

# **The Vietnamese-American Community: Capacity Building Past and Present**

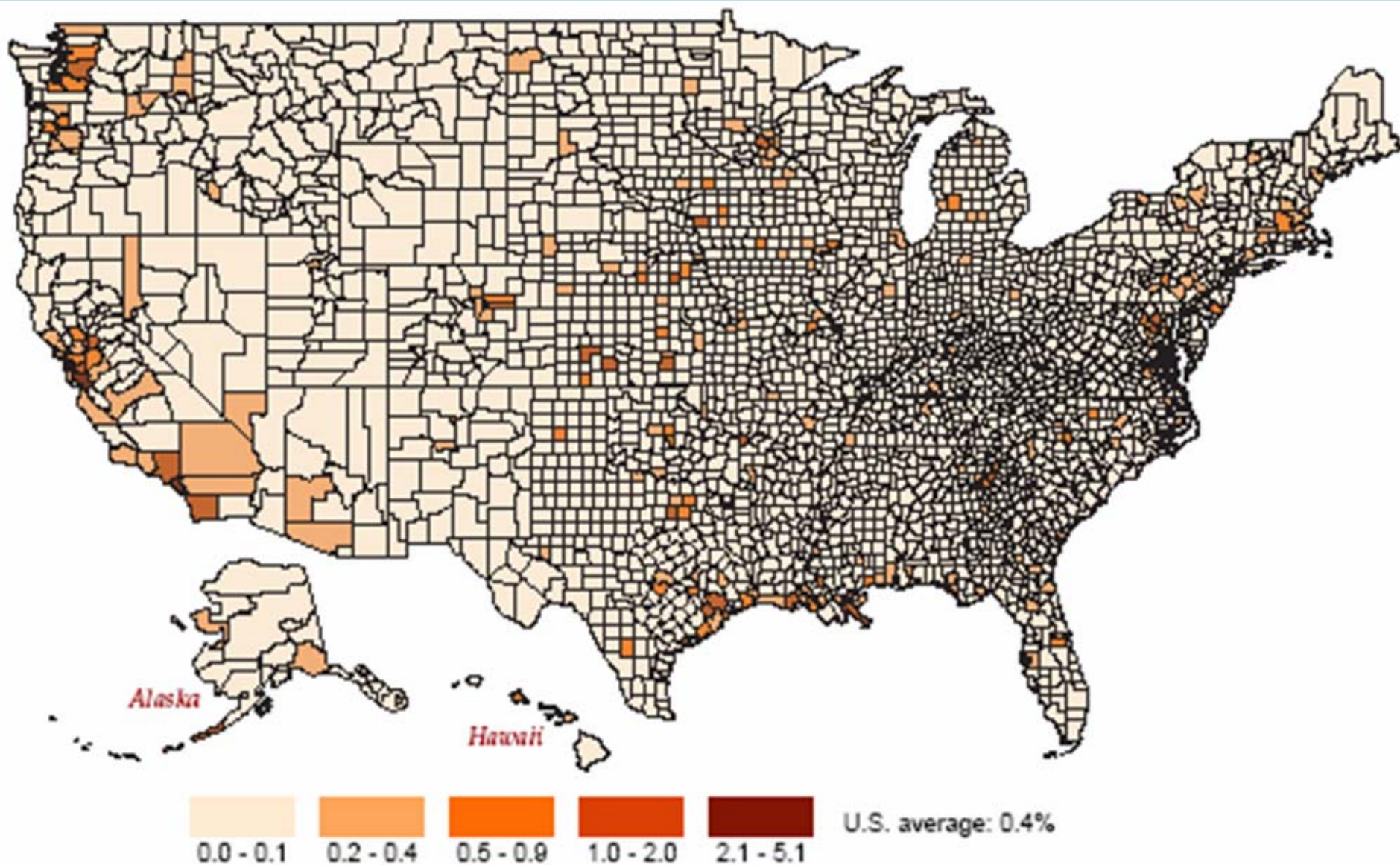
**Nguyen Dinh Thang  
Boat People SOS  
Ottawa, December 17, 2006**

# Demographic Profile

- Census 2000:
  - 1,212,465 Vietnamese
  - Highest concentrations in:
    - Los Angeles - Riverside - Orange County: 233,573
    - San Francisco - Oakland - San Jose: 146,613
    - Houston - Galveston – Brazoria: 62,924
    - Dallas - Fort Worth: 47,090
    - Washington D.C. area: 43,709

# Geographic Distribution

- Seattle - Tacoma – Bremerton: 40,001
  - San Diego: 33,504
  - Boston - Worcester – Lawrence: 31,325
  - Philadelphia - Wilmington - Atlantic City: 24,779
  - Atlanta: 23,996
- ¼ of Vietnamese in America live in small, isolated enclaves



# The Four Waves

10% in 1975: 130,000 evacuees

30% from 1976 to 1985: 300,000 first-wave boat people

30% from 1985 to 1995: 300,000 second-wave boat people

20% from 1990 – present: Orderly Departure Program

- 180,000 HO refugees (torture survivors and family members)
- 80,000 Amerasians and family members
- 20,000 ROVR refugees (repatriated boat people)

# Newcomers

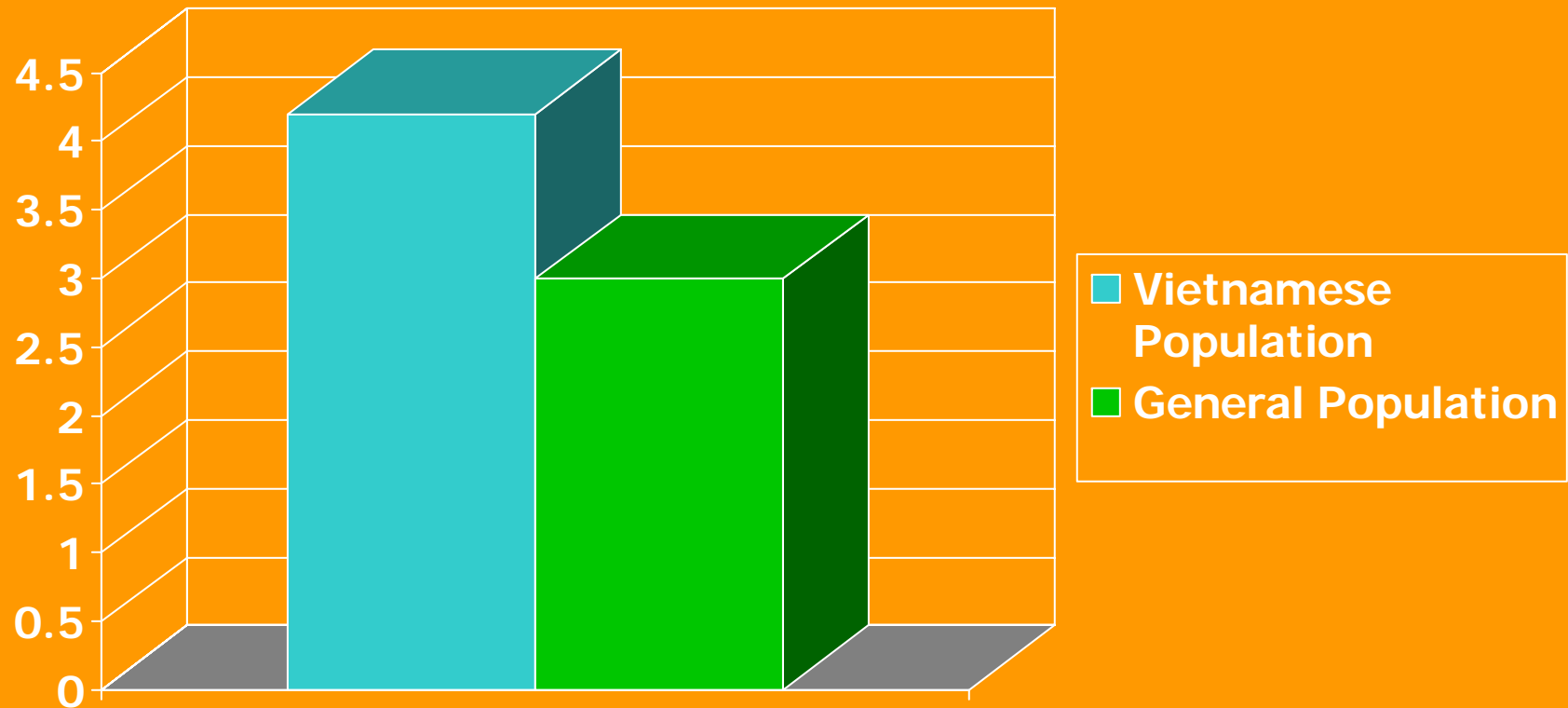
BPSOS 2001-2002 survey on sample of 1,500 newcomers nationwide

- 88% speak little or no English
- 65% never used a computer
- 55% unaware of basic health issues
- 58% non-citizens
- 40% did not participate in Census 2000

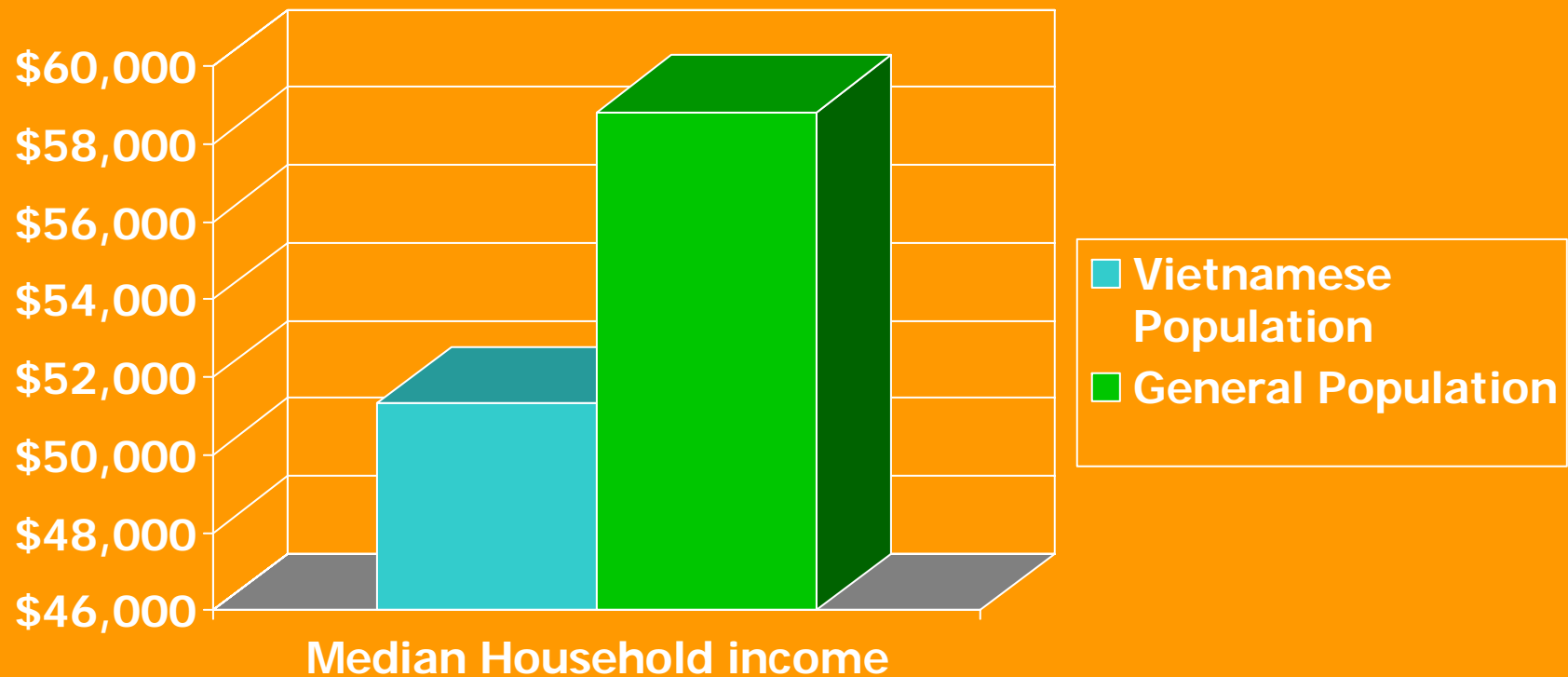
# Economic Profile

- 97,764 businesses in 1997, with total sales and receipts of \$9.3B
- Mostly small businesses: nail salons, restaurants
- Economic integration and development in the community have been uneven

...the average house hold size is larger in the Vietnamese population than the general population...



...yet the median household income is much lower...



# Civil Society

- There are 1.6M non-profits in America
- 80,000 new ones each year
- 200 Americans/non-profit
- 120 Vietnamese-American service agencies:
  - Few with full-time paid staff
  - A handful with budget exceeding \$1M
- No mechanism to bridge the disconnect among the different waves of Vietnamese refugees and immigrants

# Reality Check

- Office of Refugee Resettlement 2000 report to Congress:
  - 2 Vietnamese organizations: \$0.4M
  - 8 Hmong organizations: \$0.8M
  - 5 Lao organizations: \$1.8M
  - 5 Cambodian organization: \$4.8M

# Case In Point

## **Hurricanes Katrina and Rita:**

- 40,000 Vietnamese survivors
- Private and faith-based shelters: \$36M in kind
- Millions in cash raised around the country
- Hundreds of volunteers

**Few organizations able to sustain long-term recovery services**

# Report Card

- Vietnamese-American Community:
  - **disorganized, voiceless and invisible**
  - **incapable of meeting the needs of its own members**
  - **unprepared to defend the interests of its members**
  - **not yet ready to collaborate or compete with other communities**
  - **marginalized with many lost opportunities**

# Community Organizing

- Mid-1980: “Vietnamese community” organizations began to appear:
  - Representative body
  - Appearance of unity
  - Government-like structure
- Shortcomings:
  - Incompatibility with American civil society
  - Lack of continuity
  - No paid staff
  - No budget
  - No service
  - Limited influence

# Alternative Model

- Neighborhood Empowerment and Support through Teamwork (NEST)
  - Established in 1998
  - Three stages:
    - Self-help group: low level mutual assistance
    - Non-profit with funded programs and paid staff: services to community members
    - Sustainability: infrastructural capacity building
  - Formation of team of social sector professionals

# Infrastructure for Sustainability

- + System of incentives and penalties
- + Power entities
- + Professionals: Specialists and generalists



# On-going Experiment

- BPSOS: \$23K in 1997 → \$7M in 2006
- 45 community-based and faith-based organizations:
  - \$200K in subgrants
  - \$1M in direct grants
  - \$1.5M in direct grants in 2006
  - Self-help group as first responder
  - Over 100 disaster relief volunteers