

Insights on Arab-American Giving: A Report from the Collaborative of Arab-American Philanthropy

A Project of the National Network for Arab-American Communities and the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services

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Prepared by Karen Rignall

With the research support of Jeanette Mansour, Taleb Salhab and Karin Tice

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ABSTRACT

Insights on Arab-American Giving: A Report from the Collaborative of Arab-American Philanthropy

This report is the first initiative of the Collaborative for Arab-American Philanthropy, a program to promote strategic philanthropy in the Arab-American community nationwide. The Collaborative was established in 2005 with the funding of the W.K. Kellogg and the C.S. Mott Foundations. It is intended to serve as a permanent forum in support of Arab-American giving.

The first phase of the Collaborative is a research project to better understand Arab-American giving. There are literally no in-depth studies of Arab-American philanthropy. This research is fundamentally action-oriented, with the primary goal of assisting Collaborative staff in designing an outreach initiative that responds to the priorities of Arab-American donors. A second goal is to provide Arab-American organizations with practical insights about donor priorities they can use in their own fundraising.

The research

How Arab Americans define philanthropy: Research participants emphasized philanthropy as giving of oneself, for the sake of community development and empowerment. They emphasized that it could involve both time and monetary donations and that it was a fundamentally personal and emotional endeavor. They also described philanthropy as a more systematic approach to giving than traditional charity.

Defining Arab-American philanthropy: In describing the particular attributes of Arab-American giving, participants noted that philanthropy in the community is in its infancy and still unstructured. It tends to be personal, focused on the family and often religious in motivation. At the same time, Arab-American giving is broad, including both Arab-American and mainstream organizations, domestic and international groups. Some of the challenges for Arab-American giving include a lack of awareness of Arab-American organizations to which to donate, competition for donors, a lack of resources to support donors, the lasting impact of September 11th and divisions within the community.

A snapshot of Arab-American giving: The research showed a diverse set of priorities for Arab-American donors. Participants emphasized support for international organizations, whether humanitarian or political, domestic social justice issues and advocacy on behalf of Arab Americans, family, religious institutions, domestic humanitarian and service groups, and education. They had a strong interest in youth and in giving to both Arab-American and mainstream organizations. Participants noted the impact of September 11th in dampening giving, but also noted how Arab-American philanthropy was trying to respond to this sense of crisis. Research also showed generational differences in giving patterns, with older Arab Americans and newer immigrants focused more on giving to their home countries.

The practicalities of giving: In describing what they wanted to accomplish with their giving, few respondents had concrete goals but most had a vision of community empowerment. They tended to consult peers, family and religious leaders for advice but

did not otherwise turn to others for professional counsel for their giving. Participants described clearly what affected their decision to keep on giving, citing the strength of personal relationships, board and staff leadership, strong reporting and follow up, transparency, accountability, and organizational reputation as key factors.

Conclusions

Research conclusions offered concrete suggestions for how to structure the Collaborative's outreach program as well as general insights into the key issues facing Arab-American philanthropy. It was clear that this is an opportune time to promote Arab-American giving because of increased levels of civic engagement in the community: the impact of September 11th both stifled giving and spurred civic participation. Philanthropy could help address the pervasive negative stereotypes of Arab Americans by "telling the story" of Arab-American contributions to American society.

In terms of the program itself, the research indicated that an effective outreach effort must include a diverse range of culturally competent approaches. Donor education should be tailored to the specific interests of each target group and focus on small events, personal relationships and building trust among donors. Outreach should also include concrete support through the dissemination of "how to" resources for giving (which would include guidance about avoiding post-September 11th backlash in philanthropy) as well as establishing vehicles through which Arab Americans can donate to the community. Such vehicles should be both financial and service-based since volunteerism is an important priority for Arab Americans. An effective program would make sure that the outreach supports giving both to mainstream and Arab-American groups. Research participants also highlighted the importance of providing support and training to Arab-American organizations to enable them to better target philanthropists in the community and of including Arab-American youth in any outreach plan.

1. Introduction

This report is the first initiative of the Collaborative for Arab-American Philanthropy, a program to promote strategic philanthropy in the Arab-American community nationwide. The Collaborative was established in 2005 with the funding of the W.K. Kellogg and the C.S. Mott Foundations. It is intended to serve as a permanent forum in support of Arab-American giving. The goals and methods of the Collaborative parallel similar efforts in other ethnic, racial and tribal communities to promote strategic philanthropy and draws from the many lessons learned and research conducted in these initiatives.

The goal of the Collaborative is to strengthen Arab-American communities by increasing the resources devoted to community institutions and highlighting the important contributions of Arab-American philanthropy to our country. This initiative strives to support Arab-American giving in all of its diversity, whether directed specifically at Arab-American community organizations or towards other issues of concern to Arab-American donors. The underlying philosophy of the program emphasizes the power of philanthropy to energize and inspire Arab Americans. A systematic approach to giving – challenging ourselves to give more and to give creatively – brings our community together around a common vision of empowerment.

In the two year pilot program, the Collaborative will:

- Reach out to Arab Americans to encourage them to invest in their community organizations by connecting potential donors and volunteers with Arab-American non-profits
- Empower Arab-American donors by providing the tools and support they need to make an impact with their strategic philanthropy
- Raise awareness throughout the Arab-American community about the challenges facing Arab Americans and what the diverse Arab-American organizations are doing to empower our community
- Work with Arab-American community organizations to strengthen their ability to reach out to donors and build community support for their work
- Provide technical and financial support for one fundraising campaign launched by a member of the National Network for Arab-American Communities
- Create a permanent resource center at the National Network for Arab-American Communities to support philanthropic giving for Arab-American empowerment and lasting social change

The Collaborative for Arab-American Philanthropy is a project of the National Network for Arab-American Communities (NNAAC), a coalition of grassroots organizations that provide services to Arab Americans in their communities. NNAAC was formally established in 2004, but had been operating as a capacity-building and networking program since 2002. NNAAC is currently housed at the Arab Community Center for Economic Services (ACCESS), 35-year-old human services and advocacy organization in Dearborn, Michigan and the largest Arab-American organization in the country.

The Collaborative has a two-pronged approach that addresses both the needs of donors and the needs of Arab-American community groups as they attempt to diversify their philanthropic base. However, the first phase of the initiative, a research effort described below, addresses the concerns and opinions of donors and does not tackle the issues and challenges facing community groups.

Aim of the research

The first phase of the Collaborative is a research project to better understand the current issues facing Arab-American giving. There are literally no in-depth studies of Arab-American philanthropy. This research is fundamentally action-oriented, with the primary goal of assisting Collaborative staff in designing an outreach initiative that responds to the priorities of Arab-American donors. A second goal is to provide Arab-American organizations with practical insights about donor priorities they can use to develop their relationships with Arab-American philanthropists. The Collaborative project director led the research with key support from ACCESS development staff, staff of the National Network for Arab-American Communities, and consultants from the University of Michigan, Formative Evaluation Research Associates of Ann Arbor, and the C.S. Mott Foundation. The Collaborative also drew on the work of the many practitioners and researchers that have examined philanthropy in other communities. We are especially indebted to the Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society at City University of New York Graduate Center and the research the Center conducted as part of the Coalition for New Philanthropy in New York.

The Collaborative research agenda sought to gain a deeper understanding of how Arab Americans perceive philanthropy. This is not a scholarly study and researchers did not attempt to gather a representative sample of the national Arab-American community. Rather, the sample was culled from existing donors to ACCESS and other donors, volunteers and community activists who will serve as the primary target audience for the Collaborative's outreach efforts. Research participants included a diverse array of established professionals in the public and private sectors, community activists who closely identified giving with volunteerism, emerging young professionals, senior established philanthropists more immersed in the world of strategic giving, newer immigrants and 2nd or 3rd generation Arab Americans.

Methodology

Research conclusions are based on three focus groups conducted between March and June 2006 in New York City, Dearborn and Chicago. In-depth interviews were conducted with 8 established and prominent Arab-American philanthropists who did not attend the focus groups. In addition, researchers conducted a short survey for participants at NNAAC's Arab-American Community Conference in Jan. 2006 about their experiences in philanthropy and key barriers to accessing resources about giving in their communities. Two of the focus groups involved similar short surveys, the results of which were also incorporated into the conclusions. Because the sample is both small and

not representative, researchers did not attempt to make estimates of total giving in the community, average gift sizes or trends in giving behavior.

2. How Arab Americans define philanthropy

The first objective was to understand research participants' perspectives on philanthropy generally. Researchers were interested in knowing what this term meant to Arab Americans and how familiar they were to the practices associated with philanthropy.

- ***Philanthropy as giving:*** Participants expressed the common American definition of philanthropy as giving of yourself; other definitions focused on the aim of community development, a sense of religious obligation, an expression of love and a selfless contribution.
- ***Time and money:*** There was consensus that philanthropy included both financial contributions and volunteering, though there were differences regarding the relative importance of the two approaches. Established professionals and donors tended to give more financially because of limited time while younger professionals had an active volunteering agenda because they had limited resources to give.
- ***Philanthropy as an emotional endeavor:*** Participants emphasized the emotions and motivations associated with giving more than a concrete vision of what impact philanthropy can have. Few discussed the practical benefits of philanthropy. Only one mentioned that “we should not forget the tax breaks and other benefits” of giving, though many took advantage of incentives. To appear to be interested in tax breaks or other benefits could be seen as unseemly among Arab Americans, who tend to feel that philanthropy should be selfless.
- ***Philanthropy as a different way to give:*** There was broad consensus that philanthropy was a “different” approach to giving. As one respondent phrased it, philanthropy is different from a charity model and Arab Americans may be caught in the latter. “The philanthropy model needs a certain level of sophistication to advance our community. We need to move beyond charity.” Philanthropy involves donations outside the family and has to be more accountable than charity.
- ***Philanthropy as empowerment:*** There was general consensus that philanthropy was about more than giving for personal satisfaction and individual growth. It was also a means towards power and recognition for the community as a whole. One participant stated this clearly: “First and second generation Arab Americans who are more assimilated need to teach new immigrants or others who don't know about philanthropy that money equals power.”

3. Defining Arab-American philanthropy

A particularly lively and galvanizing subject throughout the research was what defined Arab-American giving. Researchers were interested in determining whether participants felt that there are characteristics that set Arab-American giving apart from other groups.

What are the particular cultural, historical or political issues at play in shaping Arab-American philanthropy?

- ***Arab-American giving is unstructured:*** There was broad consensus that Arab Americans are very generous donors but that Arab-American philanthropy is still in its infancy and does not have the impact for the Arab-American community that it should. For many, this led to a call for a concerted plan for Arab-American giving: an institution to help organize philanthropy for greater impact in the community and to bring positive attention to Arab-American contributions to American society. Respondents felt that the way Arab Americans do philanthropy differs from the “American model.” One interviewee cited the example of an Arab-American organization that was very professional in its reporting to donors, noting that as “an American model,” in implicit contradistinction to an Arab-American approach. The assumption was that mainstream or “American” organizations are systematic while Arab Americans tend to be informal and unsystematic. Others did not see such a dichotomy, emphasizing that philanthropy allows Arab Americans to find pride in their heritage and build a sense of community with their fellow Arab Americans. This sense of community allows Arab Americans to contribute to American society without losing that sense of identity.
- ***Arab-American philanthropy is more personal:*** Research participants felt that there is a strongly personal character to philanthropy among Arab Americans because in the Middle East, the traditional focus of giving is within the family, extended kin group or religious group. Volunteering is a common practice but it is not necessarily formalized or named “volunteering.” As one participant highlighted, “organized volunteering is a concept people don’t understand” at the same time that she emphasized how generous people were with their time and resources to help their families, neighbors and communities.
- ***A religious overlay to giving:*** A sense of religious obligation was an important element of Arab-American giving and many participants felt it was the primary vehicle for fellow community members. This was variously interpreted as an expression of generosity and a potential obstacle for systematizing Arab-American philanthropy. As one participant noted, many of the successful businessmen in the community are newer immigrants and they will often give hundreds of thousands of dollars to religious causes but not to non-sectarian groups or social service agencies serving the Arab-American community. They may not have a clear understanding of the role non-profit community institutions play in this country or of the tax benefits associated with philanthropy.
- ***Giving to Arab American versus mainstream institutions:*** This research showed unequivocally that Arab-American giving is not specifically “Arab American,” but also extends to mainstream institutions. The explicit intention for many was to build a more positive image for the Arab-American community. Philanthropy was broadly recognized as an important way for Arab Americans to show their commitment to American values.
- ***Giving domestically versus internationally:*** Participants emphasized that sending funds back to the Middle East was a defining aspect of Arab-American giving. Participants felt that traditionally, Arab Americans have placed a higher priority on humanitarian support of their communities back home or on supporting their extended

- ***A new activism and new pessimism:*** Participants highlighted dual tendencies in Arab-American philanthropy and volunteerism – on the one hand, many Arab Americans have developed a sense of renewed activism after the backlash of the last five years. They feel a sense of possibility that the overwhelming negative backlash against the community offered an opportunity to come together and seize the attention for a more constructive purpose. On the other hand, many Arab Americans have experienced a deep pessimism. One participant noted, “There is a feeling of doom, that we are overmatched and my money doesn’t make a difference. Why should I bother?” This tied in closely to the fears surrounding giving or activism – many Arab Americans do not want to be identified as Arab for fear of being targeted by the FBI, a fear especially marked among new immigrants.

Challenges to giving in the Arab-American community

In this research, discussions of what define Arab-American philanthropy quickly turned to debates about the challenges of giving within the Arab-American community. Among the challenges cited were:

- ***Religious focus:*** Donations are focused on faith-based organizations such as mosques and religious advocacy groups, posing a challenge for community-based agencies with a service or broader advocacy mission.
- ***Lack of awareness:*** There is a lack of awareness among Arab Americans about the importance of philanthropy in advancing the community – according to many participants, Arab Americans with money tend not to even know about grassroots organizations working on behalf of the community or do not believe that their money can make a difference.
- ***Competition for donors:*** A concurrent challenge is that among the groups that are familiar to donors, there is intense competition for donor support. This has resulted in widespread donor fatigue – a core group of organizations keeps on going back to the same donor pool with more and more frequent requests. This results in a zero-sum sentiment among groups that already feel like the donor pool is small and stretched by the seemingly constant set of challenges facing both the Middle East and the Arab-American community.
- ***Lack of targeted resources:*** There are no clear, concise ‘how to’ resources targeted to the Arab-American community to encourage giving or make the process easier. Many options for mainstream giving are also not open to Arab-American organizations or causes – for instance, workplace giving through groups such as the United Way.
- ***The lasting impact of September 11th:*** The closure of Islamic charities, murky regulations surrounding anti-terrorism and philanthropy, and an overall targeting of the Arab-American and Muslim communities has created widespread fear in the community. This fear has spilled into people’s willingness to give domestically as well, as they

wonder whether local donations could cause legal trouble or bring them unwanted attention. Some research participants felt that there was an opportunity hidden here - the fact that people are afraid to give abroad might mean that they are more willing to give to local causes that they know better.

- *Divisions within the community:* Many research participants felt that divisions within the Arab-American community pose a significant challenge to promoting philanthropy. One respondent felt that “the divisiveness of the Middle East is penetrating Arab-American society,” with the harmful effect of creating too many splinter groups unable to work together. This was an issue that evoked strong emotions among many participants, who felt that Arab Americans cannot afford to let divisions splinter the community; these donors emphasized giving to non-political and non-sectarian groups as a result of this concern. These perceived divisions were not only considered a barrier to philanthropy – some felt that philanthropy itself can be a way to bring people together around a positive goal and put aside differences to create community change. A number of donors emphasized the value to them of seeing partnerships among Arab-American community groups. This indicated a concerted effort to avoid redundancy and leverage the activities they do for more impact.

4. A Snapshot of Arab-American Giving

This section outlines the giving priorities of the Arab-American donors who participated in our research. Generally speaking, giving patterns showed a clear distinction between higher level gifts, which were the result of more emotional, personal and sustained engagement with organizations and smaller donations, many of which were responses to mail appeals and less personal relationships. The larger, more personally motivated gifts tended to be for Arab-American causes while smaller gifts were distributed more broadly to mainstream groups. The stated reason for many was that they wanted to give to charities where their contribution would make a real difference and that would address an issue dear to them.

The areas of interest that figured most prominently for Arab-American donors were (in no particular order):

- Arab-American advocacy and political mobilization
- Mainstream advocacy organizations
- Arab humanitarian or advocacy organizations
- Education
- Arab-American service and culture organizations
- Arab-American faith-based or interfaith groups
- Mainstream social service and health
- Mainstream cultural groups

Insights into giving priorities

- *International – humanitarian or political:* Most donors mentioned some international giving, a reflection of the level of investment Arab Americans tend to have in the

situations in Lebanon, Palestine and other conflicts in the Middle East, as well as their home communities' welfare.

- *Domestic social justice issues or advocacy:* Giving here tended to focus on civil rights and political mobilization of Arab Americans in order to ameliorate the image of Arabs, address discrimination against the community and work towards overall empowerment of the community.
- *Family and religion:* Giving to family and to religious causes are key characteristics of Arab-American philanthropy. Some noted specifically that they “take care of their family first,” and for their estate planning, they plan to provide for their family before considering other philanthropic goals. Many said that their religious giving did not exclude giving to secular groups or other kinds of issues. Some noted that their giving stemmed from a sense of religious obligation while one interviewee explicitly stated that his philanthropy was not rooted in his faith but in a desire to build community.
- *Strong interest in youth:* Participants' strong interest in youth was not just a question of giving in order to support youth but also of involving youth in the practice of philanthropy so that they, too, can get involved in community-building and preserving their heritage. Many felt that Arab-American youth both suffer more from discrimination and are in the greatest danger of losing their cultural heritage because of the stigma attached to being Arab. Giving directed at cultural celebration was seen as a way of addressing this. In terms of involving youth, one interviewee noted, “When you build a philanthropist, they will retire and may not give as much, but their children may be made aware and can fill their shoes; children should become philanthropists...and efforts [to encourage philanthropy] should be family oriented.”
- *Arab American versus mainstream:* Most donors did not give exclusively to Arab-American causes. Giving to mainstream organizations was important to Arab Americans for two main reasons – it is way to show commitment to American values and society and a way to connect with their local communities as professionals or community members with a range of concerns. Others put their primary emphasis on giving to Arab-American community groups because they felt that it was the best use of their time and resources. As one person stated: “I can diversify my money [to give outside the community], but my time is more scarce so I give that to the Arab-American community.”
- *Education:* This was an important priority for many donors, some of whom had the resources to endow academic chairs or participate in substantial fundraising campaigns. Given how difficult endowment fundraising can be, this shows the potential that already exists within Arab-American philanthropy.

Some generalizations about giving priorities

- *Vehicles for giving:* Most research participants focused on philanthropy as cash donations rather than the full range of financial vehicles (stock, real estate, etc). While most were also involved in giving their time, few mentioned in kind support through their places of employment or offering professional services. Donors tended to focus on

cash donations or volunteerism generally as a way to develop relationships with receiving organizations.

- *Impact of September 11th*: In many respects, the attacks of September 11th had such a profound impact that a detailed examination of the effects on philanthropy is beyond the scope of this report. It was general knowledge among participants that murky regulations and backlash severely dampened giving and so little discussion actually turned on this question. Some did note that worries about donating cash or leaving a “paper trail” did shift the way they gave. For some, this meant turning away from religious organizations or nascent community groups that do not have the accountability mechanisms of more established organizations. They tended to focus on well-respected, well-known groups in the community as hedge against being targeted for their philanthropy.
- *Responding to a sense of crisis*: One issue that sets apart Arab Americans from other ethnic communities at this time is the sense of crisis regarding the community’s position in American society. Beyond negative stereotyping and portrayals in the media, there is a broad sense that official targeting of the community calls for an urgent response. Arab Americans perceive philanthropy as one prong in this strategy – beyond the common sentiment of wanting to give back to this country, research participants also saw their giving as a way to counteract the negative images of Arabs so prevalent in this country.
- *Generational differences*: The way that generational differences play out in the Arab-American is quite similar to other immigrant communities. The research showed at least the perception that recent immigrants tend to give more to their country of origin and hold on to values traditionally associated with that community. The younger generations, often born in the U.S., tended to have a broader range of causes to which they gave and tended to have a greater understanding of the way mainstream American non-profits work. This conclusion gave rise to an interesting paradox in the research. On the one hand, a picture emerged in the focus groups of youth as more politicized, activist and “outward looking” as a result of the backlash from September 11th. One participant felt that “guidance from the older generation is missing...The older generation has a more dominant relationship than giving advice.” On the other hand, some research participants cited a fear that Arab-American youth are losing their heritage and that, as one stated it, “second and third generation immigrants are not as involved.” Philanthropy, in this view, could be a way to bring these youth back into community work and promote pride in their culture.
- *Differences in immigration status*: Some participants felt that newer immigrants were less likely to engage in systematic philanthropy. On the other hand, others felt that newer immigrants were more likely to be affected by many of the policies and discrimination targeting Arab Americans and were often more invested in community activism. Newer immigrants who were established professionals and high level donors showed themselves to be quite adept at learning the way American philanthropy works and embarked on sustained giving rather easily.
- *Defining the community*: Participants were asked how they define the community they want to support through their giving. Research participants were already comfortable with the idea of an “Arab-American community” and most spoke of this as

the focus of their philanthropy. Although the community is defined by Arab ethnicity it is very diverse nationally, religiously, economically and in terms of immigration status.

A history of giving

How people approached their giving was influenced by their personal history of philanthropy. As is true for most communities, participants became involved when they were young and as their economic stature increased, were able to become more financially generous. One established philanthropist described his history in this way: “I started [giving] early, aspiring for leadership and independence; in college, I saw that you have to give not expecting anything in return. I started helping on an individual level - once you have accumulated resources, you can give more systematically.” Many donors who shared this profile talked of getting their start as activists, either in the Arab-American community or on purely “American” issues such as the Vietnam war or the civil rights movement.

Another said that he got started when he established himself in the U.S. as an immigrant. He was looking for something that could replicate the sense of community he had in the Middle East; for him “philanthropy gives you pride and gives you that missing sense.” A strong work ethic marked the childhood of many of the philanthropists in our research and they understood from that the importance of “giving back.” Many highlighted their early involvement in philanthropy as a direct result of their immigrant heritage.

Another way Arab Americans got involved was through their professional experience. Work as a corporate funder allowed one interviewee (retired from a career as a CEO of a large Midwestern company) to get his “feet wet” in philanthropy and learn how to plan his personal giving. Most of the donors, whether high or mid-level philanthropists, noted the impact that their peers had on their giving, either by motivating them to get involved in the first place or by talking to them about causes that are close to their heart.

5. The practicalities of giving (Donor goals, influences and decision making)

Questions about the practicalities of giving yielded some of the most concrete insights about how best to support Arab-American philanthropy. Participants were very clear about what they expected to see from organizations that they support.

What do Arab Americans want to accomplish with their giving?

The research findings in this area closely paralleled those of the Coalition for New Philanthropy/CUNY study.¹ In that research, “most donors [interviewed] have limited knowledge of the types of vehicles or ways to contribute to or finance efforts; many are also vague about the types of service areas, programs or projects they would most like to

¹ Felinda Mottino and Eugene D. Miller. “Pathways for Change: Philanthropy among African American, Asian American and Latino Donors in the New York Metropolitan Region.” Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society at the Graduate Center, the City University of New York, in partnership with the Coalition for New Philanthropy. 2005

support. There are some who dare to dream big but most do not envision clear obtainable goals...The disconnect between a willingness to give and the lack of clear goals and plans for giving among donors is one area where non-profit orgs can better partner with donors.” (pp. 37) This was found to be true for Arab-American research participants as well.

While many had a vision for empowering the community and redressing some of the problems facing Arab Americans, it was harder for them to articulate specific or long-term goals for their donations. There was a broad understanding, however, that there is, in the words of one interviewee, “a difference between just giving and a long-term commitment.” Defining what that difference meant in concrete terms for philanthropy was more of a challenge since many participants were not aware of the broad range of giving vehicles or how to apply a strategic approach to their philanthropy. The exception here was among the highest-level donors who had already worked through trusts, community foundations and other established vehicles such as United Way. Even for donors less familiar with these mechanisms, there was a sense that their giving would be enhanced through setting clearer goals and using a more systematic approach. One had started developing a philanthropic budget to help him decide how to give.

Who Arab Americans consult about their philanthropy

The research showed that there is no established network or community for advising Arab-American donors and that many professional sources (like philanthropic advisors, financial planners, non-profit development officers) that cater to mainstream philanthropists are not a significant presence in the Arab-American community. Participants did not express a need for professional advice and did not specifically cite this as a barrier to their giving. However, when asked, participants noted a lack of familiarity with giving vehicles, implying that advice may be welcome and appropriate. The highest-level donors were more integrated into the mainstream philanthropic community and they either had ready access to counsel or felt that “I am knowledgeable about the field so I don’t need to rely on others.” This particular interviewee was interested in the idea of a charitable organization that others who are not so familiar with philanthropic vehicles can give to; in his view, it could channel Arab-American giving and could “help them understand planned giving and other vehicles.”

This should not imply that Arab Americans do not rely at all on others’ advice in determining their giving priorities. The main sources of counsel for Arab-American donors were family members and religious leaders. Others were influenced by mainstream programs and thought about their relevance for Arab Americans: one donor for instance, learned about the work of Habitat for Humanity and thought, “...Gee, we should have that [in our community.]” Many were also open to advice and solicitation from their peers. They often tried to encourage giving among family, friends and colleagues and were willing to be the objects of such entreaties themselves. Participants felt that this mode of networking and peer influence was particularly powerful in the Arab-American community.

What impacts a donor's decision to give – and keep giving?

The factors noted below are not listed in order of importance. Participants felt that there was a long way to go for Arab-American organizations to develop their capacity in these areas but they also expressed understanding that the Arab-American non-profit sector is still a nascent one. Participants showed a long-term commitment as donors to helping Arab-American groups better reach out to them as philanthropists.

- *Personal relationships:* Virtually every participant emphasized the importance of personal relationships and building trust – no one wanted to have an exclusively financial relationship with the Arab-American groups that were most important to them. This kind of personal involvement was also a way to feel reassured that the donors could feel safe in giving. By knowing an organization well, donors could get a good sense of whether their money was being properly spent. Others stated that if they are going to donate substantial sums, they want to have major input in policy and decisionmaking at the organization.
- *Importance of a personal appeal and public relations savvy:* Donors responded well when organizations took the time to tailor their message to them and exhibited some savvy in how they conducted their communications. Paying attention to the medium and the message was seen as a sign of sophistication and a good investment in donor relations. It could compel donors to reach out to their peers and pressure them to give since the organization made the task easier for the donor.
- *Execution and tangibility:* Donors noted that having a tangible project and executing the project well was a strong factor in their decision to give. One participant noted that “I am for quality things; things done well.” Donors frequently highlighted examples of groups to which “you give money and you don’t know where the money goes – you don’t get immediate feedback and don’t know what they are doing.” On the other hand, if the organization makes the effort to show you the results, “you see the fruits of the gifts, it is contagious and you want to give more.” Conversely, if the organization makes the effort to recognize the donor, that can be a good way to continue the sense of investment: one philanthropist noted he would be likely to continue giving if he “enjoyed the event and got good recognition. I like to see successful people doing successful things.”
- *Importance of strong leadership:* Donors emphasized the importance of strong leadership at the board and staff level in determining their giving. Beyond a strong personal relationship with the donor, participants felt that program and financial operations should be well-documented and transparent, and that administrative costs should be kept to a minimum.
- *Importance of follow-up, reporting and transparency.* Participants said that good reporting was important both because of post- September 11th scrutiny and because many donors are professionals who are results oriented in general. They want to see the impact of their donations: “feedback is essential, not only reports but inviting people to functions and visits.” Others elaborated that they wanted to see “a strong strategic plan, timely reports back, invitations to events that highlight organization’s activities” and “a clear mission and goals, reasonable administrative costs, strong leadership, annual

report, [and] measurable impact. Make the donor a partner.” A few noted negative experiences in this regard and so when Arab-American groups show a systematic approach to reporting and getting the work done, they stand out. One participant described how Arab-American groups are not as savvy in resource development as mainstream organizations and that they “need to understand they need to spend money to make money.” Another cautioned the Collaborative to help organizations understand the need to use volunteers and donors wisely. “Follow up is crucial...there are much more sophisticated ways to ask for money and we need to use those.”

- *Reputation of the agency as key factor.* People felt that having a strong reputation and broad recognition does much to allay Post-September 11th concerns about giving. Acquiring this kind of reputation not only means paying attention to the issues described above, but also engaging with the mainstream non-profit community – recognition in the mainstream community can offer some kind of insurance against government targeting. Donors honed in on this (as well as developing accountability and transparency) as a key way of addressing the fear of giving. While they would like clarity about government regulations and felt like Arab and Muslim Americans were being unfairly targeted, they spent little time discussing reforming the regulations, largely because of a sense of pessimism about government responsiveness to their concerns.

A community organization perspective

Although not the focus of the research, focus groups and surveys did yield some insights into the perspectives of the Arab-American community organizations that are on the “asking side.” Arab-American community groups show an acute understanding of the need to professionalize both fundraising and program operations. While they would like to turn to professionals, corporations and foundations to diversify their funding base, they feel overwhelmed by the time and skills needed to branch out in this way. They also understand the importance of high quality materials, reporting and brochures as well as the elements of strong fundraising –grantwriting, donor databases, etc. – but they feel they do not have the expertise, relationships or resources to get started. There is a broad sense that doing systematic fundraising in the Arab-American community is very hard because of lack of awareness or divisions in the community.

They highlighted a number of areas in which they could use support:

- Knowing how other successful Arab-American groups communicate with Arab-American business and professionals
- Assistance in identifying and developing a network of leaders (donors and supporters generally) locally
- How to approach potential donors in our community: a ‘how to’ guide for engaging in systematic fundraising
- How to set up a donor database and maintain relationships with donors
- How to communicate our goals and purpose to the whole community at large
- Develop a culture of philanthropy in the Arab-American community
- Raise awareness of the need for increased funding for Arab-American human service organizations

- Highlight the philanthropic work that already exists within the Arab-American community in order to shatter stereotypes
- Help local organizations benefit from the national credibility of the Collaborative, NNAAC and other nationwide Arab-American groups

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Research conclusions offered concrete suggestions for how to structure the Collaborative’s outreach program as well as general insights into the key issues facing Arab-American philanthropy. It was clear that this is an opportune time to promote Arab-American giving because of increased levels of civic engagement in the community: the impact of September 11th both stifled giving and spurred civic participation. Philanthropy could help address the pervasive negative stereotypes of Arab Americans by “telling the story” of Arab-American contributions to American society.

In terms of the program itself, the research indicated that an effective outreach effort must include a diverse range of culturally competent approaches. Donor education should be tailored to the specific interests of each target group and focus on small events, personal relationships and building trust among donors. Outreach should also include concrete support through the dissemination of “how to” resources for giving (which would include guidance about avoiding post-September 11th backlash in philanthropy) as well as establishing vehicles through which Arab Americans can donate to the community. Such vehicles should be both financial and service-based since volunteerism is an important priority for Arab Americans. An effective program would make sure that the outreach supports giving both to mainstream and Arab-American groups. Research participants also highlighted the importance of providing support and training to Arab-American organizations to enable them to better target philanthropists in the community and of including Arab-American youth in any outreach plan.

The context

1. **An opportune moment for a program supporting philanthropy:** While there are many challenges and barriers to Arab-American giving, the research showed a strong demand for support in this area and broad recognition of the potential for philanthropy to strengthen and showcase Arab-American civic participation.
2. **The importance of September 11th and related perceptions of Arab Americans in defining Arab-American philanthropy:** Research participants felt that the attacks of September 11th had a dual effect of stifling giving by creating widespread fear in the Arab-American community and also spurring renewed activism among Arab Americans to address long-standing stereotypes. Philanthropy was broadly seen as a way for Arab Americans to change the negative images so pervasive in the public media.
3. **The need for a concerted public relations strategy that “tells the story” of Arab-American giving to other Arab Americans and the broader American public:** While research participants felt that a personalized approach would be best for the Collaborative program, they also felt that there needed to be a broader

public relations strategy to “tell the story” of Arab-American contributions and philanthropy. This would be a way to encourage Arab Americans to get involved and to showcase Arab-American civic participation to a broader public.

What should a program supporting Arab-American philanthropy do?

4. **Include a diversity of approaches:** A program to support philanthropy must take into account the diversity of the target audiences in the Arab-American community, especially generational differences, differences between newer immigrants and 2nd or 3rd generation Arab Americans, and differences in income levels.
5. **Incorporate culturally competent approaches into donor outreach:** All of our conclusions pay attention to the cultural specificity of working with the Arab-American community but it still is important to remember key cultural norms that impact Arab American giving as we shape materials and outreach. One key example is a sense of embarrassment in asking about tax benefits of giving because that might impugn the selfless motives of the donor. Honoring these sentiments while offering the many options for facilitating philanthropy will be a key mandate for the Collaborative.
6. **The Collaborative program should focus on small events, developing personal relationships and building trust among donors:** This would emphasize peer sharing to allow Arab-American philanthropists to learn from each other, share experiences and eventually even plan their giving together. Discussion, joint planning and strategizing would work well for higher level donors; for newer donors, a mentoring or support initiative could help them learn the fundamentals of strategic giving.
7. **Emphasize donor education targeted to different audiences:** Even though participants tended not to have specific requests for advice or support in their giving, the fact that many were not aware of the diverse philanthropic vehicles and what a strategic approach to philanthropy entails signals the importance of donor education on the “how to” of giving. This donor education should recognize the varying mix of financial donations and volunteering that everyone from young professionals to established philanthropists may engage in.
8. **Conduct donor education not only on the “how to” of giving but also on the Arab-American and non-Arab organizations working on issues that affect the community:** While research participants showed broad knowledge of Arab-American organizations, they were less aware of the community-based service providers and many of the economic issues facing sectors of the Arab-American community. If Arab-American organizations with a social service mission want to resonate with donors, they will need to build greater awareness of poverty and lack of opportunity within the community.
9. **Understand the diverse priorities of Arab-American donors:** Many donors shared the priorities of supporting Arab-American organizations that promote a positive Arab-American image and civil rights for the community, but other priorities ran the gamut of philanthropic concerns: culture, religion, education,

- political participation, health, youth development, social services, economic empowerment, community service and others. It will be important to support donors in whatever priorities they may have, offering tools and advice about how to plan giving and take advantage of tax and other incentives. Many donors will not necessarily be interested in espousing a fully “systematic” approach to giving but will continue to structure their philanthropy informally; the Collaborative can still offer valuable support to this kind of donor.
- 10. Provide support and information about giving to both Arab-American and mainstream American organizations:** Virtually all participants in the research emphasized their giving to both Arab-American and mainstream organizations. Facilitating philanthropy to all kinds of organizations will be an element of building trust with donors so that they know the Collaborative supports their goals and aspirations.
 - 11. Concretely facilitate giving:** Beyond donor education, there is a need for concrete assistance to philanthropists. This can take many forms, from help with tax and estate planning, coordinating a strategy for giving, setting up donor advised funds, or establishing a community foundation for Arab Americans. Research participants expressed a desire to organize Arab-American philanthropy for maximum impact. Even if philanthropy is not coordinated in such a formal or official way, a central institution that serves as a touchstone for Arab-American giving and a go-to resource for those interested in learning about Arab-American giving can help to address the ‘scattered’ nature of current Arab-American philanthropy. And while these kinds of services exist in the mainstream community, many also felt that a specifically Arab-American organization can provide the environment of trust and understanding needed to effectively support philanthropy in the community. Still, a key step for the Collaborative will be to link Arab Americans with mainstream philanthropic services.
 - 12. Develop concrete strategies for addressing the fear of giving after Sept. 11th, including advocacy on this issue:** Participants felt that Arab-American fear of giving after September 11th could be addressed by outreach to the community that helps them determine whether they are giving in a manner consistent with the law. But for many, this is not enough and the fear of being targeted by law enforcement persists. Further advocacy on behalf of and trust-building with Arab Americans on this issue is an important element in any effort to support giving.

Supporting Arab-American philanthropy means addressing diverse audiences, including Arab-American organizations

- 13. Emphasize the role of youth in philanthropy:** Youth figured prominently among participants’ priorities, both as a target group for donors’ giving and as future philanthropists. There was a broad sense that the youth of today will be tomorrow’s philanthropists and that they need to be educated and encouraged to get involved in giving early.

- 14. Target a broad array of donors by facilitating volunteering and other forms of philanthropy beyond financial contributions:** A strong volunteer network was seen as a way to honor the varying capabilities of donors and cultivate a new generation of philanthropists. The Collaborative can offer support to community groups in cultivating volunteerism but even more importantly, can serve as a national clearinghouse for Arab-American community service.
- 15. Technical assistance should help Arab-American community groups learn how to cultivate donors, conduct follow up and maintain relationships:** Any program to support the capacity of Arab-American community groups to diversify their philanthropic portfolio must pay attention to the issues of accountability, transparency and follow-up. These were the top priorities of donors and remain challenges for many emerging and even some established Arab-American organizations.