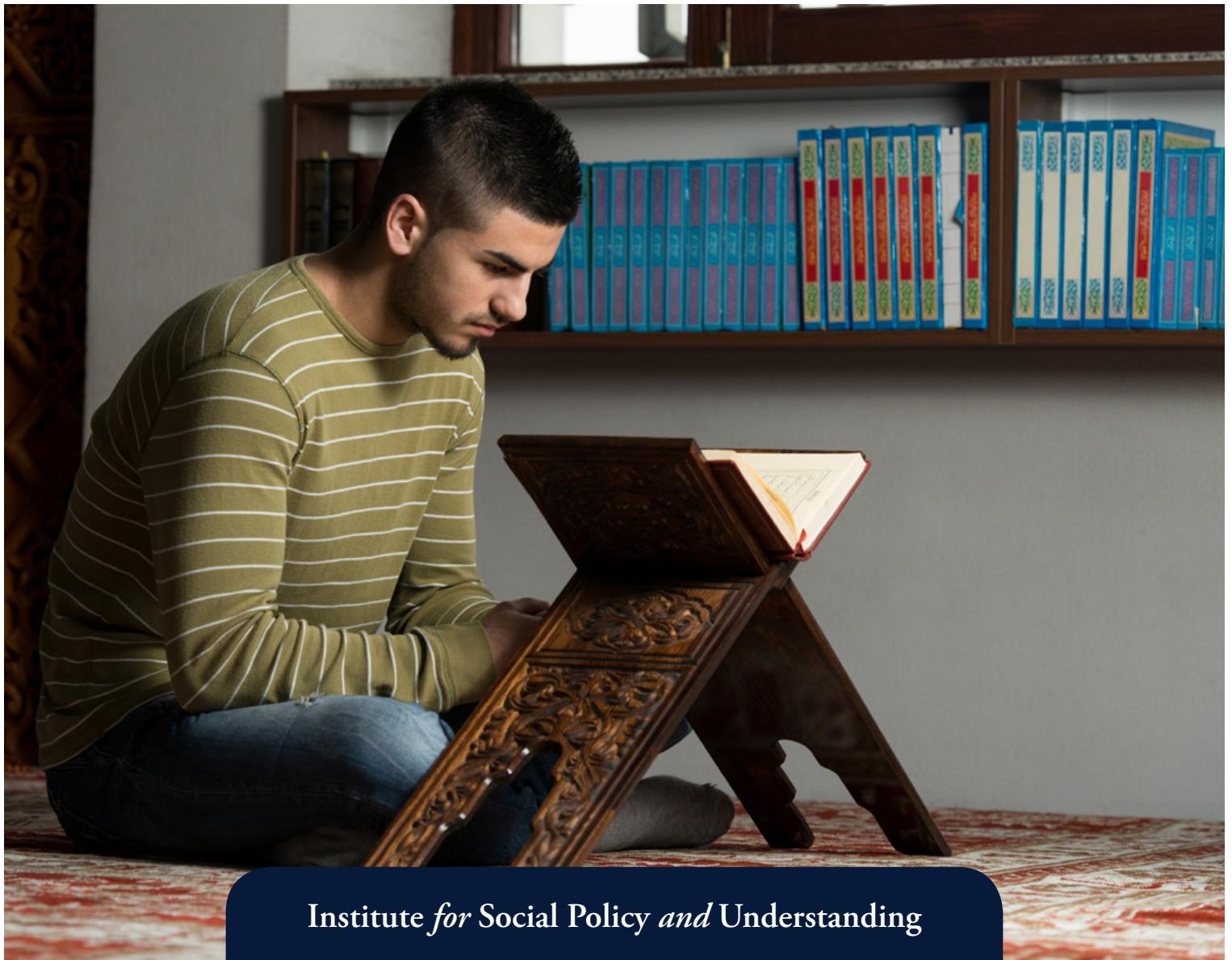




American Muslim Youth Convening Report Series

# Meeting the Needs of Generation 9/11

## Strengthening Religious Literacy



Institute *for Social Policy and Understanding*

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## Acknowledgements

ISPU would like to acknowledge the generous supporters whose contributions made this report possible:

**Mahmood and Annette Abdul Hai**

**Kenan Basha and Mariam Kandil**

**Athar and Nuzhat Siddiqui**

**Ghulam Qadir and Huda Zenati**

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# Letter from the Research Director



Any American born between 1990 and 2000 probably doesn't remember a world without smartphones, Facebook and Game of Thrones. They also likely don't recall a time when people kept their shoes on at airport security, could go all the way to the gate to see their friends off, or thought "Patriot Act" was just a good deed. Today's 15 to 25 year olds don't know an America before the horrific events of September 2001. They are "Generation 9/11."

For American Muslims, membership in this generation presents additional challenges. Their religious community, according to polls, is among the least warmly regarded of any in the country and their country's news media portrays their faith and community negatively 80% of the time. They face bullying, racial profiling and job discrimination.

Moreover, they face the same challenges of growing up as any other American, from drug and alcohol abuse to online safety to risky sexual experiences. And like other Americans, their community also struggles with racism and a crisis of religious literacy. At the same time, American mosques leaders, like their counterparts in other faiths, are finding it difficult to meet the unique needs of young people.

ISPU's "Meeting the Needs of Generation 9/11" brief series addresses some of these challenges and offers actionable recommendations for parents, community leaders and national organizations. Each brief can stand on its own or be used as part of the series for a comprehensive approach to tackling the hurdles faced by today's youth and young adults. We brought together practitioners and academics, imams and parents, local leaders and national figures, grandparents and college students to craft practical recommendations that could be applied in a variety of contexts.

Though we set out to address a number of pressing topics, we make no claim that our series is exhaustive. There are important topics that we have not covered but hope to tackle in the future. These include offline bullying and the unique needs of refugee Muslim youth as examples.

We hope these briefs help you meet the needs of this unique generation of American Muslims. We welcome your thoughts and questions.

Sincerely,

**Dalia Mogahed**  
Research Director  
Institute for Social Policy and Understanding

# Introduction

**O**n Saturday and Sunday, June 6 and 7, 2015, the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) hosted a two-day solution seeking convening on American Muslim Youth. The convening held at the El-Hibri Foundation in Washington, DC brought together 31 American Muslim experts and stakeholders ranging in age from 18 to 68.

The group came together to discuss some of the significant challenges and opportunities faced by young American Muslims today, namely young people between the ages of 15 and 25. The group included MBAs, entrepreneurs, mental health professionals, social workers, marketers, religious leaders, activists and even a Fulbright scholar. In the words of Meira Neggaz, ISPU's Executive Director, what the diverse group all had in common was, "that we care about young people and we want young American Muslims to thrive in America."

ISPU developed a list of potential invitees through outreach and referrals from practitioners who work with young people including American Muslims. The final list was based on a potential invitee's experience working with American Muslim youth, in general, and their ability to contribute to the themes and topics of the convening in particular. The final list included end user stakeholders: imams, parents, board members, youth directors, chaplains and national youth organization representatives. Consideration was also given to their geographic, religious and ethnic diversity. The 31 participants selected were individuals who met these criteria and were willing to participate in the two-day set of discussions.

While there is a great deal of useful research on American Muslims, very little of it is ever acted on. ISPU brought this group together to operationalize some of the research by posing the questions, "So What? Now What?"

ISPU as host and convener provided funding and staffing for the workshop. ISPU also created a facilitated and supportive environment for open and honest conversation. Discussions and recommendations from the convening were both a research tool and source for this report on American Muslim Youth.

To encourage open and free conversation and discussion, the convening honored Chatham House Rule. Comments have not been attributed to participants. No live tweeting or social media was allowed during the sessions and no individual audio- or video-recording in the room was permitted.

# Why this Convening on American Muslim Youth?

ISPU's focus on research making an impact guides the organization to address and answer questions critical and relevant to American Muslim communities. "How can we meet the needs of Muslim youth?" is one of the top questions that ISPU gets asked by its stakeholders and supporters.

The convening focused on young American Muslims between the ages of 15 and 25, or younger Millennials. According to Pew Research Center, the Millennial generation is "forging a distinctive path into adulthood."<sup>1</sup> Coming of age during a time of technological change, globalization and economic disruption, their behaviors and experiences are unique. Millennials are the first digital natives and the most racially diverse generation in history. Behaviorally—in comparison to their parents—they have low levels of social trust, are less linked to organized politics and religion, more linked by social media, more likely to defer marriage, and more optimistic about the future.<sup>2</sup>

Understanding this generation's broad characteristics is critical when looking at young American Muslims. Young American Muslims are unique in that they are the first true post-9/11 generation. As a generation that was born or came of age around 9/11, they have grown up at a time when the negative perception and coverage of Muslims in the media is pervasive.<sup>3</sup>

According to Roland Schlitz, Founder and CEO of Media Tenor International, "80 percent of all reports on Muslims and Islam are negative."<sup>4</sup> By comparison, "70 percent of the coverage on North Korea—a designated terrorist state—is negative."<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the media overwhelmingly ties Islam and Muslims to terrorism,<sup>6</sup> placing a great deal of pressure on the personhood and identity of young American Muslims.

The almost constant external attacks have a compounding effect when added on to the challenges youth already face as older adolescents (15 to 17) and emergent adults (18 to 25). Adolescence and emergent adulthood are periods of great transformation accompanied by complex changes in the brain and the body. Cognitive processes such as reasoning, planning, judgment, and self-regulation evolve and grow at this time and are not complete until at least the age of 25.<sup>7</sup>

As a result, adolescent and emergent adult behaviors shift dramatically during this period. The most common behavioral changes seen across cultures are: 1. increased novelty seeking; 2. increased risk-taking; and 3. a social affiliation shift toward peer-based interactions.<sup>8</sup>

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, young people in this age range are at their, "lifelong peak of physical health, strength, and mental capacity."<sup>9</sup> They are also at their most hazardous age. Mortality rates due to injury increase significantly in late adolescence (15 to 19 years old), as do rates of death due to injury, crime rates among young males, and rates of alcohol abuse.<sup>10</sup>

ISPU's joint research with the Family and Youth Institute (FYI) has shown that young American Muslims are not that different from their peers.<sup>11</sup> Socialized and acculturated with their non-Muslim peers, their behaviors mimic those of the broader population. For example, according to *State of American Muslim Youth: Research and Recommendations*, an alarming number of young American Muslims engage in risky behaviors including substance abuse, risky sexual behaviors and gambling.

Although most young people do transition through this age successfully, genes, childhood experiences, and environment can positively or negatively impact development. Support, guidance, family bonds, and a strong foundational development at this stage are critical to life-long mental health.<sup>12</sup>

At the family and community levels, parental and adult involvement, and a young person's sense of belonging, are harbingers of their future success and well-being. At the community level, quality youth programming—online, offline, youth-led, and adult-led—seem to be key to integrated identity development.

Qualitative research by ISPU suggests that American Muslim parents are struggling to provide young American Muslims the supportive environment they need. Many young American Muslims feel unsupported and misunderstood by their parents. Children of immigrants feel misunderstood because their parents do not understand American social contexts and youth culture.<sup>13</sup> Children of American Muslim converts say their parents cannot understand their challenges because they were not raised as Muslims.<sup>14</sup>

American Muslim communities' efforts to date are not hitting the mark for young American Muslims either. Many young American Muslims, "feel disconnected, judged, excluded and unsafe in mosques."<sup>a</sup><sup>15</sup> Convert youth and African American Muslim youth in particular

feel isolated and unwelcome as many American Muslim communities do not recognize or empathize with their challenges—namely post-conversion crises for convert youth and racism for African American Muslim youth.

Although some mosques and community centers have youth programming, and some national Muslim organizations focus on youth development, these programs are frequently underfunded and under-resourced.<sup>16</sup> Not finding solace or support in American Muslim institutions and feeling increasingly alienated in their Muslim spaces, many young American Muslims feel like they don't fit in anywhere.

Thus, there is an urgent need in American Muslim communities to recognize and understand American Muslim youth's vulnerabilities, as well as the risks associated with certain behaviors and the serious consequences of those risks.<sup>17</sup> Even more critically, American Muslim communities need to develop strategic solutions for both proactive prevention and effective intervention.

# Findings from Past Research

Relevant research on American Muslim youth includes the joint ISPU and FYI report, *State of American Muslim Youth: Research and Recommendations* by Dr. Sameera Ahmed, Executive Director, Family and Youth Institute (FYI),<sup>18</sup> and a literature review *Young Adult participation in American Congregations* by Faiqa Mahmood, ISPU Fellow.

## Key Findings from State of American Muslim Youth: Research and Recommendations

### American Muslim Youth Are Similar to their Non-Muslim Peers

- American Muslim youth are socialized in non-Muslim settings—whether it be the schools they attend, the camps they go to, etc.
- American Muslim youth are exposed to the same media messaging as non-Muslims (e.g. values, standards of beauty, perception of Muslims).

### American Muslim Youth are Unique

- Despite all these similar exposures and attitudes, the experiences of American Muslim youth are unique from their non-Muslim peers. For example, most American Muslim youth will experience some form of Islamophobia. However, their individual experiences are also unique based on their location, socioeconomic and racial backgrounds.

<sup>a</sup> Mosque: Arabic word for a Muslim place of worship.

## Several underserved and at-risk American Muslim Youth populations exist:

- Convert youth
- African American youth
- Youth engaging in risky behaviors

### Convert Youth

- Young converts are making a major life change at a time when they are still dependent on their parents physically, financially and emotionally. If their parents are not supportive of their conversion, it is important for them to have an alternative support system in the American Muslim community.
- Young converts often find that their experience as new Muslims is dependent on their race, both the race from which they convert and the predominant race of their adopted Muslim community. For example, converts from the African American community assimilating into an immigrant Muslim community may face racism.
- Young converts also find that their experience as new Muslims is dependent on gender. The FYI's research found that gender impacts integration. It's easier for women converts to integrate particularly if they're identifiably Muslim.
- Converts' integration into the American Muslim community is also dependent on the profile of their mosque and community (size, diversity, location, etc.) they are joining. Typically, urban mosques are larger, more diverse, and offer more programming, and thus are easier to integrate into.

### African American Youth

- In their everyday lives, African American Muslims are viewed as black first. The reality of institutionalized racism and their sociocultural context has a deep impact on African American Muslims. American Muslim mosques and communities must understand the impact of this reality on their lives.
- Young African American males may be more inclined to see Islam as an alternative, given numerous positive images of African American Muslim males within popular culture, as well as

the African American community. They relate to prominent African American Muslims including Malcolm X, Mohammed Ali, Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Yasiin Bey (formerly Mos Def), Lupe Fiasco, Q-Tip, Freeway, Keith Ellison, Andre Carson and many others—as Muslims, as Americans and as African Americans.

- Many immigrant Muslim communities are not aware of—or choose not to acknowledge—the historical and current contributions of African American Muslims to the building of America. In addition, African American Muslims' experiences and perspectives are often not included within the American Muslim narrative.
- Elder African American Muslims in the community often converted as adults and sometimes struggle to relate to African American Muslim youth.
- As a result, African American Muslim youth have difficulty in identifying living role models that can empathize with their youth experiences and struggles.

### American Muslim Youth engaging in potentially risky behaviors

- Studies indicate patterns of increasing risky behavior including drug and excessive alcohol use among youth.
- According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMSHA) 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 63% of full-time college students in the United States consumed alcohol in the month prior to the survey. The FYI has explored alcohol use in various sample populations, and their data analysis indicates that one in two Muslim college students reported alcohol consumption in the year prior.
- The FYI's preliminary research on American Muslim illicit drug use indicates usage by one in four Muslim youth. This rate is similar to SAMSHA's rate of usage by non-Muslim college students.
- FYI research identified a study of American college students in which lifetime prevalence of non-marital sexual intercourse was 76 percent.
- In a national sample of college students, the lifetime prevalence of sexual intercourse among never married Muslim college students was 54 percent.

- Engaging in one form of risky behavior increases the likelihood of engaging in other risk behaviors.
- There was no significant difference in alcohol and marijuana usage, and sexual activity between genders.
- More men than women use tobacco, particularly prior to college.

The American Muslim Youth convening focused primarily on intervention and prevention. Key findings from *State of American Muslim Youth: Research and Recommendations* on prevention and intervention include:

## Prevention

The first step is effective youth programming. Components of an effective youth program include:

- Collaboration and partnership between groups serving youth
- Youth empowering programs in environments that are strength-based, youth-generated, and address their identified needs
- A positive relational experience with peers, mentors and adults
- Clear programmatic objectives and goals that inform and direct youth activities
- A multi-method, multimodal approach to achieve programmatic goals
- Opportunities for varying levels of participation and multiple points of entry to allow for greater participation
- Integration of social media and technology
- Financial sustainability

## Intervention

With regard to intervention, there are several areas of focus:

- Strengthening families and their ability to deal with challenges – teaching parents to more effectively communicate and engage with their children so that the parent-child relationship can serve as a protective factor.
- Engaging in school – creating programs where American Muslims can engage and feel respected.
- Making masjids<sup>b</sup> welcoming – creating an atmosphere in the mosque where youth feel welcome and not judged or ostracized.

- Promoting exploration – developing spaces where youth can explore their identities, and gain exposure to art, culture, performance, etc.
- Developing a better understanding – between American Muslim communities and the wider American landscape.

The FYI report also makes recommendations around three developmental contexts (family, school, and the Muslim community) that must play a role in enhancing American Muslim youth development. Finally, it is believed that a more nuanced understanding of American Muslim youth developmental contexts—along with research findings and programmatic recommendations—will enhance current youth development efforts.

## Literature review of Young Adult participation in American Congregations

As part of ISPU's research for their study *Reimagining Muslim Spaces*, the piece *Young Adult Participation in American Congregations* by LiErin Probasco serves as a set of case studies that can be reviewed to identify best practices from other faith traditions that can be replicated in the American Muslim context.

In this study:

- Young adults are adults between 18 and 34. And the data was collected from two (2) major studies:
  - FACT National Survey, 2010 – very few mosques were included in this survey
  - Mosque survey by Dr. Ihsan Bagby
- Congregations with 21% or more young adults qualified as congregations with “significant” young adult participation (Only 16% of congregations had “significant” young adult participation).

From Dr. Ihsan Bagby's 2011 mosque survey, the number of mosques and the number of congregations are increasing. Between 2000 and 2011 there was a 74% increase in the number of mosques.<sup>19</sup> However, the primary concern of many mosques is their inability to engage and keep youth in mosques.

This seems to be a challenge across faith traditions. According to the Pew survey, approximately one in three young adults (ages 18-33) surveyed are religiously unaffiliated.<sup>20</sup> However, lack of religious affiliation does not necessarily mean lack of interest in religion. According to College Students' Belief and Values (CSVB) survey, 80% of college freshmen expressed interest in spirituality.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>b</sup> *Masjid*: Arabic word for a Muslim place of prostration.

Thus, there isn't a clear way to engage young American Muslims—as the mosque for many is not somewhere they regularly attend. However, there are opportunities there to meet young people where they are. Many young American Muslims are not becoming irreligious per se; they are just becoming unaffiliated.

Engaging with young people and meeting them where they are needs to be a stated and deliberate priority of any congregation seeking to engage youth. Having said that, congregations and their leaders need to set realistic expectations and invest in the next generation without expecting immediate returns.

# Seeking Solutions Together

Over the course of two days, groups engaged in dynamic conversation using the World Café model on the following six (6) questions presented by ISPU.

1. How can we provide better support to convert youth?
2. What can we do to prevent drug use among youth? How can the American Muslim community better address the needs of youth struggling with addiction?
3. Growing up online, youth face numerous challenges and opportunities. How do we keep American Muslim youth safe online line from radicalization, pornography, child predators, and bullying?
4. Simultaneously, how do we nurture positive online engagement through social media, peer networks, apps, and online content?
5. How can predominantly South-Asian and Arab-American mosques promote a greater understanding of race, civil rights, and create inclusive environments for African American Muslim youth?
6. What basic knowledge and literacy gaps about Islam are important to fill for American Muslim youth and what resources already exist?

As questions 3 and 4 both addressed youth online engagement, these two questions were combined for the purposes of the report.

These particular questions were chosen because they addressed some of the most pressing issues facing Muslim young people according to both qualitative and quantitative research. The selected questions are not

meant to be exhaustive of all challenges. We recognize for example that we did not address offline bullying, or the unique needs of refugee youth. These important topics may be the focus of future research.

A large number of ideas, opinions, and solutions were presented as participants engaged in timed blocks of discussion on each question on the first day. On the second day, groups worked to refine and detail some of their discoveries into actionable recommendations.

The recommendations presented by the groups are varied and diverse. However, they had several common threads and themes. Most of the recommendations included:

- A needs assessment
- A focus on promoting education, awareness or training on their focus issues
- An emphasis on engaging supporting, celebrating, and advocating for youth,
- Development or repackaging of content or programming (khutbas, videos, talking points)
- A youth-led component (educating parents, content creation and production, online promotion)
- Investing in youth and youth-targeted content and resources
- Developing and implementing policies to force change
- Capacity building efforts

# Strengthening Religious Literacy:

*What basic knowledge and literacy gaps about Islam are important to fill for American Muslim youth and what resources already exist?*

## Introduction and Key Themes

In the United States, children live in an increasingly diverse and pluralistic environment, and need to be, “equipped with an understanding of various religions” and their place in today’s world.<sup>1</sup> Although teaching about religion should be a critical part of the school curricula, educators sometimes avoid teaching about religion because of the fuzziness regarding the line between church and state. As a result, children’s general knowledge of religion is limited. This environment of limited religious knowledge promotes intolerance, fear, and hate of religion—particularly Islam.

Many American Muslim youth learn about Islam and their own religious traditions and heritage at home and in part-time and full-time Islamic schools. However, they may not be gaining a broad foundational understanding of their non-Muslim peers’ religious traditions and heritages in school.

Is what they learn enough for them to be literate and confident in their knowledge of religion in general, and Islam in particular? What can American Muslim communities do to help American Muslim youth gain a stronger and more contextual understanding of religion—their own and others?

In this series of small group discussions, participants focused on the importance of Islamic literacy for American Muslim youth. Additionally, the group identified resources that exist, literacy gaps that need to be filled, and challenges to overcome.

Following are some of the major themes and recommendations from the convening:

*“Religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess 1) a basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world’s religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts; and 2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place.”*

*—Diane L. Moore, Director of the Religious Literacy Project at Harvard Divinity School<sup>2</sup>*

## Religious Literacy in the United States

Religion does not exist in a vacuum—it is deeply enmeshed in the historical and cultural fabric of societies. Religious literacy is a crucial part of any democratic, pluralistic society.<sup>3</sup>

The United States is the world’s most religious developed nation and very religiously diverse,<sup>4</sup> but the country suffers from, “a widespread illiteracy about the nature of religion in general.”<sup>5</sup> Americans—secular and religious—are, “deeply ignorant about religion,”<sup>6</sup> their own and others.

To illustrate this point, in 2010, Pew administered the first comprehensive, national survey assessing the general state of religious knowledge among US adults, *the US Religious Knowledge Survey*. Half of the 3,400 surveyed scored less than 50%, even answering questions on their own faith incorrectly.

## Education About Religion in the United States

A critical finding of the survey was the, “widespread confusion” about, “the line between teaching and preaching” in public schools.<sup>7</sup> Less than one in four surveyed knew a religious text can be cited in a literary context, and approximately one in three surveyed knew that a public school teacher can teach a comparative religions class.

The separation of church and state was written into the Constitution to protect religious liberty, not to protect Americans from learning about religion,<sup>8</sup> or to ban religious practice and discussion. However, the lack of clarity regarding the line demarcating teaching from preaching currently makes some educators hesitant to teach about religion in public schools. Forcing public schools to become “religion free zones”<sup>9</sup> promotes religious illiteracy by denying students the opportunity to, “engage critically in the academic study of religion.”<sup>10</sup>

For young people, religious literacy can be enriching, strengthening and empowering. Understanding religions—their own and others—can help young people to better, “understand literature, history, art, or the current political landscape”<sup>11</sup> and empower them to consider and ask, “big questions.”<sup>12</sup> As religion further penetrates American politics and culture, and technology continues to blur global boundaries,<sup>13</sup> young people need to be religiously literate to compete in this increasingly integrated world.<sup>14</sup>

Lack of religious literacy limits historical and cultural understanding and encourages the association of a religion, “solely with its devotional practices, such as rites, rituals and religious festivals.”<sup>15</sup> It also fosters culture wars and promotes religious and racial hate and bigotry.<sup>16</sup>

a According to research in 2010 by the Pew Forum, almost six out of ten adults consider religion to be “very important”, and approximately four out of ten state that they attend weekly worship services.

# Religious Literacy Among American Muslims

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Many American Muslim youth learn about Islam and their own religious tradition and heritage at home and in part-time and full-time Islamic schools. However, they may not be gaining a broad foundational understanding of their non-Muslim peers' religious traditions and heritages in school. Without a strong foundational understanding of religion, younger American Muslims are limited in their ability to think critically about religion in general—and Islam in particular. They are not equipped to address the ignorance, intolerance, fear, and hate of Islam resulting from broader religious illiteracy, nor are they able to find the answers to their own questions on Islam.

## Islamic Education Among American Muslims

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The majority of American Muslim youth gain their formal Islamic education<sup>b</sup> through weekend Islamic schools or full-time Islamic schools.

In the United States, *weekend Islamic schools* are an effort by Muslims to educate their own in the Islamic faith mainly in mosques, schools, third spaces, universities and homes. These programs resemble weekend religious instruction in churches, synagogues and temples.

As instructional time is limited, the focus is on Islam's primary sources, the *Quran*<sup>c</sup> and the *Sunnah*<sup>d</sup> and the basics of the faith, namely Islamic principles and core pillars or practices; the *Quran*, its meaning and recitation; Islamic beliefs and practices; and at least a minimal level of Arabic language for worship.

In addition to limited instructional time, weekend or part-time schools have limited funding. However, they are critical places for youth development because—although full-time Islamic schools are growing in number and stature—the majority of younger American Muslims attend public schools and learn Islam through weekend or part-time schools.<sup>e</sup>

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b The generic term, "Islamic education" has multiple usages and meanings. For scholars, the term encompasses both religious and secular education about Islam. In the paper *Defining Islamic Education: Differentiation and Applications*, Susan L. Douglass and Munir A. Shaikh categorize Islamic educational activity to create more precision around the term. The categories are: 1. Education of Muslims; 2. Education for Muslims; 3. Education about Islam and Muslims for those who are not Muslim; and 4. Education in an Islamic spirit and traditions.

For the purposes of this research, the first two categories, education of Muslims (weekend schools) and education for Muslims (full-time schools) are most relevant.

c Quran: central religious text of Islam, which Muslims believe to be a revelation from God.

d Sunnah: verbally transmitted record of the teachings, deeds and sayings of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, as well as various reports about Muhammad's companions.

e According to the Islamic School League of America (ISLA)—a nonprofit that links Muslim educators around the nation—in 2011 there were 240 to 250 Islamic schools in the U.S., serving 40,000 students. Full-time Islamic schools are growing in number and stature and experienced a 25% increase in the number of schools between 2006 and 2011.

For part-time Islamic studies, two popular curricula are:

- *Islamic Studies: Weekend Learning Series* by Mansur Ahmad and Husain Nuri. The 12-year curriculum covers broad aspects of Islam based on the *Quran* and *Hadith*.<sup>f</sup> Additionally, it minimally covers social issues like peer pressure, drinking, and dating<sup>17</sup>. Part-time Islamic schools need a more comprehensive, innovative Islamic studies curriculum.
- *IQRA*. The 12-year Islamic studies curriculum developed for both weekend and full time Islamic schools. IQRA covers The *Quran*, *Seerah*<sup>g</sup> and *Hadith*, *Aqidah*<sup>h</sup>, *Fiqh*<sup>i</sup> and *Akhlaq*<sup>j</sup>, Muslim history & social studies as well as Arabic language. IQRA has been in existence since 1983, and its curriculum and textbooks are comprehensive and field-tested.

*Full-time Islamic Schools* are more all encompassing than after-school programs and weekend schools, and provide education for Muslims in both secular and Islamic disciplines at the primary, elementary, middle and/or high school levels.

Full-time K–12 Islamic schools in the United States were first funded and founded by The Nation of Islam (NOI) in the 1930s. The first school—called University of Islam—was in Detroit in the home of Elijah Muhammad.<sup>18</sup> It met political resistance, but the concept was popular and the number of Universities of Islam grew in Northeastern and Midwest urban centers. Named ‘universities’ indicated their “curriculum was universal and advanced,”<sup>19</sup> and a viable alternative to the poor educational quality and structural racism of urban public schools. The NOI curriculum included math, science, history, and reading—as well as life-skills training. Additionally, these schools cultivated a strong core focus on education and self-improvement. By the mid-1970s there were 42 Universities of Islam across the United States.

After Elijah Muhammad’s passing in 1975, his son W. Deen Muhammad became the leader of NOI. W. Deen Muhammad had converted to Sunni Islam as had many of his members. Reflecting this, the Universities of Islam—renamed Sister Clara Muhammad schools in honor of his mother and the school’s first teacher—retained their emphases on education and self-improvement, but replaced the NOI theology with a curriculum focused on the *Quran* and *Sunnah*, and Sunni thought and theology.<sup>20</sup>

The majority (85%) of United States’ 250 Islamic schools today were founded by Arab and South Asian immigrants in the 1990s. Of these, only a few are identified as Shi'a. Many Islamic schools—though Sunni—attract Shi'a students as well.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the Sister Clara Muhammad schools also have Sunni religious instruction and have joined with schools founded by predominantly immigrant Muslim communities. They have also joined umbrella organizations, such as the Council of Islamic Schools of North America (CISNA).

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f Hadith: record of the traditions or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.

g Seerah: The biography of the Prophet.

h Aqidah: Arabic for creed or religious belief system. The term has taken a significant technical usage in Muslim history and theology as a branch of Islamic studies describing the beliefs of the Islamic faith.

i Fiqh: human understanding of the Sharia.

j Akhlaq: The practice of virtue, morality and manners in Islamic theology and philosophy.

With more instructional hours than weekend Islamic schools, full-time schools' Islamic studies curricula are more in-depth. In addition to the curriculum at Sister Clara Muhammad schools, full-time Islamic schools have at least two comprehensive curricula for Islamic studies—IQRA (discussed above) and the *Islamic Studies Textbook Series* by Islamic Services Foundation.

The *Islamic Studies Textbook Series* has three levels of curricula—*I Love Islam* elementary grade level textbooks, *Learning Islam* middle school level and *Living Islam* high school. The Islamic Services Foundation has well-developed books with excellent graphics and photos, and Quran and Hadith integrated into each theme. Currently under development is an innovative eight semester high school materials encompassing the following:

- Grade 9, Iman (Heart of Life) and Fiqh Al-Ibadat (Jurisprudence of Worship)
- Grade 10, the Seerah (Story of Prophet Mohammed), and Akhlaq (Character Education)
- Grade 11, Fiqh ul-Mu'amalat (Jurisprudence of Daily Life) and Da'wa (Outreach Ethics and Techniques).
- Grade 12, Islam in America, and Islam and contemporary issues.

## Approaches to Islamic Curricula

In, "The Status of Islamic Curricula - An Overview", Freda Shamma notes that full-time Islamic schools suffer from the, "lack of a comprehensive curriculum of Islamic Studies."<sup>22</sup>

According to Shamma, there are two main approaches to curricula. The first is the established *limited curriculum approach*, which incorporates Islam into one Islamic Studies class, while the rest of the curriculum is secular—similar to those in local and state public schools. The second is the entire or *integrated curriculum approach* that restructures the curriculum for every subject and integrates Islamic knowledge/thinking into every subject.

At present, the *limited curriculum approach* is widely in use. Prior to September 11, numerous curricular reform efforts focused on integrating Islamic studies across subjects were being developed. However, after September 11, Islamic education became politicized, and most full-time Islamic schools' chose to pursue limited curricula where most of the curriculum matches those of secular public schools. These Islamic schools are "Islamic" because they offer Islamic studies and Arabic classes, and are Muslim-majority schools with a strong focus on Muslim identity.

In the longer term, the more comprehensive *integrated curriculum approach* is considered more ideal as Islam and Islamic knowledge are integrated across subjects and teaching can be more holistic.

The *integrated curriculum* is still under development. Two examples of this approach are the *Tarbiyah*<sup>k</sup> Project and FADEL. These comprehensive values-based curricula have *tauhid*<sup>l</sup> as their core content and approach, and use authentic instructional models to promote more effective learning and life experiences.

<sup>k</sup> Tarbiyah: Arabic for education and upbringing.

<sup>l</sup> Tauhid: God-centeredness in all its aspects

## More Effective Pedagogy

One of the major limitations of existing part-time and full-time Islamic school curricula and approaches is that the study of Islam is limited to only one subject. Additionally, Islamic school curricula typically take a devotional approach to Islam, teaching Islam with a focus on its doctrines, rituals and practices.<sup>23</sup> As the approach is not contextual or interdisciplinary, many important aspects of Islam cannot be covered. Another significant drawback of existing curricula and pedagogical approaches to teaching Islam is that they are not engaging and can lead to boredom in the classroom.

Keeping younger American Muslims meaningfully engaged in Islamic education is critical. To ensure that they retain what they are taught about Islam, there must be a focus on effective pedagogy that promotes literacy, as well as character, confidence, critical thinking, self-awareness and a co-existence of American and Islamic cultures.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, *Five Standards of Effective Pedagogy*<sup>24</sup> are:

1. Joint Productive Activity
2. Language Development
3. Contextualization
4. Challenging Activities
5. Instructional Conversation

*Joint productive activity* between teacher and students maximizes teaching and learning. Working together allows conversation, which teaches language, meaning, and values in the context of immediate issues. Teaching and learning through, “joint productive activity” promotes cross-cultural learning as it creates common experiences and context allowing for the development of common systems of understanding.

*Language Development* across the curriculum promotes literacy. Knowledge and thinking cannot be separated from language, and thus fostering subject focused language development—written, spoken and conversational—promotes effective learning. For example, effective mathematics learning is based on the ability to, “speak mathematics.”

*Contextualization* requires connecting school and curriculum to students’ lives. To achieve high literacy goals curricula need to be contextualized to a student’s existing knowledge and skills basis. New learning is based on existing knowledge, and students learn more when abstract concepts are explained through real world applications.

*Challenging Activities* teach complex thinking and help students with cognitive complexity. Challenging instruction encourages students to stretch their thinking, and promotes critical analysis and exploration not required with rote repetition and memorization. The goal here is to challenge students without overwhelming or discouraging them.

*Instructional Conversation* engages students through dialogue. Dialogue encourages students to form, express, and exchange ideas—as well as question and share ideas. Teachers can probe students and adjust their responses to promote learning. Instructional conversation is supportive and collaborative while allowing for sensitive contextualization and intellectual stimulation.

## Existing Resources for Younger American Muslims

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Workshop participants mentioned several existing resources for younger American Muslims. These include books, youth groups, and camps for younger American Muslims focused on leadership and identity development opportunities rooted in Islamic principles; and organizations and courses focused on Islamic learning.

### *Books, Youth Groups and Camps*

Books for youth include, but are not limited to:

- ***The American Muslim Teenager's Handbook*** by Dilara, Imran and Yasmine Hafize – This primer is a positive, fun, informative guide to being a Muslim teenager in America today. Covering everything from basic Islamic history and reading the Quran to drinking and dating, it includes thoughts and opinions from Muslim teenagers across the country, and focuses on finding one's place in America today.
- ***Growing Up Muslim: Understanding the Beliefs and Practices of Islam*** by Sumbul Ali Karamali – Karamali offers her personal account of growing up in Southern California. She also provides an academically reliable introduction to Islam—addressing its inception, development and current demographics.
- ***Reclaim Your Heart*** by Yasmin Mogahed – a manual about the journey of the heart in and out of the ocean of this life, this book is about healing, redemption, hope and renewal. Reclaim Your Heart will teach readers how to protect their hearts.
- ***War Within Our Hearts*** by Habeeb Quadri and Saad Quadri – An advice book for Muslim teens covering topics including alcohol, modesty, music, pornography, the Internet, friends, suicide, abuse, and more. The approach is positive, encouraging young Muslims to be respectful of both themselves and others.

Youth programs and camps include, but are not limited to:

- ***Inspiring American Muslim Youth (IamY, [www.iamy.org](http://www.iamy.org))*** – A youth-oriented convention for American Muslim families, IamY seeks to develop American Muslim Youth in their religion.
- ***Muslim American Society (MAS, [www.muslimamericansociety.org](http://www.muslimamericansociety.org))*** – MAS is a dynamic multi-faceted grassroots youth organization with over 50 chapters nationally. MAS offers unique programs and services promoting Islamic knowledge, community service, political activism and personal development.
- ***Muslim Interscholastic Tournament (MIST, [www.getmistified.com](http://www.getmistified.com))*** – Founded in 2002, MIST is a series of regional and national tournaments bringing high school students together from around the nation to develop

leadership, promote communication, and inspire creativity while gaining a deeper understanding of Islam and Muslims. MIST was created to empower high school students by giving them a venue to develop confidence and professionalism, and to express their thoughts and ideas through various creative media.

- ***The Muslim Youth Camp of California (MYC, [muslimyouthcamp.org](http://muslimyouthcamp.org))*** – Founded in 1961, MYC is a unique American Muslim living and learning experience. The week long spiritual retreat aims to create a living Muslim community providing social, educational and counseling experiences to help develop Islamic religious consciousness and positive Muslim identity in America.
- ***Muslim Youth of North America (MYNA, [www.myna.org](http://www.myna.org))*** – Founded in 1985, MYNA is the Islamic Society of North America's (ISNA) youth program. MYNA is focused on youth empowerment and leadership development. MYNA's programs are “for youth, by youth” and include summer camps, educational camps and an annual conference.
- ***Roots Youth Camp ([www.qalaminstitute.org/rootscamp](http://www.qalaminstitute.org/rootscamp))*** – Roots is a community program founded by the Qalam Institute that focuses on building people—youth and elders, individuals and families, students and professionals. Roots works with all mosques and organizations, helping to recruit talent to provide holistic Islamic experiences for the Muslim community.
- ***Young Muslims (YM, [www.ymsite.com](http://www.ymsite.com))*** – YM is the largest national off campus grassroots youth organization in the United States. YM’s goal is to presents Islam in an easy, beautiful, socially and spiritually relevant manner promoting the development of a balanced American and Muslim identity. YM provides college and high school students with an opportunity to discuss their religious experiences and spiritual concerns on a weekly basis in a safe environment.
- ***IONA’s Youth of Ummah (YOU, [www.youthofummah.com](http://www.youthofummah.com))*** – YOU is a youth group created by IONA center in Michigan. YOU’s objective is to provide youth with fun, creative and inspiring opportunities for leadership and personality development. Programs include basketball leagues, educational seminars, lectures, relevant *khutbahs* and videos on topics for American Muslim youth, community work and social service events and mentorship.

### *Islamic Literacy Focused Institutes*

Many institutes focused on promoting Islamic literacy in the United States offer online courses and in person weekend and weeklong retreats. Though they are not exclusively youth oriented, their programs are beneficial to youth. Some literacy institutes mentioned at the convening include:

- ***American Learning Institute for Muslims (ALIM, <http://www.alimprogram.org>)*** – Founded in 1998, ALIM was developed to empower healthy and religiously sound development of American Muslim individuals, families and society through the promotion of “Islamic literacy,” which is the establishment and critical engagement of the requisite intellectual and spiritual foundations of Islam. ALIM offers summer and winter retreats and is committed to facilitating dialogue between the textual and historical traditions of Islam and the sociopolitical, cultural, and intellectual realities informing the lives of American Muslims.

- **Bayyinah ([bayyinah.com](http://bayyinah.com))** – Bayyinah seeks to enrich individuals, families and institutions by making Arabic and Quranic studies accessible to the world. Bayyinah programs offer comprehensive study resources and educate in a way that is innovative, affordable, and easy to understand. Bayyinah seeks to make Arabic language and Islam's sacred texts accessible to Muslims in America using modern technology and innovative educational tools.
- **Fawakih ([www.fawakih.com](http://www.fawakih.com))** – Fawakih seeks to develop a generation of dynamic leaders that are deeply literate in the Islamic intellectual tradition, can respect differing viewpoints, and can think critically. Additionally, these leaders can then share this knowledge in a way that is relevant.
- **Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA, [www.icna.org](http://www.icna.org))** – ICNA is a leading grassroots organization in the American Muslim community. It was initially established for educational, personal and spiritual development, and refined its focus in the late 1970s toward social service and establishing a place for Islam in America. ICNA's projects include: ICNA Relief, 877-Why Islam, Young Muslims, the National Shura Council, the Message International, Muslim Alert Network, Muslim Savings and Investments (MSI), and more to cater to the needs of the American Muslim community. ICNA also organizes Muslim Family Day at Six Flags around the country, and created The ICNA Council for Social Justice to represent the Muslim voice on matters of social justice.
- **Islamic Organization of North America (IONA, [ionamasjid.org](http://ionamasjid.org))** – IONA's objective is to help the Muslims of North America understand and fulfill their divinely ordained obligations on the basis of the Quran and the Sunnah, to please Allah and achieve success and salvation in the Hereafter. IONA has identified Muslims' divinely ordained obligations as follows: (1) cultivation of a strong and authentic faith; (2) loving and sincere obedience to the will of Allah; (3) calling all of humankind towards Islam in the most beautiful and convincing way; and, (4) engaging in the struggle to establish social, political, and economic justice.
- **Qalam Institute (<http://www.qalaminstitute.org>)** – Through online material and on site seminars, the Qalam Institute is committed to providing khateeb training to promote the development of educated, passionate, balanced, and relevant leadership for Muslim communities in North America.
- **Rihla ([www.deenintensive.com](http://www.deenintensive.com))** – Founded by the Deen Intensive Foundation is a North American initiative dedicated to the preservation and dissemination of the core sacred sciences of Islam from traditional sources. To achieve this goal, the Foundation seeks to provide quality educational programs with qualified scholars and teachers. The week long and month long programs are designed to enlighten and empower a wide cross-section of students with the basic values of faith and citizenship so that they may live as dignified and upright individuals.
- **Zaytuna College ([www.zaytuna.edu](http://www.zaytuna.edu))** – The first Muslim liberal arts college in the United States, Zaytuna was founded in 1996 as Zaytuna Institute in Hayward, California by Hamza Yusuf and Hesham Alalusi. The institute established an international reputation for its efforts to help revive Islam's educational and intellectual legacy and to popularize traditional learning among Western Muslims. In 2004, Zaytuna Institute launched a pilot seminary program under the guidance of Zaid Shakir. After the culmination of the pilot program, the Board of Directors led the organization toward establishing an accredited Muslim institution of higher education in the United States. In 2009, Zaytuna College was launched in Berkeley, California, by Hatem Bazian, Zaid Shakir, and Hamza Yusuf. The Summer Arabic Intensive—a two-month, residential language course—was its first academic program. Subsequently, the undergraduate program welcomed its inaugural freshman class for the Fall 2010 semester.

## Identified Islamic Literacy Gaps

Below are some of the Islamic literacy gaps identified in the course of the workshop convening. Overall, the gaps identified encompassed emotional intelligence, comparative and Islamic theology, social issues, and history.

- Islam 101
  - What is jihad
  - What is sharia
  - What is hadith
  - Why do we pray?
  - Why do we fast?
- History
  - Islamic History
  - Prophetic History
  - Sectarianism/Sectarian history
  - African American History
  - African American Islamic History
  - Islam in America
  - Women's Role in Islamic History
- Comparative Religion
  - World Religions
  - Atheism/Agnosticism/Secularism
- Diversity and Pluralism of thought and practice
  - Current
  - Historical
- Addressing peer pressure and social issues
  - Dating, drinking, drugs, clubbing, sex, etc.
  - Gender interaction
- Social Sciences and humanities
  - Gender and sexual orientation
  - Women's roles in Islamic history
  - Critical thinking/emotional intelligence
  - Tactics to Address Islamophobia

## Bridging Islamic Literacy Gaps

When addressing Islamic literacy gaps among younger American Muslims, it is important to not only consider what gaps need to be filled, but also how they can be filled. Some suggestions from participants were:

- Encouraging Intellectual Honesty and Curiosity
- Strengthening Faith through a Focus on Spirituality
- Engaging Youth Online
- Safe Spaces and Curated Dialogue on Current Events
- Expansiveness and Accessibility

## *Encouraging Intellectual Honesty and Curiosity*

Islam has a long tradition of diversity and pluralism of thought and practice. However—due to time and resource constraints—existing formal Islamic education uses a more devotional approach focused on the basics of the faith. A comparative and contextual approach to Islam would recognize plurality and diversity in Islam, as well as the influences of culture, society, and politics on religion, while the devotional approach tends to be more monolithic and sectarian and does not explore diverse interpretations and contexts.

Parent and family networks can offer younger American Muslims a more contextual cultural exposure to Islam. This can be both good and bad. Often able to pass on their own culture and traditions, parent and family networks are not always able to differentiate between cultural practices and Islamic practices. This lack of clarity can further contribute to younger American Muslims' religious confusion.

If on the other hand, parent and family networks—and even Muslim spaces—are able to expose younger American Muslims to Islam's pluralism and diversity of ideas, it can promote intellectual honesty and curiosity. A workshop participant mentioned that in her Muslim space, diverse speakers and subject matter experts were brought in to talk about issues impacting American Muslims.

Offering younger American Muslims the opportunity to see and hear from people who are like them—and a little different—can help them address the monolithic stereotypes and representations of their faith. If they face cultural and religious diversity for the first time in college, their lack of early exposure to and knowledge of religious and Islamic diversity can result in crises of faith.

Nurturing a culture of asking questions and helping younger American Muslims understand that not all Muslims agree (or have to agree) on all issues—while also introducing them to different Muslim cultures and sects of Islam—can promote their appreciation of Islam while also fortifying their faith.

## *Strengthening Faith through a Focus on Spirituality*

Young American Muslims are growing up at a time when religion is waning in the United States. According to Gallup, “the church and organized religion is losing its footing as a pillar of moral leadership in the nation’s culture.” According to Pew Research Center’s 2014 Religious Landscape Study,<sup>25</sup> one in five Americans are religiously unaffiliated, or “nones.”<sup>m</sup>

Looking specifically at Millennials, one in three Millennials claim no religious affiliation. As more Millennials become adults, the number of “nones” is continuing to increase.

Less conventionally religious, less religiously committed,<sup>26</sup> “nones” attach a lower degree of importance to religion than older generations. They tend to stay away from religious organizations because they view organized religion and religious organizations skeptically. Having said that, “nones” are not necessarily

*“As Muslims, we need to be intellectually honest. We need literacy for ourselves, not just to present Islam to others.”*

*—Workshop participant*

*“More of today’s adolescents are abandoning religion before they reach adulthood, with an increasing number not raised with religion at all.”*

*— Jean M. Twenge, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology, San Diego State University and Lead researcher for “Generational and Time Period Differences in American Adolescents’ Religious Orientation, 1966–2014”*

<sup>m</sup> Religious “nones” self-identify as atheists or agnostics (31%) or those who when asked their religion say “nothing in particular” (69%).

irreligious.<sup>27</sup> Two in three “nones” believe in God, and more than one in three call themselves “spiritual” if not “religious.”<sup>28</sup>

In this broader environment, many American Muslim youth are facing existential questions about faith. Without a secure knowledge of Islam, they are not only questioning their Islamic upbringing, they are asking “Who is God?”, “What is my relationship to God?”, “What is my purpose in life?”

Formal Islamic education provides young American Muslims with basic information on Islam, but it does not awaken younger American Muslims hearts the way *seerah* does. To create a deep relationship with God they need to feel God in their daily lives, youth need more relevant and less technical information about Islam.

*“Our imams cannot be afraid of engaging social media. ISIS has recruitment video games. We have to go where the youth are.”*

—Workshop participant

### *Engaging Youth Online*

American Muslim youth may or may not come for weekend school, but they are always online. Imams and scholars seeking to engage youth need to be smart and well-versed on social media. They can establish an online presence or partner with youth-friendly Muslim social media personalities to influence and educate youth.

Youth need imams and scholars need to use youth-friendly modes of production, curation and dissemination for online content. Additionally, the Islamic knowledge conveyed needs to be accessible, relevant and youth friendly. Some online programming ideas suggested at the convening: YouTube crash courses on Islam, and more reliable online confidential Q and A centers.

### *Safe Spaces and Curated Dialogue on Current Events*

According to workshop participants, there needs to be a focused effort on improving ways of teaching and interacting with youth. There also needs to be an emphasis on creating safe, non-judgmental spaces where youth feel comfortable asking questions.

One of Muslim Youth of North America’s (MYNA) most successful programs is their open spaces’ discussion held at their conferences. Open spaces uses a workshop format, focuses on smaller groups, and tackles a specific pre-set question(s) that attendees might not bring up on their own. Roots’ Abdur Rahman Murphy utilizes a similar format at their annual youth camps. At both MYNA and Roots, the resulting discussions are extremely productive.

Additionally, American Muslim youth don’t always know how to react to social questions. For example, “My friend just told me they’re gay, what do I do?” or “What is Islam’s view on transgender people?” There is a great deal of diverse and conflicting information and American Muslim youth don’t always know who to ask for answers in their Muslim communities. In the case of Caitlyn Jenner, Abdul Rahman Murphy wrote a thought-provoking piece for American Muslim youth.

## *Expansiveness and Accessibility*

### *Expansiveness*

Current programming in Muslim spaces is very age specific. Age specific programming is helpful when addressing peer pressure and social issues (12–16 year olds – social issues – dating, clubs, music; 15–18 – critical thinking stage; and 16–19 – social media, porn, jihad).

However, less age specific, more expansive programming would encourage more diverse, more cross-generational interaction and discourse. For example, programming engaging community elders and high school students might give elders the opportunity to provide high school students with some perspective (“it seems like a big deal right now, in ten years it won’t be”), and high school students the opportunity to provide community elders with helpful insights (“this is how you upload a photograph to facebook”).

### *Accessibility*

Developing trusting relationships between all members of the community and community leadership is critical for youth identity development. Youth—both men and women—need frequent and regular access to imams and mosque leadership regardless of their age and gender (typically men have access, but women and younger people do not). This access should include informal time for questions after lectures and talks, and formal time for discussions on relevant top-of-mind topics.

In all cases, the information and format should be targeted toward young people. Often imams and leaders of the community know their subject matter but are not able to convey the information in a way that is applicable *today*. American Muslim youth seek to know how the information they are receiving is relevant to them in their lives *now*.

# Key Recommendations

## 1. Identify Resources of Islamic Knowledge and Critical Islamic Literacy Gaps

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**Target audience:** National education focused organizations, National youth organizations

**Recommendations:** Within the next six months, create comprehensive databases of resources of Islamic knowledge. This includes existing courses/learning materials/textbooks/curricula offered by Islamic schools; camps/youth groups; and Islamic literary groups.

**Target audience:** National education focused organizations, National youth organizations

**Recommendations:** Within the next year, review existing courses/learning materials/textbooks/curricula identified in databases. Based on this review identify critical Islamic literacy gaps.

**Target audience:** National education focused organizations, National youth organizations

**Recommendations:** Within the next year, supplement findings from content review (above) with in depth surveys and interviews with at least 2,000 American Muslim youth to gauge their Islamic literacy.

**Target audience:** National education focused organizations, National youth organizations

**Recommendations:** Within the next 18 months, compile and analyze database, content review and survey findings to identify resources of Islamic literacy/knowledge, and gaps in Islamic literacy.

## 2. Identify Ways to Leverage Existing Resources and to Bridge Islamic Literacy Gaps

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**Target audience:** Parents, Imams, Youth directors, chaplains, National youth organizations

**Recommendation:** In the next year, host at least two new speakers (diverse speakers and subject matter experts speaking on issues impacting American Muslim youth).

**Target audience:** Parents, Imams, Youth directors, Chaplains, National youth organizations

**Recommendation:** In the next six months, at your Muslim space host at least one youth-focused discussion on spirituality and God in our everyday lives.

**Target audience:** Parents, Imams, Youth directors, Chaplains, National youth organizations

**Recommendation:** In the next six months, at your Muslim space host a small-curated dialogue for youth on a current topic the MYNA Open Spaces or Roots discussion format.

**Target audience:** Parents, Imams, Youth directors, Chaplains, National youth organizations

**Recommendation:** In the next year, at your Muslim space after at least 50% of the events create informal time for American Muslim youth to engage with the imam and other mosque leaders.

**Target audience:** Parents, Imams, Youth directors, Chaplains, National youth organizations

**Recommendation:** In the next year, at your Muslim space host one intergenerational activity for American Muslim youth and community elders to create opportunities for cross-generational interaction.

**Target audience:** Parents, Imams, Youth directors, Chaplains, National youth organizations

**Recommendation:** Within the next year, host at least one educational hackathon. Hackathon participants can be a mix of American Muslim youth, educators and innovators coming together to discuss ways to improve and strengthen existing Islamic education (part-time and full-time) curricula and approaches. The goal would be to make the curricula and approaches more relevant, youth-focused and emotionally intelligent speaking to the realities of American Muslim youth.

**Target audience:** Parents, Imams, Youth directors, Chaplains, National youth organizations

**Recommendation:** Within the next year, host at least one online crowdsourcing campaign to identify existing resources of Islamic knowledge, Islamic literacy gaps and successful relevant, youth-focused approaches to teaching/teaching about Islam.

**Target audience:** National Muslim organizations (ISNA, CISNA, MAS, ICNA, W.D. Muhammad, MANA, etc.)

**Recommendation:** Within the next year, engage at least 2 educational consultants to evaluate existing Islamic curricula and approaches against needs of American Muslim community. Suggest revisions and changes to existing Islamic curricula and approaches to make them more effective in addressing the needs of American Muslim youth.

**Target audience:** National Muslim organizations (ISNA, CISNA, MAS, ICNA, W.D. Muhammad, MANA, etc.)

**Recommendation:** Within the next 18 months, publish findings on resources of Islamic knowledge, literacy gaps and suggested changes to curricula and approaches. Discuss these findings at a minimum of one major Muslim conference and in at least two articles, as well as in existing training materials for teachers, principals, and parents.

**Target audience:** National organizations (ISNA, MAS, ICNA, W.D. Muhammad, MANA, etc.)

**Recommendation:** Within the next six months, invest in grant writing to gain at least \$500,000 funding for youth-focused content development and creation.

### **3. Cultivate and Fund Experiential Learning Opportunities for American Muslim Youth**

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**Target audience:** Imams, Board members, Youth directors and Chaplains

**Recommendation:** In the next 6 months, cultivate and invest in at least two experiential learning opportunities for American Muslim youth at your Muslim center to promote identity development, empowerment, identity, spirituality, confidence-building. Suggested experiential learning opportunities include:

- leadership camps and initiatives
- community and faith based service
- civic engagement
- intergenerational networking
- peer networking and mentoring through: camps, big sister/big brother mentoring programs
- cultural awareness programs

### **4. Focus on Youth-Focused Content: FAQs and Answering Difficult Questions**

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**Target audience:** Parents, Imams, Youth directors, Chaplains and National youth organizations

**Recommendation:** In the next 6 months, create at least 3 hot topics FAQs and portal/channel/app for answering difficult questions.

- Create easy to access, easy to understand one page FAQs on critical topics (Sharia, sexual orientation, radicalization, domestic violence, jihad, etc.)
- Create portal/channel with anonymous submit a question function

**Target audience:** Parents, Imams, Youth directors, Chaplains and National youth organizations

**Recommendation:** Within the next year, work with influential youth and opinion leaders to create at least 5 short, groundbreaking videos, infographics or other digital media pieces. These digital media pieces would utilize existing content from Muslim experts and scholars, and would answer difficult questions dealing with Sharia, sexual orientation, radicalization, domestic violence, jihad, etc. The output would be accessible, relevant, youth-friendly, digital content targeted to popular media platforms (YouTube, snapchat, etc.) and delivered by influential public personalities.

### **5. Promote Community Focused Learning**

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**Target audience:** Imams, Board members

**Recommendation:** In the next 6 months, develop best practices for local community engagement for imams by imams through existing institutions such as American Muslim Jurists Association (AMJA)

# Strengthening Religious Literacy

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# APPENDIX 1: Scope Of Convening

At this convening, ISPU brought forward some of this valuable research on American Muslim youth to establish context, and asked for the group's input in developing strong recommendations. The convening was structured in three distinct parts:

1. *Take in research* - On Saturday morning, to establish the research context for the convening, Dalia Mogahed and others from ISPU reviewed relevant research on American Muslim youth and young adult participation in congregations; and presented guidelines for actionable and effective recommendations.
2. *Think creatively* - Once the research context had been set, the larger group broke out into smaller groups for discussion using the world café method. Using this method, Saturday afternoon, the group engaged in six (6) constructive and dynamic groups discussions: four (4) 30-minute and two (2) 10-minute sessions. These sessions were facilitated, but free flowing to allow participants to ideate in small groups.
3. *Think pragmatically about actionable recommendations* - After ideating for several hours, participants regrouped late Saturday afternoon and again on Sunday morning to develop and detail pragmatic actionable recommendations for each of the questions.

## Norm Creation

At the start of the convening, the group established agreed upon norms for the weekend. These norms included:

- *Step back, step forward* – to hear from as many voices as possible
- *Be present* – mute cell phones
- *One mic* – when someone is speaking, they are the only one speaking

- *Avoid jargon* – use accessible language, clarify what you are saying, don't assume everyone understands acronyms and terminologies
- *Express appreciation*
- *Brave space* – be brave enough to dream and to say the things that don't often get said
- *Safe space* – this is a place for respect and confidentiality
- *Be open to others thoughts/ideas* – “don't yuck my yum”
- *Be respectful of others religiosity* – avoid using labels like moderate, conservative, etc.
- *Respect time* – be timely
- *Coaching* – ask questions to understand what people are saying
- *Agree to a social contract of professional ethics*
- *Make 'I' versus 'We' statements* – understand that participants are presenting their reality and that it may not be shared by everyone in the room

## World Café Model

The World Café is a simple, effective, and flexible format for hosting large group dialogue.<sup>22</sup> The methodology is based on seven (7) integrated design principles:

1. Setting the Context
2. Creating Hospitable Space
3. Exploring Questions that Matter
4. Encouraging Everyone's Contribution
5. Connecting Diverse Perspectives
6. Listening together for Patterns and Insights
7. Sharing Collective Discoveries<sup>23</sup>

The World Café model includes the following five (5) modifiable components:

1. **Setting:** A café environment: round tables covered with paper, pens and a “talking stick.”

2. **Welcome and Introduction:** A warm welcome and an introduction to the World Café process, context and etiquette.
3. **Small Group Rounds:** Three or more 20-minute rounds of conversation per small group. At the end of the 20-minutes, each member of the group moves to a different new table. Conversations may or may not be hosted or facilitated.
4. **Questions:** Each round is prefaced with a question designed for the specific context and desired purpose of the session. The same questions can be used for more than one round.
5. **Harvest:** After the small groups and/or in between rounds individuals are invited to share insights or other results from their conversations with the rest of the large group.

# Endnotes

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# Participant Biographies

## Facilitators

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### Jennifer Hollett

Jennifer Hollett is an award-winning broadcast journalist (CBC, CTV, MuchMusic) and a leader in Canada's rising generation of community organizers and activists redefining politics. A leading digital expert, Jenn uses social media to increase participation and mobilization in politics and social issues. She studied public policy at Harvard University, obtaining her MPA, and was the digital director on Olivia Chow's Toronto mayoral campaign. Jennifer is running for Member of Parliament in Canada, as the NDP candidate in the new Toronto district of University-Rosedale.



### Zeba Iqbal

Zeba Iqbal is a freelance editor and author at ISPU. She has a diverse background in for-profit, non-profit and startup management, research, communications and business development. She led CAMP (Council for the Advancement of Muslim Professionals) from 2007-11 transforming it from a networking platform to an inclusive space for professional dialogue among American Muslim professionals. She founded and developed the CAMP Leadership Summit and was its Conference Manager in 2008, 2009 and 2011. A 2009-10 Fellow of USC CRCC's AMCLI (American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute), she has been a board member and advisor to the Muslim Democratic Club of New York; Muslim Voices: Arts and Ideas' Festival; and The Domestic Crusaders, among others.

## Participants

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### Abubakr Abdul-Latif

I am Abubakr Abdul-Latif born and raised Muslim in the heart of Brooklyn, NY. I have studied Islam in Syria, Morocco and Saudi Arabia. I'm presently a Coordinating Senior Chaplain for New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, wherein I've worked for 13 years. I am also a Mentor and Family Support Worker for Mental Health Association in Orange County New York. I'm a holder of a Youth Mental Health First Aid certification, and I am completing my bachelor's degree of Psychology at SUNY Empire State College. For many years, I have worked-in and around NYC--with Muslim and non-Muslim youth on several at-risk behaviors such as violence and drug abuse, etc.



### Sameera Ahmed

Sameera Ahmed is the Director of The Family & Youth Institute. She also serves as a Clinical Assistant Professor at Wayne State University, a Fellow at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, an Associate Editor for the Journal of Muslim Mental Health (JMMH), and a Board Licensed Psychologist in Ohio and Michigan. Her research includes risk behaviors and protective factors of Muslim adolescents and emerging adults; promoting culturally and religiously meaningful psychotherapy; and skills-based parenting and marital interventions to strengthen families. Dr. Ahmed is the Co-editor of Counseling Muslims: Handbook of Mental Health Issues and Interventions (Routledge, 2012). Dr. Ahmed holds a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, a M.S. in Biology, as well as a certificate in Family Life Education and has been involved in American Muslim youth development for over 25 years.



### Sawssan Ahmed

Dr. Sawssan R. Ahmed is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at California State University, Fullerton and a Volunteer Assistant Professor in the Department of Family Medicine and Public Health, Division of Global Health at University of California, San Diego. She completed her graduate work in clinical psychology at Wayne State University and postdoctoral training in developmental issues and health disparities at the University of California, Los Angeles and San Diego State University. Her research focuses on the role of socio-cultural risk and protective factors in physical and mental health, with a special interest in Arab Americans, adolescents and refugees. Her teaching and clinical interests include child and adolescent psychotherapy and cultural competence in working with people of color.



### Laila Alawa

Laila Alawa is the CEO of Coming of Faith, a digital media startup amplifying stories of minority women. Alawa works as the Secondary Investigator at ISPU's American Muslims Elections 2016. Laila also works on government communications, and serves as the Lead Marketing Strategist for PushBrand Marketing. She writes regularly for Salon.com, The Guardian, The Huffington Post, and Mic.com, among others. Alawa is also an associate editor at The Islamic Monthly. She previously worked at Princeton University, conducting a study on Muslim American perceptions of belonging.

# PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES, *continued*

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## Iyad Alnachef

Iyad Alnachef is the Director of Muslim Youth of Grand Blanc. He's also Founder of MYX, a consultancy institution that aims to help communities establish youth programs that are impactful, sustainable and institutionalized. He has more than fourteen years of experience in organizing community and youth development programs in the United States. His work experience took him from working as a local volunteer youth director in a community center in Michigan to working with the National Capital Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America to working with MYNA, the first national organization focused on serving Muslim American youth. He has been invited to speak at several national and international conferences on issues of youth and community development. Iyad earned his Masters in Youth Development from Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan.



## Chris Abdur-Rahman Blauvelt

Chris Abdur-Rahman Blauvelt is a passionate Muslim American entrepreneur committed to building up the global Muslim community to reach its full potential. He was born in Malaysia, raised in the United States and at the age of 16 became a Muslim through the influence of a friend and the Autobiography of Malcolm X. He received a masters in educational leadership and prior to starting LaunchGood was a teacher at one of the top boarding schools in the world, founded an Arabic non-profit, and was a producer for Bilal's Stand, an award-winning Sundance film about an American Muslim. He started working on LaunchGood in 2011 and launched the site in 2013. In just over a year LaunchGood has already helped raise over \$2 million for more than 250 projects across 23 countries, and has received the 2014 Islamic Economy Award in Dubai for best startup in the Muslim world.



## Ilhan Dahir

Ilhan Dahir has a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and English from the Ohio State University. In her time at Ohio State, she has served as a mentor with the Program for Advising in Scholarship & Service (PASS) and founded Integrated Student Services, a community group dedicated to providing services for new citizens. She served as the Executive Secretary for the Collegiate Council on World Affairs while also working as an organizer with the youth powered grassroots organization, the Ohio Student Association. She is passionate about politics, service learning, educational justice and preserving civil liberties. Ilhan is especially interested in international security issues and has worked to combat worldwide radicalization concerns at the local level by organizing community engagement programs with the Department of Homeland Security Civil Rights and Civil Liberties division. In the coming year she will be travelling to Turkey on a Fulbright scholarship and plans on attending law school upon return to the United States.



## Amin Gharad

From 2010 to 2012, Amin Gharad served two terms as president of the Muslim Youth of North America (MYNA). A rising senior at Georgetown University, pursuing a double major in Arabic and Philosophy and minoring in Government, Amin is currently president of his campus' branch of Amnesty International.



## Tannaz Haddadi

Tannaz Haddadi is a founder and president of the Board of Trustees of the Next Wave Muslim Initiative (NWMI), Inc., which works to engage the Muslim community in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area. NWMI is an organization that provides an open platform supporting a variety of programs including community engagement, intellectual discourse, spiritual practice, and social consciousness. She is currently a Privacy Analyst at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Tannaz's passion is to facilitate intra-community dialogue to build bridges of understanding between Shi'as and Sunnis. She is an alternative dispute resolution practitioner with experience in collaborative consensus building within groups and organizations, and the application of such techniques to problem-solving models in various settings. She holds an MS in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University. During her undergraduate studies at GMU she majored in Philosophy & Religion.



## Leena Hadied

Dr. Leena Hadied is a clinical psychologist at the Center for Forensic Psychiatry. She received her M.A. and Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of Detroit Mercy. Her dissertation focused on examining the relationship between mental illness and juvenile delinquency as related to recidivism in adulthood, along with identification of risk and protective factors. Throughout her career, her research has focused on understanding the dialectics of ethnic identity in transitional Muslim families, with particular interest in the youth experience. In her private practice, she works closely with Muslim and non-Muslim youth to address identity issues, as well as general mental health concerns including: addiction, depression, anxiety, self-harm, and family conflict.



## Hamada Hamid

Hamada Hamid is a Senior Research Fellow and Former Director of the Center for Global Health at ISPU. He is also a Clinical Instructor in the Departments of Neurology and Psychiatry at Yale University. Dr. Hamid completed a dual residency in neurology and psychiatry and a Masters in Global Public Health at New York University, followed by a clinical research fellowship in epilepsy at Yale University. Dr. Hamid has published several articles and book chapters on neuropsychiatric illness, mental health policy in the Middle East, and the role of culture in mental illness across a diverse spectrum of Muslim populations. He is also the founding and current managing editor of the Journal of Muslim Mental Health. Dr. Hamid has served on the boards of Tamkeen, an Arab American social service agency, Muslim Mental Health, Inc., Muslim Family Services, and he is an affiliated faculty member for the Council of Middle East Studies at Yale University.

# PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES, *continued*

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## Sulaimaan Hamed

Imam Sulaimaan Hamed serves as the resident Imam of the Atlanta Masjid of Al Islam, one of the largest Islamic centers in the southeast affiliated with the community of his late teacher, Imam W.D. Muhammad. A student of Religious Studies, he has taught Arabic and Islamic sciences at the Mohammed Schools and Islamic Theology and Islamic Law for the Faith Institute in Atlanta. He represents the new generation of teachers of Islamic Studies in America. Educated primarily in private Islamic Schools in the US, Hamed received his specialized training under the tutelage of the Grand Mufti Sheik Ahmed Kuftaro of Damascus, Syria at the Prestigious Abu Nour University. Completing courses in Jurisprudence , Arabic, Prophetic traditions, and Theology. He served as Imam of Masjid Fresno in California and assistant to Masjidul Warithleen of Oakland. Sulaimaan is passionate about the improvement of Islamic institutions of education. His publications include "Ramadan: The month of purification and self restraint." Sulaimaan currently resides in Atlanta, GA with his wife and children.



## Namira Islam

Namira Islam is a lawyer and graphic designer, and Co-Founder/Executive Director of MuslimARC, the Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative. She practiced in poverty law providing legal services to low-income individuals in Flint, MI, and has worked in prisoners' rights litigation and interned at the trial and appellate levels in international criminal law and war crimes for the United Nations. She has served on the boards of multiple Muslim student organizations and has fundraised on behalf of Islamic Relief and charity: water, as well as for other causes. Namira has been tutoring and mentoring low-income students for nearly a decade, and has freelanced as a graphic designer for diverse clients in the United States and abroad since 2007. Born in Detroit to Bangladeshi parents, Namira is an alumna of the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor and the Michigan State University College of Law.



## Saleem Khalid

Imam Saleem Khalid was born and raised in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He moved to Detroit and attended Wayne State University. He began his professional career with Standard Federal Savings, now known as Bank of America. Mr. Khalid was Standard Federal's first Muslim and African American Vice President. During this period of time he took his shahada, began his involvement with the Muslim community, and completed an Imams training program sponsored by the Muslim World League. His also has served as a consultant in both Saudi Arabia and Doha, Qatar. Immediately prior to returning to the Detroit area in July 2011, he represented Islamic Relief USA, nationally, as their Community Affairs Representative. He is actively involved in classes, talks, and lectures to Muslims and people of other faith traditions and has spoken at numerous events held at colleges, universities and Islamic Centers. He currently serves as the Executive Director of the Muslim Enrichment Project, a project providing educational and social support to new Muslims.



## Amal Killawi

Amal Killawi is a clinical social worker, researcher, and community educator. She serves as a scholar with the Institute for Social Policy & Understanding, and sits on the board of the Family & Youth Institute. She holds a Bachelors in Psychology, Masters in Social Work, and a Certificate in Sexual Health from the University of Michigan. She has a special interest in community-based participatory research and the provision of culturally competent care. Amal's previous experience includes working as a counselor with college students and domestic violence survivors, conducting research on family and health challenges in the American Muslim community, and serving as an online counselor and writer.



## Farhan Latif

As El-Hibri Foundation's President, Farhan Latif provides strategic leadership by working with the Board of Trustees and the staff to define and implement the Foundation's long-range vision, goals, strategies and policies. He previously served as the Chief Operating Officer & Director of Policy Impact at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. During his time at ISPU, Mr. Latif worked with White House, Department of State, and Department of Homeland Security officials on a range of domestic and foreign policy issues. Prior to ISPU, he spent over a decade in higher education working at the intersection of building a culture of philanthropy and enabling access for underrepresented, low income, and first generation students. As a social entrepreneur, he founded Strategic Inspirations, a social impact consulting firm focused on strengthening the ability of nonprofit organizations to build capacity, create a culture of learning, catalyze innovation through philanthropy, and maximize impact. He holds an M.A. from Harvard University and a degree in Business Management and Marketing with graduate work in nonprofit management at the University of Michigan-Dearborn.



## Khalid Latif

Imam Khalid Latif is a University Chaplain for New York University, Executive Director of the Islamic Center at NYU, and a Chaplain for the NYPD. He was appointed the first Muslim chaplain at NYU in 2005. He was also appointed the first Muslim chaplain at Princeton University in 2006. Spending a year commuting between these two excellent institutions, he finally decided to commit full-time to New York University's Islamic Center where his position was officially institutionalized in the spring of 2007. Under his leadership, the Islamic Center at NYU became the first ever Muslim student center at an institution of higher education in the United States. In 2007, Mayor Michael Bloomberg nominated Imam Latif to become the youngest chaplain in history of the New York City Police Department at the age of 24. Most recently, Imam Latif was selected as one of 60 NYC leaders to serve on Mayor Bill Deblasio's Transition Team, helping to recommend and select individuals for key roles in the current NYC administration and also appointed to a "Task Force to Combat Hate" by NYC Public Advocate Tisch James to deal with the rise in Islamophobic, anti-semitic and anti-sikh sentiment in NYC.

# PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES, *continued*

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## **Edina Lekovic**

Edina Lekovic is the Muslim Public Affairs Council's Director of Policy and Programming, where she oversees strategic initiatives in government and policy, media and communications, and leadership development. Edina has spoken in hundreds of national and international conferences, community events and interfaith dialogues on a variety of issues related to American Muslims. She has also had the opportunity to participate in a United Nations program on "Confronting Islamophobia" and the International Conference of Muslim Young Leaders, which served as a precursor to the annual conference of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). She is co-founder and graduate of the American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute and also co-founded Elev8, an arts-based youth leadership development program. From 2004-2010, Edina served as MPAC's Communications Director, and has appeared regularly in major media outlets, including CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, CBS Television, the Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, Associated Press, Chicago Tribune, and Los Angeles Times.



## **Shabana Mir**

Shabana Mir is the author of *Muslim American Women on Campus: Undergraduate Social Life and Identity*, published by the University of North Carolina Press. Shabana has taught Anthropology at Millikin University, IL, and graduate and undergraduate courses in Qualitative Research Methods, Social Foundations of Education, Anthropology, Diversity in Education, History of American Education, and Literature at Oklahoma State University, Indiana University, and Eastern Illinois University. Shabana Mir earned her Ph.D. in Education Policy Studies and Anthropology, with a concentration in Comparative Education, from Indiana University, Bloomington. She received the Outstanding Dissertation Award for her doctoral dissertation from the American Anthropological Association's Council on Anthropology and Education. She conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Washington, DC area, as Visiting Researcher at the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University. She also has an M.A. in English literature from Punjab University, Pakistan and an M.Phil. in Education from Cambridge University (UK).



## **Fatima Mirza**

Fatima Mirza, PhD, MSW, grew up in Northern Virginia and has been active in the Muslim community throughout her life. Her experiences and schooling have sensitized her to the complex interactions between individuals, families, and communities, especially for individuals who are members of minority racial and religious communities. She completed her Master's in Social Work at Virginia Commonwealth University which helped her gain more experience working with young people and individuals who had experienced traumatic events. Fatima recently completed her Ph.D. in Social Work at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, gaining advanced training in research. Her dissertation research focused on improving our understanding of Muslim American youth identity and the factors related to Muslim American youth engagement in risk behaviors. More information about her research is available at: [www.id-mosaics.com](http://www.id-mosaics.com). She is currently a Supervisee in Social Work gaining postgraduate hours required for state licensure.



## **Hadia Mubarak**

Starting this fall, Hadia Mubarak will be teaching on Islam, gender, and the Quran at UNCC's and Davidson College's respective Religious Studies departments. She received her PhD in Islamic Studies from Georgetown University, where she specialized in gender in Islam, modern and classical Quranic Exegesis, Islamic law and modern Islamic movements. Mubarak previously worked as a Senior Researcher at the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University, a researcher at the Gallup Organization's Center for Muslim Studies and a researcher with American University's Islam in the Age of Globalization project. Mubarak received her Master's degree in Contemporary Arab Studies with a concentration in Women and Gender from Georgetown University. In 2004, Mubarak was the first female to be elected as president of the Muslim Students Association National (MSA) since its establishment in 1963. She is regularly invited to speak on Islam, Muslim women and American Muslims at symposiums, conferences, and diverse religious institutions across the country.



## **Habeeb Quadri**

Habeeb Quadri is an Educator, Author, and Youth Activist. He has a Bachelor in Teaching of History and a Masters in School Administration. He currently is taking a few courses a year at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education – Principal Center, where he works as part-time staff in their professional development programs. In addition to his teaching and administrative experience in public and private schools, Habeeb has delivered hundreds of lectures throughout the United States, Canada and abroad on Islam, society, and social problems confronting Muslim youth and the community at large for the last 15 years. Habeeb is currently on the National Advisory Board for MYNA (Muslim Youth of North America), CISNA (Council of Islamic School of North America), Cook County Sheriff Muslim Advisory Board, Illinois Coalition of Non-Public School, IQRA Foundation and in the past for the Dean of Depaul School of Education.



## **Kameelah Rashad**

Kameelah is the Founder of Muslim Wellness Foundation (MWF), an organization dedicated to reducing stigma associated with mental illness, addiction and trauma in the American Muslim community through dialogue, education and training. Kameelah also serves as the Interfaith Fellow & Muslim Chaplain at the University of Pennsylvania. As Chaplain, Kameelah acts as a counselor and advisor to the Muslim students on campus and facilitates discussions on religious identity development and challenges faced by American Muslim youth. Kameelah is a 2014 Ariane deRothschild Fellow, recipient of the 2014 Student Multiculturalism and Education Awards from the Pennsylvania Psychological Association. National Council for Behavioral Health has selected Kameelah for the prestigious 2015 Mental Health First Aid Community Impact Award. In February 2015, she was one of 14 American Muslim Leaders invited to attend a roundtable discussion with President Obama (and other Senior officials) at the White House. Kameelah

# PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES, *continued*

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graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a BA in Psychology and M.Ed in Psychological Services. She earned a second Masters in Restorative Practices & Youth Counseling (MRP) from the International Institute for Restorative Practices and a post-Masters certificate in Family Therapy. Kameelah is a certified instructor in Adult, Youth and Higher Education Mental Health First Aid. She is also pursuing her doctorate in Clinical Psychology at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



## Mika'il Stewart Saadiq

Imam Mika'il Stewart Saadiq is a fifteen-year teacher of Social Studies at Detroit's Al-Ikhlas Training Academy. Imam Mika'il is a married father of five who resides in Detroit. Born and raised on the west side of Detroit, he went on to study sociology and political science at Prairie View A&M University. After accepting Islam at 21 years of age, he immersed himself in Islamic activism and began studying under local and internationally renowned Imams and scholars. He is the President of Al-Aqabah Islamic Community Center in Detroit, a Police Chaplain, a member of the Michigan Muslim Community Council Imam's Committee, and is involved in several community service projects and activities. Imam Mika'il is known for his real, but sophisticated, lectures and writings on minority and youth social issues. In 2013, he became the first Muslim to offer the invocation for a Michigan State Senate session. In late 2014, he received international notoriety when he organized over 65,000 people in a 24 hour social media blackout called the National Black Day of Silence.



## Joshua Salaam

Joshua Salaam was born in Camden, New Jersey in 1973. He was raised by a single mother who kept him very involved in every community they lived in. His mother was responsible for his involvement in MYNA (Muslim Youth of North America) from its inception in 1985. Joshua has continued to work with MYNA for over 20 years as a participant and a counselor. He helped start MYNA Raps in 1992, which later lead to the creation of the international music group Native Deen. Joshua entered the military in 1995 and served as a Police officer at an Air Force Base in North Carolina. In the military he was able to serve as a D.A.R.E. Officer (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) for local elementary schools. Joshua's ability to be creative with youth earned him the "Most Outstanding Member" in the 36th North Carolina D.A.R.E. Seminar. After the military he worked for Wayne County in North Carolina to provide drug resistance education to youth from low-income families. Joshua has returned his focus to youth work and is working at ADAMS Center in Northern Virginia as the Youth Director since 2007.



## Fatima Salman

Fatima Salman has been closely involved in Muslim American activism since her early youth. She was president of MYNA in 1994 and became head of the MSA's Tarbiyya committee in 1995. Her visit to Damascus in 1997 was a transformative experience for her and led to her regularly traveling back and forth in the following years in which she studied Islamic theology, history, Shafi'i jurisprudence, the prophetic biography, and spirituality. She also received a certification in Quranic recitation in 1997 through Shaykh Abul Hasan al-Kurdi. Fatima Salman has since then been teaching her own classes while continuing her involvement with various Muslim American organizations, such as the Majlis Youth Committee for the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) of which she is currently a member. She also serves as the Central Zone representative for ISNA, sits on the West Bloomfield Diversity Committee and on the board of the Michigan Muslim Community Council. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Arabic from the University of Michigan and is currently starting a Master's degree in social work with a focus on community organization and management from the same institution.



## Sayeed Siddiqui

Sayeed Siddiqui is a freshman studying math and computer science at Ohio State University. He has been involved with MYNA (Muslim Youth of North America) since he was in 14 in various capacities. He is currently serves as the programs chair, overseeing camps, conferences, and other MYNA programs, and is the incoming president.



## Madiha Tahseen

Dr. Madiha Tahseen received her doctorate in Applied Developmental Psychology at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). Tahseen received her M.A. in Developmental Psychology in May 2009 from UMBC, and her B.A. in Psychology in May 2005 from University of Maryland, College Park. She is currently an adjunct professor at UMBC and a member of the The Family & Youth Institute and IAMY. She is also an executive Board member of a non-profit organization, Stones To Bridges ([stonestobridges.org](http://stonestobridges.org)), which aims to provide an anonymous online platform for Muslim youth to address their emotional, social and behavioral needs. Tahseen's dissertation was on the identity experiences of Muslim-American adolescents living in a heated sociopolitical context. Her research interests include: individual and group identity development, parenting, acculturation, and risk and protective factors of Muslim adolescents' healthy development.



## Suhaib Webb

Imam Suhaib Webb is an American Muslim Imam, serving as a Resident Scholar for Make Space in Washington DC, and is the founder of the Ella Collins Institute of Islamic and Cultural studies. He is a Graduate of University of Central Oklahoma with a background in Education & Al-Azhar University from the College of Shariah (Islamic Jurisprudence). Imam Suhaib strongly advocates for an authentic articulation of the American Muslim identity & a proponent of understanding the various challenges facing the American Muslim community by finding solutions based on an Authentic American Muslim experience.

# Hosts and Conveners

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## Sarrah Buageila

Sarrah Buageila has recently joined ISPU as the Research Project Manager. Sarrah has spent the previous eleven years at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan where she has worked as an Interviewer, Research Assistant, and Project Manager within the Project Design and Management Group. She primarily worked on the National Survey of Family growth, a study of the National Center for Health Statistics. Sarrah has co-authored papers for the International Field Directors and Technologies Conference and the American Association for Public Opinion Research Conference. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology and has completed Graduate work towards a Masters of Liberal Arts in American Studies. She is also a trained Life Coach and uses her training to teach young women empowerment through self-development.



## Patrick Cates

Patrick Cates is Senior Communications Officer at ISPU. Over the past decade, Patrick has served the organization as an event management, technology, communications and philanthropy consultant. Patrick transitioned to the non-profit sector after spending more than ten years in business development, helping startups and small businesses scale to regional enterprises. Patrick's experiences focused on expanding business capacity, crafting corporate branding and developing new business models. Patrick has been instrumental in fostering foundation partnerships and technical grant writing for ISPU. He was the recipient of the Henry Ford II endowed scholarship award and University of Michigan Dearborn distinguished leadership award.



## Butheina Hamdah

Butheina Hamdah is Development Associate at ISPU where she helps manage ISPU's individual donor related development strategy and donor engagement and assists in all aspects of both fundraising and research dissemination events. She also provides executive assistance to the Chairman of the Board of Directors on strategic initiatives. She comes from a wide background of community organizing, fundraising and youth mentorship in Northwest Ohio and Southeastern Michigan. Hamdah holds a B.A. in Political Science and an M.A. in Political Science with a concentration in International Relations at the University of Toledo.



## Iffa Kazi

Iffa Kazi is the Senior Development and Research Dissemination Officer at ISPU. Prior to joining our team, Ms. Kazi worked in the fields of strategic planning, performance analysis, and non-profit development and project management. She is a proven community organizer and was at the top of her class at the Michigan Development Institute, a program to cultivate development officers. Ms. Kazi brings years of experience in the areas of community and non-profit event organizing to ISPU. She also spends time volunteering in her local community as a youth mentor and program organizer. Ms. Kazi holds a BA in Economics from UM-Dearborn where she was the recipient of numerous academic and leadership awards. She is currently pursuing graduate work in Business Administration at Wayne State University.



## Faiqa Mahmood

Faiqa Mahmood is a visiting fellow with the South Asia program at the Stimson Center, and a consultant at the Institute of Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU). Ms. Mahmood has also conducted research for think tanks in Egypt and Lebanon. Her writings have appeared in Foreign Policy's South Asia Channel, Georgetown Security Studies Review, The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, and Pakistan Review of International Law and Human Rights, among others. Ms. Mahmood graduated from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy with a focus on International Security Studies and Southwest Asia and Islamic Civilization. Ms. Mahmood earned her Bachelor of Laws (LLB) from the University of London's International Program in Pakistan at The Institute of Legal Studies, Islamabad. She completed the Bar Practitioner Training Course (BPTC) at City Law School, City University, London. Previously, Ms. Mahmood taught second-year law students as part of the University of London's International Program in Pakistan. She is a licensed attorney at the Islamabad High Court, Pakistan and has been called to the Bar of England and Wales.



## Dalia Mogahed

Dalia Mogahed is the Director of Research at ISPU where she develops, leads and executes ISPU's community-focused research strategy. Mogahed is former Executive Director of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, where she led the analysis of surveys of Muslim communities worldwide. With John L. Esposito, she coauthored the book Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think. President Barack Obama appointed Mogahed to the President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships in 2009. She is a frequent expert commentator in global media outlets and international forums. She is also the CEO of Mogahed Consulting. Mogahed earned her BS in chemical engineering at the University of Wisconsin and was a Dean Scholar earning her MBA at the Katz Graduate School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh.



## Meira Neggaz

Meira Neggaz is the Executive Director at ISPU, where she is responsible for the institution's overall leadership, strategy, and growth. Meira works to build and strengthen ISPU's relationships with community leaders, policy makers, scholars, partner institutions and stakeholders to broaden the reach of ISPU's research and to increase the impact of the organization's mission. Before joining ISPU, Meira was the Senior Program Officer for Marie Stopes International (MSI), a leading, UK-based organization working in 42 countries. There, she led and managed programs in multiple countries, developed partnerships with key stakeholders and partner institutions, and managed key grants and donor relationships. Formerly, Meira was the first Executive Director of WINGS in Guatemala, where she grew the organization from its infancy to become a national leader in the health sector, and the Guatemala Country Representative for Curamericas, establishing country presence and leading a USAID funded child survival project. She holds a BA from Huron University in London and a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

# Notes

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## About ISPU

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ISPU is an independent, nonpartisan research organization specializing in addressing the most pressing challenges facing the American Muslim community and in bridging the information gap between the American Muslim community and the wider society. Through objective, empirical applied research ISPU supports the American Muslim community to develop, contribute and innovate, offering actionable recommendations to inform community change agents, the media, the general public and policy makers alike. In addition to building in house capacity, ISPU has assembled leading experts across multiple disciplines, building a solid reputation as a trusted source for information for and about American Muslims.

For more information, please visit: [www.ispu.org](http://www.ispu.org)

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