

Vulnerable Adult Act Redesign: Findings from stakeholder engagement in 2019

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Introduction and overview

In order to inform a redesign of the Vulnerable Adult Act (VAA) and Adult Protective Services (APS), the Department of Human Services (DHS) Adult Protection unit worked with consultants to gather input from important stakeholder groups in 2019 through two phases of work.

In Phase I, Public Sector Consultants (PSC) interviewed stakeholders representing 53 organizations or state divisions. PSC also researched evidence-based practices and compared Minnesota's adult protection system with systems in other states.

For Phase II, staff from the state's Management Analysis and Development (MAD) consulting group used several methods to engage an even broader group of stakeholders. To start Phase II, MAD invited people who are, or who care for or work with, vulnerable adults to share their perspectives through Community Conversations centered on fictional stories describing potential maltreatment of a vulnerable adult. At an in-person Community Stakeholders Summit, community members and staff from organizations who hosted Community Conversations helped interpret the feedback from the Community Conversations and identified the values that should ground a redesign of the VAA. At two Institutional Stakeholders Summits, one for general institutional stakeholders and one for APS workers and supervisors, more people who are invested in a redesign of the VAA shared their perspectives and built on the insights gathered from community members. Additional information about both Phase I and Phase II, including next steps in the redesign process, starts on page 12.

Overall, community and general institutional stakeholders had consensus across many recommendations for how to improve the VAA and APS. However, the perspectives of APS workers did not align with those of other stakeholders' in some key areas.

The following findings, which are described in more detail in this report, emerged as a result of stakeholder input collected in 2019 in both phases:

General

- Overall, community and institutional stakeholders' values do not align with the current VAA.
- Safety and protection are highly valued, but they need to be balanced with vulnerable adults' right of self-determination.
- The current system is seen as punitive and focused on blame, but APS workers are concerned about losing real or perceived authority to take action to protect vulnerable adults.
- There is disagreement over whether evidence-based and promising practices should be mandated by the VAA.
- The system is not culturally responsive.
- Adult protection is underresourced, resulting in funding inequities.
- Many critical definitions are outdated or need revision.

Prevention, public awareness, and reporting

- The VAA should focus more on prevention.
- Public awareness and education on adult protection are needed.
- Mandated reporters face challenges and may benefit from more training and education.
- Mandated reporters may overreport and the public may underreport.
- The central entry point for reporting is generally viewed positively.

Intake and prioritization

- There is a lack of consistency in screening and intake, resulting in stakeholders not knowing what to expect from the system after making a report.
- There should be more time for screening, intake, and prioritization.
- APS workers would like the common entry point for reporting to perform social work functions.

Investigations and services

- APS workers want to maintain investigative functions.
- The system needs an alternative response in cases of self-neglect.
- There should be more options for resolving reports of maltreatment.
- There is disagreement over whether support and services should extend beyond the vulnerable adult.

Collaboration and data sharing

- Data sharing restrictions hinder collaboration and trust building, but privacy is also important.
- Communication is essential for effective collaboration.

Outcomes measurement

- Data should be used for continuous improvement, but caution should be used when selecting measures.

Detailed findings from stakeholder engagement in 2019

Below is more detail on the findings that have emerged through stakeholder engagement in the VAA Redesign process so far. There are general findings, as well as findings specific to areas of the VAA or APS.

General findings

Overall, community and institutional stakeholders' values do not align with the current VAA

At the Summit events with both community and institutional stakeholders, participants were asked to identify the values they think are essential for APS. Generally, stakeholders identified a disconnect between the values they think are important and the current VAA and how APS operates based on the statute. The majority of the findings described in this report serve to demonstrate the ways stakeholders feel this divide appears in practice.

Safety and protection are highly valued, but they need to be balanced with vulnerable adults' right of self-determination

The majority of stakeholders interviewed during Phase I agreed that the goal of the VAA and APS is to protect vulnerable adults. In the Community Conversations and the Community Stakeholders Summit, safety was mentioned most often across all the stories as a value that is important to the individuals involved.

However, at the Community Stakeholders Summit, participants identified that while community members—especially those who work with and support vulnerable adults—may feel safety is most important, the vulnerable adult may value independence and self-determination above all. In the Community Conversations, the value identified most often as important to the vulnerable adult in the story was independence, autonomy, self-determination, or freedom, while the value identified most often as important to the reporter in the story was safety. Several Community Conversations also identified dignity of risk as an important value for vulnerable adults.

Balancing independence and self-determination with safety and protection was identified as an essential value by participants at the General Institutional Stakeholders Summit, as was the value of choice. Both community and general institutional stakeholders acknowledged the challenge APS faces when a vulnerable adult makes a

choice that could be considered “bad” or puts their safety at risk. However, participants generally agreed that it should be the vulnerable adult’s right to make that choice if it is an informed one.

APS workers who participated in the APS Stakeholders Summit echoed the values of person-centered approaches and balancing safety and self-determination. However, it was only in the APS stakeholders group that some participants said the authority to take away decision-making power from individuals was important to maintain or even strengthen. One APS worker said it is too difficult in Minnesota to have someone civilly committed or to have a guardian appointed.

The current system is seen as punitive and focused on blame, but APS workers are concerned about losing real or perceived authority to take action to protect vulnerable adults

In Phase I interviews and throughout Phase II engagements with community and general institutional stakeholders, there was consensus that the current VAA results in APS being too focused on investigations and assigning blame. Many stakeholders described the system as punitive. The Phase I report recommends altering the philosophy and approach of the VAA, and community and general institutional stakeholders engaged in Phase II echoed the need to focus more on support and services.

Emphasizing the need for a system that really addresses the root causes of maltreatment, many stakeholders recommended that APS should be able to offer services and supports to caregivers and family members—even if they have been accused of maltreating the vulnerable adult—if that is what the vulnerable adult wants and it would lead to increased safety.

Many stakeholders, both community and institutional, referenced Child Protective Services (CPS) workers’ ability to make an initial assessment of a situation before either opening an investigation or offering an optional family assessment, depending on whether there is a substantial safety risk to the child. Several stakeholders recommended that the VAA establish a similar dual-track system for adult protection.

Both community and general institutional stakeholders indicated the term “investigation” is scary, and “investigation and services” could instead be called “assessment and support.” General institutional stakeholders also recommended that the term “report” be changed to something that seems less threatening, such as “request help.”

Many APS workers supported moving to a system similar to CPS, with choice involved in how to respond depending on the situation. At least some of the participants at the APS Stakeholders Summit noted that being able to do an assessment and still offer services, even when an investigation is not warranted, would benefit vulnerable adults and could prevent future maltreatment.

However, there was general consensus among APS workers that their ability to perform investigations was not something they wanted taken away. While most participants at the APS Stakeholders Summit were supportive of a response that does not involve investigation in cases of self-neglect, participants were very vocal about needing to be able to perform investigative functions in other cases. These issues are discussed below in findings related to investigations and services.

There is disagreement over whether evidence-based and promising practices should be mandated by the VAA

Evidence-based and promising practices reviewed during Phase I included supported decision-making, the Collaborative Safety™ model, use of multidisciplinary teams, and use of standardized decision-making tools. Stakeholders who were interviewed in Phase I recommended the state train APS staff on many of these best practices. In Phase II, institutional stakeholders identified “person-centered” as an essential value for APS. The use of multidisciplinary teams, shared accountability, and root cause analysis were also recommendations that emerged from institutional stakeholders.

This finding is closely related to the two previous findings. Many of the evidence-based and promising practices involve shifting away from assigning blame toward addressing underlying issues. Many of the best practices also involve using the least restrictive method to achieve safety for the vulnerable adult.

According to DHS and APS workers, the use of person-centered approaches, trauma-informed practices, multidisciplinary teams, and supported decision-making is already happening in many places within the adult protection system. However, the VAA does not mandate the use of these practices. While the VAA does require DHS to develop and train APS staff on standardized decision-making tools, there is no real accountability if APS staff do not use them. Also, while multidisciplinary teams are identified in the VAA as an option, their use is not required.

While many community and institutional stakeholders recommended that evidence-based and promising practices should be required in the statute, some APS workers who participated in the APS Stakeholders Summit voiced disagreement. Instead, these stakeholders recommended that best practices continue to be part of training and resources provided to APS, but not mandated in statute.

The system is not culturally responsive

In additional interviews conducted at the end of Phase I, many interviewees’ comments raised issues concerning the current system’s lack of cultural responsiveness. The system was described by interviewees, and during Phase II by community and institutional stakeholders, as “one size fits all.” The current system is not seen as responsive to the needs of *all* vulnerable adults, their families, or their communities—especially those who are immigrants or people of color. These stakeholders recommended that all solutions to improve the VAA be viewed through an equity lens to help ensure the entire system is culturally relevant and responsive.

Participants in Community Conversations and the Community Stakeholders Summit echoed these recommendations, and they also called on APS to hire workers who are representative of the communities they serve. Equity and cultural responsiveness were also identified as important values for APS at the General Institutional Stakeholders Summit.

Cultural responsiveness, cultural relevancy, and equity did not rise to the top as a major concern in feedback at the APS Stakeholders Summit, which may emphasize the current disconnect between what community members desire from the system and APS’s current institutional positionality, with a majority white, female workforce.

Adult protection is underresourced, resulting in funding inequities

Throughout Phase I and Phase II, there was clear consensus across all stakeholders that APS lacks the dedicated resources it needs to be most effective.

According to stakeholders, without a dedicated funding source for APS from the state or federal level, there are inequities in resources from county to county, where property taxes and local revenue provide the majority of funding for each county's APS unit—and APS is just one of the many social services that compete for funding within a county. There is also a general sense among stakeholders that child protection receives more attention and funding than adult protection, and the lack of resources increases risk within adult protection. At the APS Stakeholders Summit, APS workers from counties in Greater Minnesota with smaller tax bases expressed dismay when hearing about the resources available to colleagues from better-funded counties.

Interviewees during Phase I identified staffing shortages—at a time when caseloads are growing—as a major concern and challenge. Stakeholders see staffing shortages as a result of low compensation for the difficult work APS staff do with little support.

APS workers were generally not supportive of having investigation duties taken away from them. However, at least one interviewee in Phase I wondered if a separation of duties between investigation and service provision could help address increased caseloads and limited resources, since most APS workers are currently responsible for both.

APS workers also indicated that additional resources and staff would be needed to implement many of the changes community and institutional stakeholders want to happen. For example, being more proactive and offering social services to people who may not be vulnerable adults, or in instances where an investigation is not needed, would require additional staff and funding. More funding would also be needed to provide case management to people who do not qualify for federally funded waiver programs or other specific programs. Many of the best practices noted previously could also require spending more time on cases, which would necessitate more resources and staff.

Many critical definitions are outdated or need revision

An update to the VAA in 1995 added definitions of terms. However, many stakeholders raised issues with current definitions, and identified specific terms that should be reviewed and revised, including “vulnerable adult” (functional and categorical), “self-neglect,” “financial exploitation” (fiduciary versus nonfiduciary), “immediate,” and “emergency.”

Based on stakeholder input, a general review of all current definitions and terms may be required to ensure alignment between the VAA and many of the other findings presented here.

Findings related to prevention, public awareness, and reporting

The VAA should focus more on prevention

As described above, many stakeholders believe the current VAA results in a system that is overly focused on investigation and assigning blame. Many stakeholders, from community members to institutional stakeholders, expressed a desire to see the system—and additional resources—more focused on prevention.

Public awareness and education on adult protection are needed

In order to prevent maltreatment, and to ensure reports are made when really needed, stakeholders agreed that more public awareness and education are necessary. It was agreed that the general public largely do not know about adult protection, nor how and when to formally share their concerns.

According to DHS data, mandated reporters make the majority of reports of vulnerable adult maltreatment; however, this could be because most people who are not mandated reporters may not know about adult protection, or people understand—or are afraid of—what will happen when a report is made.

One recommendation from the General Institutional Stakeholders Summit was to create a hotline for prevention, parallel to the Minnesota Adult Abuse Reporting Center (MAARC), so someone can call to find out about the reporting process and potentially get access to resources, especially if it is clear their report would not be screened in for investigation and services.

Mandated reporters face challenges and may benefit from more training and education

At the Community Stakeholders Summit, several stakeholders raised issues mandated reporters face. As noted below under findings related to intake and prioritization, some stakeholders said the system response is inconsistent—even within the same county—from one report to the next. Therefore, mandated reporters are put in a difficult position of betraying a client or patient's confidence by making a report, especially if they feel ill-equipped to tell the vulnerable adult what will happen next.

Training and education for mandated reporters was recommended by both community and institutional stakeholders, especially regarding how to explain their role and legal responsibilities to people, and how to support someone once a report is made. Public awareness and education were also recommended to help vulnerable adults and others understand the role of mandated reporters.

Mandated reporters may overreport and the public may underreport

Institutional stakeholders raised concerns regarding overreporting. However, many of these concerns were more specific to reports of maltreatment occurring in licensed facilities or when a licensed caregiver is responsible, which is outside the scope of this current review of the VAA.

There were some more general concerns from stakeholders regarding mandated reporters overreporting, which was linked to the need identified above for more training and education for mandated reporters. Timelines and definitions of “immediate” and “urgency” were also linked to overreporting by some institutional stakeholders. These stakeholders said the need for mandated reporters to report something “immediately” does not allow

enough time to truly assess the situation and make a good determination of whether a report is warranted. There was also a recommendation from the General Institutional Stakeholders Summit to review what is required to be reported and whether more prioritization is needed in statute.

As noted above, currently most reports of alleged maltreatment are made by mandated reporters. However, some community stakeholders believe there may be underreporting from the general population if people largely do not know about adult protection, what types of incidents should be reported, or how to report them. Community stakeholders also identified that underreporting may occur because of fear over what adult protection will do, especially if the person maltreating a vulnerable adult is a spouse, family member, or other person with whom the vulnerable adult wants to maintain a relationship. This may be related to the current sense among stakeholders generally that adult protection is too punitive and focused on assigning blame. It could also be related to the need for more public education on what adult protection is and can provide.

The central entry point for reporting is generally viewed positively

Most of the stakeholders interviewed in Phase I viewed the central entry point for reporting (MAARC) positively. Interviewees cited the ease of reporting and helpfulness of staff. The general sense that MAARC is a positive support for adult protection was echoed in Phase II, although there were some recommendations for improvement, such as simplifying the process of reporting; creating a phone-based app for easy reporting; and ensuring there is an accessible, online reporting process for people with disabilities.

Findings related to intake and prioritization

There is a lack of consistency in screening and intake, resulting in stakeholders not knowing what to expect from the system after making a report

Some participants at the Community Stakeholders Summit noted they have experienced a lack of consistency when making a report of maltreatment. They expressed frustration with not being able to predict whether a report will be screened in for investigation, even when making similar types of reports within the same county. As noted in the previous section, this caused issues for mandated reporters and their relationships with clients or patients. One recommendation from the General Institutional Stakeholders Summit was to define “bottom lines” for opening investigations, while still leaving room for consideration for county resources and professional judgment.

There should be more time for screening, intake, and prioritization

Institutional stakeholders noted that timelines required in the VAA may not result in the best outcomes. With more time to assess a situation, it is more likely that APS resources would target those cases truly needing intervention and ensuring nothing falls through the cracks. As with definitions of terms in the VAA, required timelines may need to be reviewed and revised.

APS workers would like the common entry point for reporting to perform social work functions

APS workers were the only stakeholder group to raise major concerns about the central entry point for reporting (MAARC). While interviewees in Phase I noted the helpfulness of staff who receive MAARC reports, some APS staff recommended increasing the requirements for MAARC staff, including that they be a social service professional or more highly trained or experienced, so they can better screen reports and offer consultation. This recommendation was related to a sense that too many reports from MAARC are referred to APS that should not be, and that this would be mitigated if MAARC staff could perform social work functions. There was also a recommendation at the APS Stakeholders Summit to maintain screening at the local level.

Findings related to investigations and services

APS workers want to maintain investigative functions

As identified in the first section on general findings, many participants at the APS Stakeholders Summit were vocal about their concern over losing authority to investigate and to hold people accountable, especially when a crime is committed. One APS worker said turning all investigations over to law enforcement would be detrimental, as this person believes law enforcement is seen as having an even more punitive focus and lack the social work skills of APS workers.

The system needs an alternative response in cases of self-neglect

As noted above, while APS workers did not fully support moving away from investigations, they agreed with community and general institutional stakeholders that a different response is needed in cases of self-neglect. Stakeholders agreed that cases of self-neglect do not deserve to be investigated and substantiating maltreatment in these cases is not helpful to the vulnerable adult. APS stakeholders agreed with other stakeholders that an assessment track is needed for this area rather than an investigative one. There were some stakeholders who advocated for removing self-neglect as a form of maltreatment from the VAA entirely, although it is unclear how vulnerable adults in these types of situations would then be guaranteed access to social services.

There should be more options for resolving reports of maltreatment

Several of the recommendations, especially from institutional stakeholders, were related to the desire for more options for resolving reports of maltreatment. One recommendation from the General Institutional Stakeholders Summit was to have an option for restorative justice. At the APS Stakeholders Summit, a few comments requested that “no maltreatment” be an available finding for cases. There was also a request that vulnerable adults capable of making an informed decision be able to decline an investigation.

There is disagreement over whether support and services should extend beyond the vulnerable adult

As identified in the general findings above, community stakeholders drew attention to the fact that sometimes the people around the vulnerable adult—including someone who has been found to be responsible for maltreatment—need support and social services. This was tied to honoring the vulnerable adult’s self-

determination while addressing root causes and ensuring continued safety for the vulnerable adult (for example, in an instance where the vulnerable adult desires to stay in the care of a family member who neglected them due to lack of resources or education). This recommendation was echoed by general institutional stakeholders, suggesting the “client” may need to be viewed as the whole family or the support network around the vulnerable adult.

While many of the participants in the APS Stakeholders Summit supported the idea of being able to provide services to a vulnerable adult even when an investigation is not warranted, there was not resounding support for the idea of providing support and services to those *around* a vulnerable adult. A written comment submitted at the APS Summit said APS is not family case management.

Findings related to collaboration and data sharing

Data sharing restrictions hinder collaboration and trust building, but privacy is also important

Stakeholders, especially APS workers, expressed the importance of protecting the privacy of vulnerable adults and reporters. An APS worker emphasized that just because someone is a vulnerable adult does not mean they should have to give up their right to privacy. There was also a concern from an APS worker about a “rumor” that in the future the identity of reporters would be required to be disclosed.

However, there were also many concerns from stakeholders about how data privacy rules hinder collaboration between agencies and hurts the ability of the system to build trust with people, especially reporters. Many comments from the Community Conversations expressed frustration with the fact that reporters in the stories could receive only very limited information from APS after making a report, which stakeholders believed could make people less likely to report potential maltreatment in the future. More information sharing with a vulnerable adult’s support network was echoed at the APS Stakeholders Summit as necessary for safety planning.

Restrictions on sharing data were cited in Phase I and Phase II by institutional stakeholders as barriers to effective collaboration between agencies that need to cooperate during investigations. It was recommended that data sharing laws be made more explicit, so sharing is more consistent, and data sharing be allowed for APS partners beyond law enforcement. There were also recommendations from the General Institutional Stakeholders Summit to establish a common database or case management system and to eliminate data silos.

APS workers identified the challenge with getting records from banks. One recommendation was to give statutory authority to obtain bank records without a subpoena. In the Phase I interviews, it was noted that financial institutions often charge APS for sending bank information needed for an investigation, and some counties do not have funding for this purpose, resulting in delays.

Communication is essential for effective collaboration

When asked how to deal with challenging situations in which values conflict, stakeholders agreed that communication is essential and should be the first priority. Collaboration relies on communication, and as noted above, sometimes data sharing restrictions limit communication or delay it. One recommendation from the

General Institutional Stakeholders Summit was to identify point people within each collaborating agency or organization in order to streamline communication. Another was to have a process for conflict resolution, especially in cases in which responsibility is in question. Finally, multidisciplinary teams, which were mentioned above in the general findings, were also identified as a way to improve communication and collaboration across agencies.

Findings related to outcomes measurement

Data should be used for continuous improvement, but caution should be used when selecting measures

Related to the topic of data sharing, a recommendation from the General Institutional Stakeholders Summit was to use data to be more proactive and transparent. Better data usage was also identified as a way to help track trends, make resource allocation decisions, and support evaluation of the system.

There were recommendations to measure both quantitative and qualitative indicators of success and to ensure outcome measures are aligned to community values. Specific recommendations for outcome measures included cost-benefit analysis, risk reduction, quality of life improvements, and allocation of resources.

One of the recommendations from the General Institutional Stakeholders Summit was to use caution when selecting outcome measures because this can change behavior. This recommendation seemed to point out that measuring something—and especially tying accountability to it—places value on the measure itself, which can have unintended consequences. For example, when standardized test scores were tied to teacher evaluation and school performance in the United States, significant cases of cheating were uncovered in places such as Atlanta.

Background on the VAA Redesign

The Vulnerable Adult Act (VAA), Minnesota Statutes 626.557, establishes state policy for the protection of vulnerable adults. The VAA has been updated several times since it was passed in 1980, including in 2013 when a Central Entry Point (CEP) for reports of maltreatment was created. However, the VAA has not been substantially reviewed in nearly 40 years.

Minnesota's adult protection system, as established in the VAA, receives reports of alleged abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation of vulnerable adults. The system responds to those reports and provides social services when needed to ensure vulnerable adults remain safe, independent, and protected from future maltreatment. The VAA is a civil and administrative statute that gives identified Lead Investigative Agencies (LIAs) the authority to investigate and issue a decision regarding whether maltreatment has occurred. LIAs work in collaboration with law enforcement when maltreatment is found to be criminal, as crimes against vulnerable adults are prosecuted using criminal statutes.

The system in Minnesota is complex, with Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), and APS each identified in the VAA as Lead Investigative Agencies, with responsibility depending on where the alleged maltreatment occurred or who the alleged perpetrator is.

There have been recent legislative changes to parts of the adult protection system to ensure it is achieving its intended goals, specifically related to some licensed care facilities. However, a broader review of the system has not been undertaken with a specific focus on APS, which currently receives the majority of reports of alleged maltreatment of vulnerable adults.

The decision by DHS to explore redesigning the VAA reflects the changing demographics in Minnesota, as well as recognition of the challenges within the current statute. The number of older adults and people with disabilities is expected to increase in the future, as the health care workforce is expected to shrink. Also, while APS guidance and practices have adapted over time, the actual VAA has not been updated to reflect current best practice frameworks and approaches. The VAA also established a system that has yet to receive dedicated state or federal funding, resulting in resource inequities from county to county.

The DHS Aging and Adult Services department contracted with Public Sector Consultants (PSC) to complete Phase I of the VAA review process, which involved reviewing other state models and interviewing stakeholders to gather preliminary input on the existing adult protection system.

When PSC's Phase I work was completed in the summer of 2019, DHS then brought in Management Analysis and Development (MAD), a division of Minnesota Management and Budget, to develop and facilitate Phase II of the VAA Redesign process, including gathering broader stakeholder input to develop a redesigned concept of the state APS model, with the intention of informing future revisions to the VAA.

Stakeholder engagement process

Phase I

In Phase I, PSC interviewed 63 stakeholders of adult protective services, representing 53 organizations or state divisions, including experts within and outside Minnesota, researchers, advocates, social service providers, state agency staff, law enforcement, attorneys, and county APS staff. A full report from Phase I can be found in [“The Vulnerable Adult Act and Adult Protective Services in Minnesota: A Review of National Models, Best Practices, and Stakeholder Insights”](#) (PDF).

Before moving into Phase II, MAD consultants completed additional interviews, using the same questions from those developed by PSC. These additional interviews were intended to ensure the voices of historically marginalized groups were meaningfully included from the beginning of the project. MAD conducted 10 additional interviews, which are summarized in [“Addendum to ‘The Vulnerable Adult Act and Adult Protective Services in Minnesota: Stakeholder Insights’”](#) (PDF).

Phase II

MAD consultants designed Phase II to build on the insights collected in Phase I, as well as to gather feedback from a broader group of stakeholders, including community members and people who have been—or who in the future may be—affected by APS. Input gathered at each step of the Phase II process was carried into the

next step, using participatory methods that allowed stakeholders to help make meaning of the feedback and add further insights with each additional engagement opportunity.

Community stakeholder engagement

While Phase I collected input from professional stakeholders who work in or alongside the institutions involved in adult protection, it was essential to get feedback from community members and people whose lives are directly affected by the VAA. In order to do this, MAD invited people to host Community Conversations and then facilitated a Community Stakeholders Summit to review and refine the feedback from those conversations.

Community Conversations

Rather than having state-agency-hosted meetings, the Community Conversations process was designed to gather and amplify people's voices in a way that would be more inclusive. The process was also designed to allow anyone to participate, regardless of their current understanding of the complex APS system or the VAA, including people with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

In collaboration with DHS's Adult Protection staff, including staff with extensive experience working in county APS, seven brief stories were written. Each story featured a main character who is a vulnerable adult in a situation in which maltreatment has potentially occurred. The stories and discussion questions were also reviewed by the executive director of the Governor's Council on Development Disabilities.

The stories were not intended to cover every possible situation encountered by APS, but to highlight some of the challenges of the current system, specifically situations in which there is ambiguity—for example, when it is not obvious a crime has been committed—as well as complex situations in which the values of those involved are in conflict.

The seven stories were compiled into a "[Community Conversations Packet](#)," which included instructions, the stories, discussion questions, and supporting resources. The conversations focused on what participants thought the characters would want to happen, what the characters might value, and whether the example APS response, which was based on current statute, aligned with those values.

By using stories, MAD was able to make the input process simple and engaging, allowing participants to put themselves in the shoes of the vulnerable adult, reporter, caregiver, and even the accused person in each story. It also ensured that participants were focused on the types of maltreatment that are referred to APS (i.e., those that happen in people's homes or community settings), rather than the types of maltreatment that are outside the bounds of the current VAA review (such as maltreatment that occurs within facilities licensed by DHS or MDH, which have recently received more media attention and public scrutiny).

MAD and DHS invited staff from community organizations and providers across Minnesota to host Community Conversations and to report back on the input gathered from participants. Through this method, people could participate in conversations in safe spaces, with facilitators they already know and trust, increasing the chances of receiving honest and open feedback. A webinar on September 26, 2019, provided background and more information on the process for people interested in hosting a Community Conversation. The instructions and

packet were also posted on the [VAA Redesign website](#). MAD collected input from Community Conversations through November 15, 2019. Hosts submitted notes from their groups' conversations via an online form.

A total of 20 organizations or community groups hosted Community Conversations. There was a total of 39 submissions to the online form, representing 59 total conversations about the seven different stories. Each story was discussed by at least four different groups, and several stories were discussed by at least nine different groups.

Groups were asked to briefly describe their participants. Based on these descriptions, the Community Conversations process gathered input from a variety of perspectives, including:

- People with disabilities, including people with intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities, and/or physical disabilities
- People with diagnosed mental health disorders
- Older adults
- Family members of or advocates for people with disabilities
- Caregivers or direct support professionals for older adults and/or people with disabilities
- Social service providers for older adults
- County disability services staff

It should be noted that the Community Conversations were not designed to gather input that would be considered representative of the general public. More traditional methods used by government agencies to get input from stakeholders were considered, such as surveys or in-person meetings (such as town halls or listening sessions). However, these methods would also not have reached a statistically representative sample of the public without being cost prohibitive and would likely not have been more accessible or inclusive in reaching the intended stakeholder group. They also would have involved too much time educating potential participants on the current VAA and APS in order to get meaningful feedback. Therefore, the Community Conversations were deemed to be the best among possible options for gathering community input.

Community Stakeholders Summit

The Community Stakeholders Summit, which took place on November 22, 2019, was the first in-person stakeholder engagement event. Rather than MAD or DHS staff interpreting the results of the Community Conversations, the Community Stakeholders Summit was designed as an opportunity for community members and staff representatives from organizations that hosted Community Conversations to help interpret and refine the feedback in a collaborative environment.

A total of 24 people attended the Community Stakeholders Summit, representing 14 different organizations. Many attendees either hosted or participated in a Community Conversation. The Summit was three hours and took place at the Minnesota Humanities Center in St. Paul. The event was planned and facilitated by MAD consultants, and DHS Adult Protection staff attended to observe and listen.

Participants formed small groups, with each group focused on one of the seven stories from the Community Conversations. Groups reviewed the summarized feedback from the Community Conversations and then helped

identify the most important values to honor in the APS system. This resulted in a list of the most important values across all stories, and ideas of how to define those values. Participants also discussed some of the tensions in values across different stories and provided insights into the complex situations APS encounters and what the focus for APS should be in those situations.

Notes were collected by having participants summarize their own small group discussions and individual ideas using worksheets and flip-chart paper. A DHS staff member also recorded thoughts shared during large group discussions. Participants were also invited to leave any remaining ideas or thoughts using an open-ended form or to email any additional feedback after the meeting.

Institutional stakeholder engagement

In addition to community stakeholder input, it was very important to engage professionals working in or with APS in the VAA Redesign process. These stakeholders, especially APS workers, will be directly affected by any revisions to the VAA.

Possible institutional stakeholders were identified by MAD through the help of DHS staff, and these people were invited to either the General Institutional Stakeholders Summit or the APS Stakeholders Summit, both of which took place in December 2019 and were designed to build on the input collected from community stakeholders.

General Institutional Stakeholders Summit

The first Institutional Stakeholders Summit was held in person on December 3, 2019, at the HiWay Federal Credit Union in St. Paul. The Summit was three hours. It was planned and facilitated by MAD consultants, and DHS Adult Protection staff attended to observe and listen.

A total of 42 people attended the General Institutional Stakeholders Summit. Attendees represented a range of institutional perspectives, including advocacy organizations, providers and provider associations, legal, and law enforcement. While there was a separate summit for APS staff, there were representatives from the Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA) who attended to represent the APS perspective.

Participants were facilitated through several different collaborative processes to generate feedback. They were given an opportunity to review the results from the Community Stakeholders Summit, focusing on the values identified as most important for the foundation of APS. Institutional stakeholders then added the institutional values that should guide a redesigned VAA. They also identified the values of the current VAA that may need to change or be eliminated. Participants discussed the same complex situations that arose in the Community Conversations stories, providing input on what should happen when values are in conflict in situations involving vulnerable adults. Finally, they were asked to provide guidance and recommendations to the people who will be working to generate solutions on how to better align the VAA with community and institutional values.

Notes were collected by having participants summarize their own small group discussions and individual ideas using worksheets and flip-chart paper. A DHS staff member also recorded thoughts shared during large group discussions. Participants were also invited to leave any remaining ideas or thoughts using an open-ended form or to email any additional feedback after the meeting.

Adult Protective Services (APS) Stakeholders Summit

The second Institutional Stakeholders Summit was held on December 13, 2019. Participants either attended in person at the Elmer L. Andersen building in downtown St. Paul or remotely through a WebEx online meeting. The Summit lasted three hours. It was planned and facilitated by MAD consultants, and DHS Adult Protection staff attended to observe and listen.

An invitation to the APS Stakeholders Summit was emailed to a list of all county APS supervisors, in addition to a list of tribal health and human services contacts. Many people who received the email invitation forwarded it to additional staff. A total of 36 APS staff attended in person. Remote participants were asked to email MAD consultants after the Summit to confirm attendance, as many indicated they planned on have multiple people on the same login or call. While over 30 remote participants were noted as having logged in to the WebEx event during the Summit, only 13 participants were confirmed by email afterward. Therefore, at least 49 APS staff are confirmed to have participated in the Summit, but the number of actual participants is likely much higher.

Counties and tribes known to have been represented at the APS Stakeholders Summit are:

- Anoka
- Blue Earth
- Carver
- Chisago
- Clay
- Dakota
- Grant
- Hennepin
- Isanti
- Lower Sioux Indian Community
- Mower
- Pope
- Ramsey
- Renville
- Scott
- St. Louis
- Stearns
- Stevens
- Wright

Participants at the APS Summit were facilitated through several different collaborative processes to generate feedback. They were asked to review and provide feedback on the institutional values generated at the General Institutional Stakeholders Summit. Participants also reviewed and discussed the input from the General Institutional Stakeholders Summit regarding complex situations and what should happen when values are in conflict. Finally, they were asked to also provide additional guidance and recommendations to the people who will be working to generate solutions on how to better align the VAA with community and institutional values.

Participants who attended in person used worksheets and posters to record and provide their input and ideas. Participants who attended remotely used both the WebEx chat feature and a set of online bulletin boards created using [Padlet](#) to record and submit their feedback. Remote participant comments and ideas were selected and read aloud during the Summit. A DHS staff member also recorded thoughts shared during large group discussions. Finally, participants were invited to share any remaining ideas or thoughts using an open-ended form or to email any additional feedback after the meeting.

Next steps for Phase II

Phase II of the VAA Redesign process has two more substantial steps to be completed in spring 2020.

Solution Groups

At this point, five Solution Groups will be formed to take the input received from community and institutional stakeholders and develop recommendations for how to better align APS with stakeholders' values. Participants at both Institutional Stakeholders Summits were invited to express their interest in serving on a Solution Group.

Solution Group participants will need to have a strong working knowledge of the current VAA and of the county-based APS system. MAD and DHS will work to form Solution Groups that represent a wide variety of stakeholder perspectives.

The groups will meet in February and March. The Solution Group recommendations would then be combined into a draft redesign concept.

World Café

The draft redesign concept, based on Solution Group recommendations, will be vetted at a World Café, which is currently planned to take place in May 2020. Stakeholders who participated in Community Conversations, the Community Stakeholders Summit, or an Institutional Stakeholders Summit will be invited to attend the World Café in order to review the draft redesign concept and provide feedback before a final report is submitted to DHS.