

Hmong Author Visit: River Heights Elementary

*February 2026 Community Impact Grant
Cycle*

River Heights Elementary School

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Menomonie, WI 54751

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Application Form

Instructions

INSTRUCTIONS

Complete the grant application by responding to the fields below. Note that any fields with an asterisk are required fields and must be completed prior to submitting an application.

As you complete the form, the system will auto-save every 100 characters typed or every time you click out of a field. You may collapse question groups as you go, as an indicator to yourself that you've completed that section and to reduce scrolling.

The system also allows you to Save an application and come back to it before submitting. There is also a Collaborator feature that allows applicants to work together on a single request. https://docs.google.com/document/d/15NsdFgi3lBmBu0_pp1zj2HZ51I4mx8Wryjrx4FYOmdg/edit?usp=sharing Click here to learn about the collaborator feature. Contact the Community Foundation at (715) 232-8019 if you have any questions or problems with the form.

Request Overview

Project Title*

Please provide a descriptive Name/Title for this grant request.

Hmong Author Visit: River Heights Elementary

Amount Requested*

Typical grant amounts range from \$500 to \$5,000 or more.

\$1,888.79

Program Area*

Please check the program area that best categorizes this grant request.

Arts, Culture & Heritage

Geographic Area Served*

Please select which geographic area is primarily being served by this request.

Menomonie Area

Does your organization function within Dunn County?*

Yes

Population Served*

Please select the specific population being served by this request. You can select age and income level in the next section. If the population this grant targets is not listed, please choose "General".

General

Age Group Served*

Please select the specific age group served by this grant request.

School-aged children and/or adolescents

Income Level Served*

Please select the income level of the target population being served by this request.

Low Income

Non Discrimination Policy*

In accordance with federal regulations, the Community Foundation of Dunn County does not discriminate based on race, color, creed, sex, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, marital status or national origin. Do the applicant organization's employment and service practices comply with this policy?

Yes

About Your Organization

1. Organization Overview*

Please provide a brief background about your organization, including a short summary of the organization's history, mission, goals, accomplishments, and challenges.

River Heights Elementary is a Title I school and home to 434 students in grades K-5. About 65% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. Our school is a diverse community of learners, one in five students are Hmong-Americans. The mission statement for the school is "Dedicated to preparing ALL students to become lifelong learners, caring individuals, and responsible citizens." Recently our school received an "Exceeds Expectations" for school performance as measured by WI State Report Card criteria.

2. Current Initiatives*

Please describe your current programs, activities, community impact and the community's involvement or support of your organization.

River Heights Elementary is used year round providing services for the community. We are home to a before school program for families called Early Risers and partner with Boys and Girls Club in year round after school programs. In addition, the school hosts summer school programming and AIM Camp (Arts Integration Menomonie and UW Stout Art Education students). Bridging Brighter Smiles provides dental care for students during the school year at our building. Every year our Title I department hosts two Family Nights for families to come and participate in educational activities at school. As the EL teacher I use the main hallway display case in April to showcase cultural artifacts, both past and present, that celebrate Hmong Heritage. April is Hmong Heritage Month in Wisconsin. For the past three years I have arranged for a Hmong author or artist to come and share their story with all students. I collaborate with our food service to have pho served for lunch on the day the Hmong artist visits. Students with Hmong heritage help with chopsticks and at the condiments table. Students and staff alike can wear traditional Hmong clothing. This year I incorporated the hallway display in Sept/Oct to showcase Hispanic Heritage month artifacts and five presentations for students during library time about Dia de Muertos. Celebrating diversity is a large part of my mission as the EL teacher at River Heights.

3. Organizational Structure*

Describe the current structure of your organization, including how the organization functions on a daily basis. (CEO, staff, volunteers, etc.)

River Heights Elementary is one of three elementary schools within town limits of Menomonie. We are a Title I school. We have 434 students in grades K-5 and also have 38 4K students. The school day is from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm. Our principal is Mr. Mike Kennedy. We have 20 grade level classroom teachers, 5 special education teachers, 2 speech pathologists (one is shared with two other schools), a guidance counselor, a school psychologist (shared with 2 other schools), a school social worker (shared with 2 other schools), an art teacher, music teacher, physical education teacher, an EL (English Learner) teacher, occupational therapist/physical therapist (shared with other schools), 4 food service staff, 2 custodians, reading interventionist, math interventionist, behavior interventionist, librarian, school nurse, front office receptionists and a multitude of paraeducators we could not function without. Early Risers is a program offered to our families who need a safe place for their school aged children before school begins. It runs each day school is in session starting Tuesday, September 2, 2025 and students can be dropped off as early as 6:30am. The program offers time for students to engage in free play, be physically active, enhance their school day learning through grade level math and language arts enrichment activities, and have time to use their creativity skills through various projects. Boys and Girls Club offers after school and summer programming at our building. We have an active PTO (Parent Teacher Organization) that fundraise for projects that benefit our school and our community. For example, money that was raised in the past few years was used to purchase and build accessible playground equipment that everyone can use.

About the Grant

What is the community need that this request addresses?*

The goal of this annual project is to celebrate Hmong Heritage Month in Wisconsin, to honor the Hmong people's rich culture, sacrifices (like fighting with the U.S. in the Secret War), resilience, and significant contributions to American society, highlighting their vibrant traditions and growing communities. It's a time for cultural events, education, and recognizing Hmong Americans as a vital part of the nation's diverse fabric.

Wisconsin now mandates teaching Hmong and Asian American history in K-12 schools (Act 266, 2024), adding to existing requirements for Black, Hispanic, and Native American histories, with April designated Hmong Heritage Month to cover their unique culture, contributions (like the Secret War role), and significant state presence, prompting teachers to build diverse curricula with resources from the Wisconsin Historical Society and PBS Wisconsin.

Project Goals and Activities*

Describe the specific goals and activities of your project and how they will be carried out or accomplished.

The main goals of a Hmong author visit project are to empower Hmong students, preserve and share Hmong culture & history (especially the refugee experience), build bridges between generations (elders/youth), promote literacy & bilingualism, and provide mirrors (Hmong) and windows (non-Hmong) for diverse understanding, fostering identity and belonging through authentic storytelling.

Three presentations will be given by the Hmong author, V.T. Bidania, in our library media center on Wednesday, April 29, 2026. She will be sharing about the "Extraordinary Eliana" series for the younger grade levels and "A Year Without Home" for the upper grade levels.

Presentations include:

- Writing Process
- Background as an Author
- Learn some Hmong language
- Interactive Activity

For the younger grades, she will do a character matching game. For older grades, she will teach them how to create/write a character for a book.

-Q and A Session

Book signing

Long Bio (from the author's website): www.vtbidania.com

V.T. Bidania was born in Laos and grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota, where her family resettled as Hmong refugees. She spent her childhood fascinated by magical Hmong folktales and her family's stories about Laos and the refugee camps of Thailand where they lived before arriving in the United States. As her love for stories grew, she read every book she could get her hands on and dreamed up her own stories.

After studying journalism at St. Catherine University, she moved to New York City to attend NYU's Summer Publishing Institute and received her MFA in creative writing from the New School.

She worked in children's book publishing for many years before returning to Minnesota and entering the field of education. She then worked in K-5 schools inside ELL classes, preschool classrooms, and her favorite job of all, a school media center! It was during this time that she met many of the fantastic Hmong students who inspired the characters in her chapter book, Astrid and Apollo.

She is a McKnight Writing Fellow and the author of the ASTRID AND APOLLO and EXTRAORDINARY ELIANA series and the middle grade novel in verse, A YEAR WITHOUT HOME, a fictionalized memoir about her family's escape from Laos after the Vietnam War.

V.T. Bidania is represented by Laurel Symonds at KT Literary.

In addition the food service staff will prepare pho (traditional Hmong soup) for lunch that day. Students and staff may also wear traditional Hmong clothing.

Project Outcomes*

Describe the anticipated outcomes resulting from this grant project, its impact and how the community will be better served.

A Hmong author visit at an elementary school offers huge benefits: it provides cultural mirrors and windows, boosting Hmong students' identity and non-Hmong students' understanding; fosters a love for reading by showing diverse stories are important; inspires all kids with new perspectives on writing and life struggles; and strengthens community ties by validating Hmong heritage and opening crucial dialogues about culture and racism in accessible ways, making students feel seen and empowered to share their own voices.

For Hmong Students:

Identity & Belonging: Seeing their culture reflected in books provides a powerful sense of validation, making them feel less alone in navigating two worlds (Hmong and American).

Cultural Pride: Real "Hmong stories" (not sugar-coated) connect them to their ancestry, showing them their history is valuable and complex.

Educational Empowerment: Authors can demystify the writing process, showing that writing and reading skills are tools for life, not just school tasks, and can help them navigate future challenges.

For Non-Hmong Students & the Whole School

Cultural Windows: Offers a truthful, realistic look into Hmong experiences, history, and journeys, building empathy and understanding.

New Perspectives: Introduces different ways of storytelling and problem-solving, broadening everyone's worldview.

Community Building: Helps bridge generational gaps and fosters crucial, often uncomfortable, conversations about race and identity within the wider school community.

For All Students (General Benefits)

Spark Reading & Writing: Makes reading/writing feel relevant and exciting, inspiring reluctant readers and writers by sharing personal struggles and triumphs.

Voice & Agency: Encourages students to value their own voices and share their unique ideas and stories, whether through speaking, writing, or art.

Connection: Creates magical moments, showing students they can meet real authors and see that writing is a possible, meaningful path.

Anticipated Challenges*

Describe any anticipated challenges and how you will meet them.

One of the main challenges is making sure the space we have for the author presentations is big enough and how to use that space effectively. We have four sections of 5th grade (90 students) and four sections of Kindergarten. There is the possibility of using the gym or maybe walking to the high school and using the auditorium. The weather could play a factor, but we can always do a Google Meet if the author is unable to travel due to circumstances beyond their control, like a blizzard in April.

Sustainability*

Please describe how you will fund and continue to sustain these activities beyond the grant period.

I have secured funding from our PTO and written a grant to fund the last three years' Hmong author/artist visit. I will continue to look for different grant opportunities to fund these visits. Unfortunately this year many grants were not available due to federal budget cuts.

Staff - Project Summary*

Grant Project Budget

Anticipated Project Income*

Please list out all anticipated sources of income for this specific grant project with amounts and whether the funding is approved or pending.

Ex: Dunn Energy Cooperative: \$1,000 - Approved

Currently there is no anticipated sources of income for this author visit.

Total Project Expenses*

What are the total expenses for this particular grant project? This may be more than your grant request amount and helps us to understand if the Foundation is funding a portion of the project or the full cost of the project.

\$1,888.79

Project Expenses Description*

Please itemize the expenses for this grant project, including a short description of each item and the anticipated cost. (Personnel, Materials and Supplies, etc.) If this grant is to cover a portion of the project, please list all expenses of the project and then specify which expenses you anticipate being supported by this CFDC grant.

\$1500- 3 presentations by the author

\$100 -travel expense for the author

I'd also like to purchase books for classrooms for each teacher to read out loud:

Grades 3-5: \$18.99 "A Year Without Home" 11 teachers Total: \$208.89

Grades K-2: \$7.99 "Extraordinary Eliana" (4 different books to choose from). 10 teachers Total: \$79.90

Project Budget Upload

(Optional) You may upload a separate file of your own, representing this grant request's Project Budget. For help creating the document, you can click here to download our Grant Project Budget template.

[Unanswered]

Letter of Support

(Optional) Letters of Support are optional, unless another organization or individual is integral to the purchase or use of the program and/or is a fiscal sponsor. Then it is required.

Additional Supporting Documents

(Optional) You may upload additional supporting documents to your request. If this grant request is to purchase a specific item or equipment, please upload a financial quote or spec sheet about the item here.

Author Books for Classroom Teachers.pdf

Additional Supporting Documents

(Optional) You may upload additional supporting documents to your request. If this grant request is to purchase a specific item or equipment, please upload a financial quote or spec sheet about the item here.

Emails Price_Date Information.pdf

Staff - Project Budget Summary*

Brief sentence about how the grant budget is broken down by item.

Required Organization Financials

Current Board of Directors*

Please upload a list of your organization's current Board of Directors.

990 Document Place Holder.pdf

Organizational Budget*

Please upload your organization's most recent Operating Budget with projected revenues and expenses.

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Audited Financials

Please upload a copy of your organization's current Audited Financial Statement, if you are required to file.

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Audit Opt-Out

Under Wis. Stat. § 202.12 | a charitable organization with annual contributions over \$500,000 must file an audited financial statement and include the opinion of an independent CPA. A charitable organization with annual contributions less than \$500,000 and over \$300,000 must file a financial statement reviewed by an independent CPA. If you do not upload an audit or financial statement, please verify that your organization is not required to based on this state statute.

Proof of 990 Filing*

Please upload proof of current IRS 990 Filing. You may upload the first page only; the full 990 document is not required.

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Authorization

Applicant Agreement*

As the applicant submitting this request on behalf of the organization, you certify that:

- The information provided in this application is complete and accurate to the best of your knowledge.
- Falsification of information will result in termination of any award granted.
- You have discussed this project and grant request with the necessary authorized representatives at your organization. They support this request and the proposed allocation of funding.

If awarded a grant, the organization will:

- Carry out the activities and expend grant funds as described in the proposal, to the best of their ability.
- Submit significant changes in the scope or budget of the project to the Foundation for approval.
- Complete and submit written reports as required no later than 12 months from the date the grant is awarded.
- Acknowledge the role of the Community Foundation of Dunn County in supporting the organization in communications with their board and the public.
- Provide copies of all publicity, press releases or promotional materials. If available, provide photos in digital format.

I agree

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- Author Books for Classroom Teachers.pdf
- Emails Price_Date Information.pdf
- 990 Document Place Holder.pdf
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Follow the author

A Year Without Home Hardcover – January 13, 2026

by V. T. Bidania (Author)

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A poignant novel in verse about a Hmong girl losing and finding home in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. For fans of Jasmine Warga and Veera Hiranandani.

"As gripping as it is informative and as beautiful as it is heartbreaking, *A Year Without Home* does what all great books do: spark curiosity, ignite compassion, and leave its readers changed for the better. The young people who read V.T. Bidania's story will feel energized and empowered to make their future kinder, more peaceful, and more just than either the past or our present."—Jarrett Lerner, award-winning author-illustrator of *A Work in Progress*

For eleven-year-old Gao Sheng, home is the lush, humid jungles and highlands of Laos. Home is where she can roll down the grassy hill with her younger siblings after her chores, walk to school, and pick ripe peaches from her family's trees.

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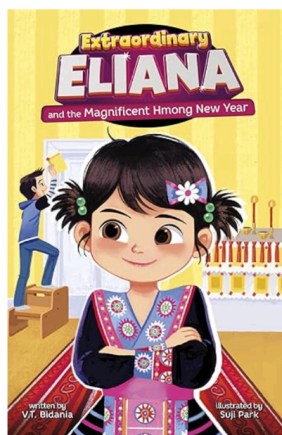
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FREE Release Day delivery **Tuesday, January 13**

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This title will be released on **January 13, 2026.**



Follow the author

Extraordinary Eliana and the Magnificent Hmong New Year Paperback – January 1, 2026

by V. T. Bidania (Author), Suji Park (Illustrator)

Part of: [Extraordinary Eliana \(4 books\)](#)

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It's Hmong New Year, and everyone in Eliana's family has an important task to perform—everyone except Eliana, that is. She wants to help—and TRIES to help—but she keeps being told "no." Is Eliana too small to do ANYTHING to help get ready for the New Year?

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Reading age	Part of series	Print length	Language
5 - 7 years	Extraordinary Eliana	32 pages	English

[See all details](#)



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This title has not yet been released.

Quantity: 1

Discover teachers' picks



Vong Bidania

to me

Mon, Nov 10, 7:22 AM



English (UK)



English (UK)



Translate email



Forward translated email

Hi Jennifer,

I hope you had a restful weekend! It was very chilly here so hopefully you're staying warm and cozy where you are.

I wanted to get back to you about my rate for school visits. I have decided to give you the same rate as last year, which is \$1500 + \$100 travel. (I usually charge \$200 for travel outside of the metro area, but because Menominee isn't as far as many of the out-of-state schools I visit, I'll keep the travel cost at \$100.)

This would include a full day of 3 presentations. We can group them the way you said with K-1, 2-3, and 4-5 grades together. If you're able to get copies of *A Year Without Home* for grades 3-5, then maybe we could regroup them into something like this: K, 1-2, 3-5. That way, I could talk about *Astrid and Apollo* and *Extraordinary Eliana* with the younger grades and *A Year Without Home* with the older grades who will be reading that book.

I really hope to make this happen, so if the rate is an issue for River Heights, please let me know. I'm willing to work with you on this. Please let me know your thoughts and we can discuss more details.

Thanks so much!

Vong

P.S. Since *A Year Without Home* is middle grade, I'm wondering if you have any contacts/teachers at the middle school who might be interested in an author visit as well?





Vong Bidania

to me

Thu, Nov 6, 3:57 PM



English (UK)



English (UK)



Translate email



Forward translated email

Hi Jennifer,

How lovely to hear from you! Yes, I'd love to come back to visit River Heights. As of now, my spring calendar is already starting to get full, so I'm glad you reached out. April 29 should work. For the younger grades, it might make more sense to talk about *Astrid and Apollo* and *Extraordinary Eliana* (the new spin-off!) and I could speak to the older students about *A Year Without Home*. What do you think? Of course I could talk about all books with all the grades, but specifically focus on the books most relevant to their reading level. We can brainstorm some more.

How exciting about your grant for books for the 3rd-5th graders! How many students are there? It would be amazing if that could work out.

I'm updating my school visit rates right now and may also be transitioning to a booking agency, but all of this is still in the works. Can I get back to you in a couple of days with more details and we can go from there?

Thanks so much!

Vong

--

V.T. Bidania

Children's Book Author

vtbidaniabooks@gmail.com

www.vtbidania.com

Twitter/Instagram: @vtbidania



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