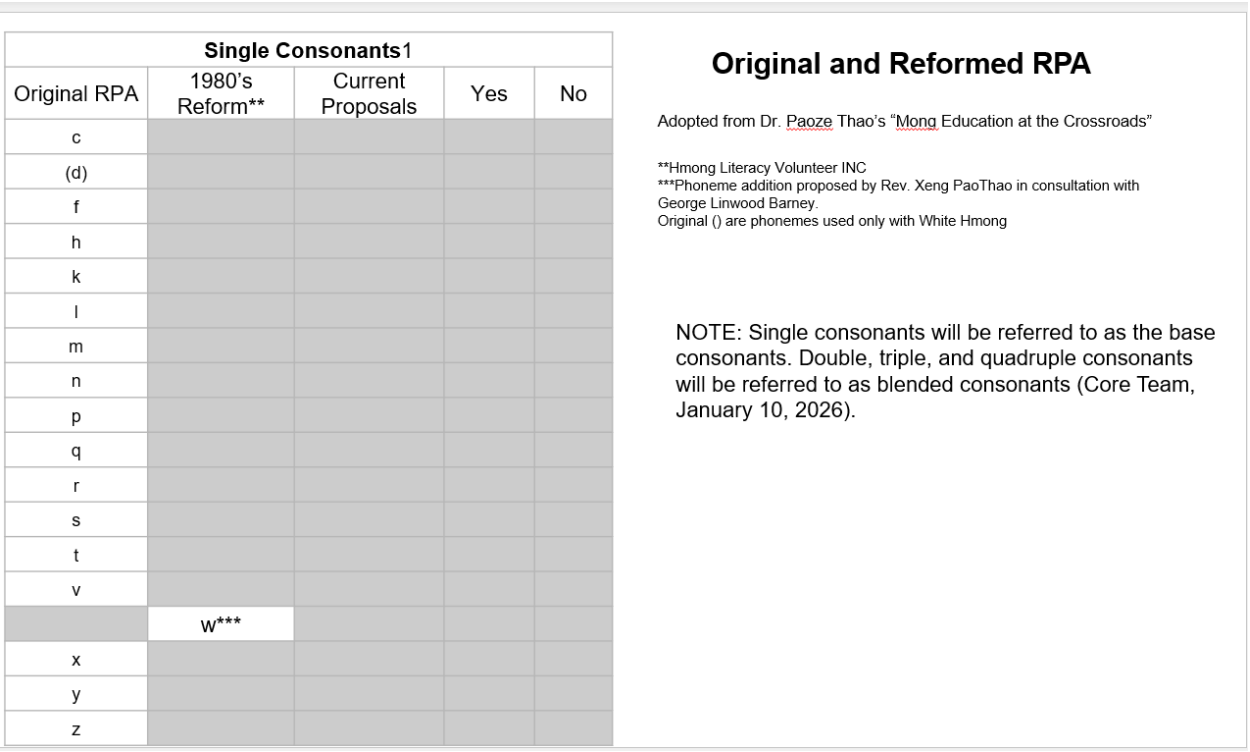
AIM 1 FINDINGS: Language Experts

Panel reviewers' votes on the proposed changes

On August 23, 2025, language experts, clan leaders, religious and spiritual leaders, and community members who are fluent in Hmong (hereafter referred to language practitioners) were invited to review the proposed changes (see Table 8) and voted on the changes to be added to the Hmong RPA writing system. Of the 69 people invited to participate in the panel review, 30 people agreed to attend the meeting. The meeting included an introduction to the Hmong RPA project, a linguist expert's presentation on the Hmong RPA writing system, and small group discussion and votes. Note that five people left the meeting before the votes; therefore, the final votes only included 25 people.

During the small group discussion, participants were asked to address these questions in their small groups: (1) Does anyone have anything to add to the proposed changes (i.e., oi, iw, pr)? What sound does this new vowel represent? Can you create one to two sentences using words containing the new vowel? Linguistically, does this new vowel sound make sense? How many of you vote to adopt this new vowel? Figures 2 to 6 describe the original, first reform in the 1980s, the current proposed changes (see Table 8), and the votes (yes means endorse and no means rejects) for the consonants (single, double, triple, and quadruple), vowels, and tones.

Figure 2. Proposed changes to the single consonants



Single Consonants1				
Original RPA	1980's Reform**	Current Proposals	Yes	No
c				
(d)				
f				
h				
k				
l				
m				
n				
p				
q				
r				
s				
t				
v				
	w***			
x				
y				
z				

Original and Reformed RPA

Adopted from Dr. Paoze Thao's "Mong Education at the Crossroads"

**Hmong Literacy Volunteer INC
***Phoneme addition proposed by Rev. Xeng PaoThao in consultation with George Linwood Barney.
Original () are phonemes used only with White Hmong

NOTE: Single consonants will be referred to as the base consonants. Double, triple, and quadruple consonants will be referred to as blended consonants (Core Team, January 10, 2026).

Figure 3. Proposed changes to the double consonants

Double Consonants				
Original RPA	1980 Reform**	Current Proposals	Yes	No
		bh		
tl	dl**		19	6
? (glottal)	ng**			
(dh)				
(hm)		mh	1	24
(hn)		nh	4	21
ch				
		fl	7	16*
hl		lh	9	16
kh		hk	0	25
ml				
nc				
ng				
nk		g	0	25
np		b	6	20
nq				
nr		dr		
nt				

Double Consonants				
Original RPA	1980 Reform**	Current Proposals	Yes	No
nt				
ny				
ph				
pl				
		pr	21	4
		qg		
		wh		

NOTE: "dl" is used as a base consonant for green Hmong.

- Proposed changes that did not receive the majority votes were not considered to be in the new Hmong RPA writing system, which will not be included in the next step of the community engagement.
- "Pr" was adopted as a new consonant as an exception without having a vowel and tone (Core Team, Jahuary 10, 2026).
- "G" was adopted as a new consonant, and it represents the Lao sound or the sound of a tiger roars.

Adopted from Dr. Paoze Thao's "Mong Education at the Crossroads"

**Hmong Literacy Volunteer INC
***Phoneme addition proposed by Rev. Xeng PaoThao in consultation with George Linwood Barney.
Original () are phonemes used only with White Hmong

Figure 4. Proposed changes to the triple consonants

Triple Consonants				
Original RPA	1980's Reform**	Current Proposals	Yes	No
tlh	dlh**	dlh	13*	1
(hml)				
(hny)		nyh	5	18
nch				
ntl	ndl**	gl	0	8*
nkh		gh		
nph				
npl		bl	3	22
nqh				
nrh		drh		
nth				
nts		j, nj	3	22
ntx				
plh				

NOTE. "Dlh" stays since it had been adopted by the 1980's reform.

- "Bl" [npl] or "B" [np] and "nj" [nts] or "j" [nts] were not adopted since they will impact future readers' ability to read texts published prior to 2026 (see criteria #6 of the Hmong RPA Reform Criteria).
- Panel reviewers voted not to accept "g" as a short-hand for "nk". However, they voted to accept "g" to represent the Lao sound, or the sound of a tiger roars – tus tsov nyooj gig gaug (Core Team, Jahuary 10, 2026).

Adopted from Paoze Thao's "Mong Education at the Crossroads"

**Hmong Literacy Volunteer INC
***Phoneme addition proposed by Rev. Xeng PaoThao in consultation with George Linwood Barney.
Original () are phonemes used only with White Hmong

Figure 5. Proposed changes to the quadruple consonants

Quadruple Consonants				
Original RPA	1980's Reform**	Current Proposals	Yes	No
nplh		blh		
ntlh	ndlh**	ndlh	11*	2
ntsh		jh		
ntxh				

NOTE. "Ndlh" stays as reformed in the 1980s. "Jh" was not adopted since it will impact future readers' ability to read texts published prior to 2026 (see criteria #6 of the Hmong RPA Reform Criteria).

Figure 6. Proposed changes to the vowels

Vowels				
Original RPA	1980's Reform	Current Proposals	Yes	No
a				
e				
i				
o				
u				
w				
aa				
ai				
au				
ee				
		er	3	22
ia				
		iu	3	11*
		iw (Mong Ntsuab only)	11*	0
		oi	19	6
oo				
ua				
		ui	3	11*
		uo (Mong Ntsuab only)	5	0
		wa	3	11*

NOTE:

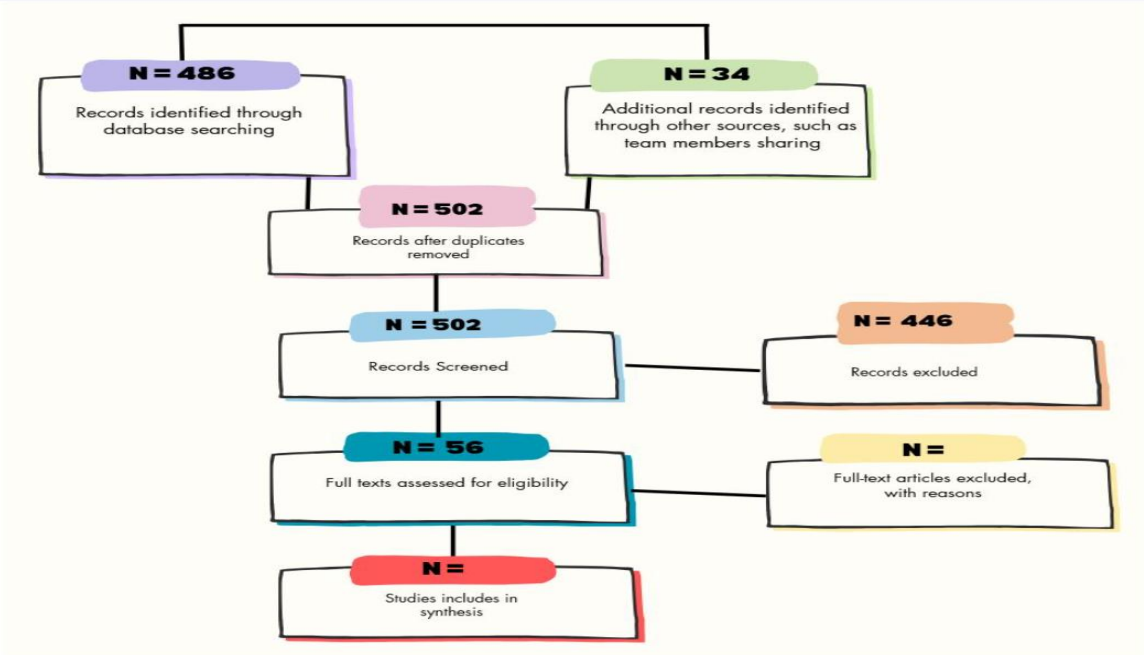
- Three vowels were adopted to represent the missing green Hmong's sounds ("iw" and "uo") and the shamanic chanting sound ("oi" or "toi").
- "IW" represents the pronunciation of "father" in green Hmong (kuv txiwv), and "UO" represents the pronunciation of "them" in green Hmong (puob vs. puab).
- Given the additions, the revised RPA now contains 9 base vowels: a, e, i, o, u, w, aa, ee, and oo.
- The rest of the vowels are blended vowels.

AIM 2 Accomplishments

To accomplish aim 2, we hired two research assistants to conduct a scoping review of the published literature on the Hmong RPA writing system to understand what has been investigated in the literature. Using the University of Minnesota (U of M) library databases, various keywords (i.e., Hmong RPA, Hmong RPA writing system, RPA Hmong language, Hmong writing style, and Hmong writing system) were used in Google Scholar, Academic Premier, and Web of Science.

The search found 486 articles. Additional 34 articles were identified from other sources such as the Hmong Studies Journal and Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement (see Figure 7). However, after duplicated articles were removed, there were 502 articles met the criteria to be screened. After abstracts were read for RPA content, 446 articles were not relevant. That is, only 56 articles met the criteria to be reviewed (see references and summary of the articles).

Figure 7. Library search process



AIM 3 Accomplishments

To improve the preliminary standards framework of the unified RPA writing system to determine its components, relevance to contemporary US context, grade-level cluster, sequency, and feasibility, we have recruited and interviewed 13 educators who are currently teaching Hmong at the k-12 (n=11) and higher education levels (n=2). Trained research assistants used the same analysis protocol (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hill et al., 2005) to code the data to find themes related to components, relevance to contemporary US context, grade-level cluster, sequency, and feasibility.

Table 11 highlights some of the major themes.

Table 11. Themes related to Aim 3: Scope and sequence and pedagogy

Themes	**Illustrative Quotations**
What to teach first is important (scope and sequencing)	“How do we teach? We need to have a standardized way to teach the Hmong RPA” (Kickoff focus groups). “What is the first thing that a baby do? You know a baby...they make noise. And so start the tone first. Teach the tones, and then teach the vowels, and then teach the consonants...That's when I started using that to say, "Okay, let's get the tones - get the tones nailed down!" And then you add the vowels because at that time a baby doesn't know how to make words out of it. But if you teach them vowels and you teach them the tones, then it's a lot easier. And then once that's done, then you can add the consonants, and then from there, you create words” (Teacher) “Our scope and sequence, the way that we just set it up, it makes it successful for students to read, you know, with a few consonants, and then they, you know, learn a vowel, and then a tone, and then it kind of goes in that pattern where eventually they're able to practice with two different tones, and then three different tones, you know, two different vowels, and then three, and then four, and then until they've learned all of the consonants, vowels and tones, and so doing it in a way that makes sense.”
Teach both dialects	“My concern is what can we do so our kids can learn Hmong. I want to know if White Hmong and Green Hmong are being taught in the schools - how are we teaching them, so they are not confused? They have to learn and they have to practice so it’s not lost.” (Kickoff focus groups) We want to make sure teachers teach children based on their dialect. A Green Hmong can use a Green Hmong text and a White

	Hmong can use a White Hmong text to follow with the instruction (Hmong Equality) “I try my very best to translate it into Green Hmong whenever I teach it. So, I will have one week I will speak in Green Hmong, although I teach in White Hmong…during that week, then the next week I will teach in White Hmong” (Teacher).
Need to focus on grammar	“We have no standardization in the writing and speaking the Hmong language. There are no punctuation and sentence structures” (Kickoff focus groups). “I teach them that the Hmong language - the grammar - is very much like the English language grammar. Like we have the subject, verb, abjective, but the difference is that our adjective comes after the noun, not before the noun like in the English language” (Teacher).
Lack of sufficient vocabulary	First, we do not have sufficient vocabulary. “Short of vocabulary” (Table 27). “We don’t have Hmong words for everyday items or terms” (Table 41). “Hmong lacks words for many English terms” (Table 33). “Making no progress in vocabulary; it is stagnant” (Table 24). Second, we tend to loan words from other languages. “Mixture of Hmong and other language speech patterns needs correction also. Because of the use of two languages, Hmong words are lost and replaced.” (Table 7) Third, we need to use vocabulary at home. “We need to actively teach basic vocabulary at home so children can hear and see” (Table 32). For example, “Ib niam txiv is a new terminology used. It should be “ib nkawm niam txiv” (Table 5). Lastly, we need to standardize our vocabulary across different sectors. “We need to work with translators who are translating. Especially when it's not standardized, we don't have a word for every word we have in English” (Table 34).

CORE VALUES CLOSING 2025

What CORE values come to mind when working with the Hmong RPA Project?

CLOSING COMMENTS from MN ZEJ ZOG

In the News

Hmong RPA Kick-off Event
March 2025 Event
Hmong Language Experts Engagement
Dr. Paoze Thao Tham Txog Keeb Kwm Tus Ntawv Hmoob Las Tees Puas Tsim Nyog Kho

Closing Comments

MN Zej Zog is honored to undertake this historic responsibility to advance the development of a unified and standardized Latin alphabet form of the Hmong Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA) writing system. This project will not only assess and document the current state of Hmong RPA, but also create opportunities for teaching, learning, and meaningful dialogue across diverse perspectives. Through collective knowledge-building and collaboration, this effort seeks to ensure that the Hmong language remains vibrant, relevant, and accessible for generations to come – well into the next 100 years.

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