A Community-Led Imam Search Process:

ISBCC, A CASE STUDY

Dear Colleagues:

The goal of our "Reimagining Muslim Spaces" project is to produce research-driven recommendations to enable the development of a mosque that is:
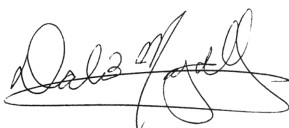
1. Welcoming: Inclusive and engaging
2. Well Governed: Effective and transparent
3. A Hub for Hope: A source of community service

To illustrate how mosques can serve as hubs for hope, ISPU identified four real-life examples of American Muslim institutions doing just that. To illustrate how mosques can create effective and transparent institutions, ISPU examined best practices that have been developed to address governance needs. Rather than simply providing theoretical advice, our researchers interviewed the very people who built these programs and institutions to identify the secrets to their success and the wisdom gained from their struggles. Our case studies cover:

1. **A "Third Space"** with MakeSpace in Washington, DC

2. **A Free Medical Clinic** with the HUDA Clinic in Detroit, MI

3. **A Jobs Center** with The SHARE Center in Lexington, KY

4. **A Civic Engagement Program** with the Muslim Community Association in Santa Clara, CA

5. **Imam Recruitment** with the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center (ISBCC) in Boston, MA

6. **Crisis Communication and Management** with the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center (ISBCC) in Boston, MA

We hope these case studies will inspire and instruct others working to develop institutions that serve and uplift.

Warmly,

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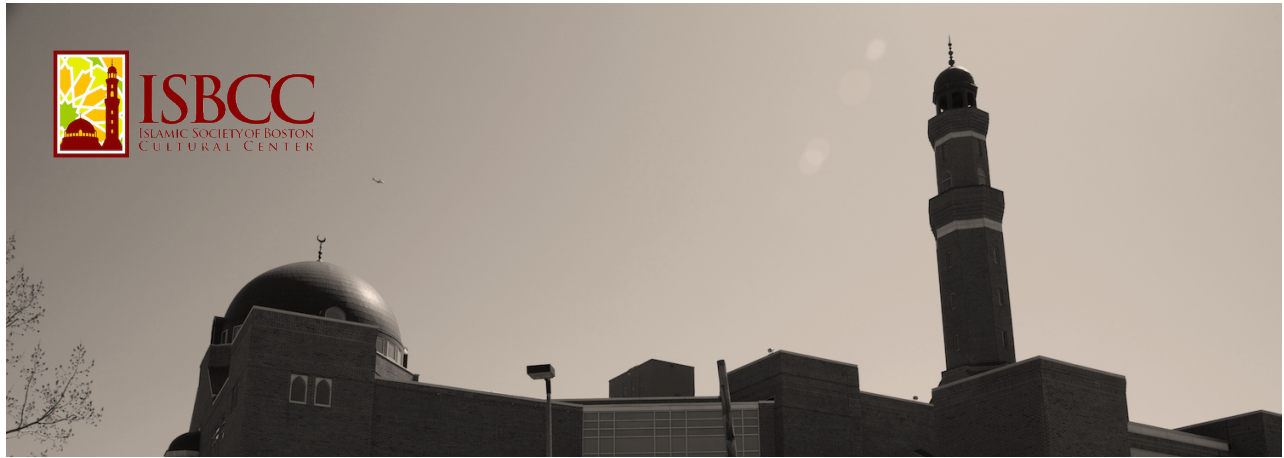Manager

For more information about the study, please visit:

↳ http://www.ispu.org/RMS

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Contents

Executive Summary

Many American mosques today report problems with retaining *imams*,[a] the congregation leaders who fulfill the organizational and pastoral needs of a mosque. One major part of retaining valuable imams is linked with whether they are a good fit for the institution and the community they are trying to serve. How an imam is hired plays a key role in determining such a fit. This report presents an example of one American mosque that meaningfully engaged its community in a thorough and multi-tiered hiring process led jointly by the mosque leadership and community. The process led to the recruitment of an accomplished imam who is well-suited to the requirements of the institution and the community. In presenting the findings from this case study, it is hoped that American mosques struggling with finding and retaining suitable mosque leaders will be able to learn from the process outlined here, and tailor it to best meet their own community's needs.

Lessons Learned

The following key lessons were learned from the process of searching for a new imam for the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center (ISBCC):

1. **At an organizational level, the board should take a back seat and empower the mosque staff and leadership to lead the process.** At ISBCC, one of the biggest factors in the success of the process was the hands-off leadership philosophy of the board.

2. **For a genuinely community-led and -owned process, take steps to empower and build capacity in the community.** Leaders of the ISBCC mosque created an imam search committee based on community feedback, and then empowered the committee to design a process and make decisions. Rather than viewing the committee as a rubber-stamp, the board decided to honor the committee's recommendation when the board made its final selection. The committee, in turn, authentically engaged with and listened to the feedback from the wider community.

3. **Invest the time and effort that the process demands.** All stakeholders involved in the imam search process agreed that the process was long, and entailed more work than the standard mosque hiring practices. However, because the process had potential long-term benefits, everyone agreed that the investment was well worth the returns.

4. **Agree to make a financial investment in high-quality leadership.** This includes dividing the responsibilities of an imam into multiple roles so that each imam can fulfill his functions in the best possible manner. In addition, to retain good talent, the mosque must be willing to offer generous pay and benefits, choosing the long-term benefit to the organization over short-term cost-cutting measures.

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[a] Imam: A Muslim congregation leader that fulfills organizational and pastoral needs of a mosque. Can also mean a Muslim prayer leader.

5. **As a first step in the hiring process, conduct a needs assessment of the community.** Invest in the time to conduct congregant surveys and focus groups, and genuinely use the data and findings to design the process. This can occur internally by the leadership team or by hiring a professional firm. To be successful, the imam search process must address the needs of the community.

6. **Conduct community forums to solicit community guidance and feedback.** This should occur from the earliest stage (i.e., the selection of the imam search committee) and be repeated at key stages in the process. It is essential to seek community guidance when identifying the characteristics of an ideal imam.

7. **Select a search committee that has a diverse range of relevant expertise and is reflective of the community.** Make the committee selection process as transparent as possible, and genuinely use community feedback.

8. **Communicate clearly and often with the community.** Explain the imam search process, and send regular updates to the community on its progress.

9. **For a large mosque, divide the imam's responsibilities into multiple roles for different individuals.** It is unrealistic to expect one imam to fulfill all the demands of a busy mosque. When dividing the roles, clearly communicate to the community what the responsibilities of each imam will be, and how each imam will be recruited.

10. **Prioritize community engagement and transparency, but use good judgment.** ISBCC held multiple community forums during the imam search process to solicit guidance and feedback from the community. This feedback was used to guide the search process and the search committee's decision making. At each step, the community was kept abreast of what the process was and how it was proceeding. Although community engagement and transparency is commendable, it must be tempered with sensitivity for the hiring process. Thus, when the semifinalists for the imam position were invited to ISBCC to interview and meet with the community, they were not advertised as such. Community feedback was solicited on the candidates' performance on khutbahs[b] and halaqas[c] without announcing that they were imam candidates.

11. **Allow candidates plenty of opportunity to engage with the community they might be serving.** Rather than meeting only with the leadership, candidates appreciate the chance to meet and engage with the congregation.

12. **To attract and retain the best talent, be thoughtful, respectful, and efficient during the hiring process.** Manage logistics professionally and efficiently, particularly when weekend site visits are needed to screen candidates. For candidate imams, the decision to accept a new job is a family-oriented one, and the needs of each candidate's spouse need to be considered. The highly talented and sought-after finalists who visited ISBCC said they greatly valued that part of the selection process.

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[b] Khutbah: Sermon given during the Friday Noon Prayer.

[c] Halaqa: A religious study circle.

The Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center (ISBCC) is the largest mosque in New England. It currently serves more than 2,000 people weekly and has an annual budget of $1.5 million. Located in Boston's historic neighborhood of Roxbury, ISBCC is an urban mosque that enjoys an immense richness and diversity in the ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds of its community members. ISBCC was inaugurated in 2009 after a two-decade effort that included several lawsuits. Overcoming these challenges helped ISBCC's diverse community to unite and build strong relationships with the Roxbury community, the city of Boston, political and civic organizations, and interfaith groups.

Today, ISBCC is a 70,000-square-foot structure that houses a prayer space, school, café, and multipurpose space. ISBCC's mission is to teach and live Islam in America; and its vision is to build a community of leaders rooted in the Islamic tradition, committed to American ideals, and empowered to serve the common good.[1] The culture at ISBCC places a strong emphasis on transparency, open communication and engagement, and empowering the community while building its capacity. This culture played a major role in how ISBCC approached the recruitment of its new imam.

Until 2015, ISBCC was led by Imam Suhaib Webb, one of the most prominent imams in the American Muslim community. As the sole religious leader of a high-profile mosque, it soon became apparent that Imam Webb needed additional help to fulfill the demands of leading a large organization and congregation. In August 2013, the ISBCC leadership appointed an advisory committee to help find a new imam, as Imam Webb transitioned to the role of Resident Scholar. But when Imam Webb shortly after announced his intention to step down, the remaining ISBCC staff was faced with the daunting task of finding a replacement to fill Imam Webb's shoes. In addition to meeting the pastoral needs of a large and diverse congregation, ISBCC's imam must represent Boston's Muslims. ISBCC, because of its size and stature, and the role it played in the aftermath of the 2014 Boston Marathon Bombings, occupies a unique place on a national level.[2] ISBCC is often called upon to engage with the national media and present the American Muslim perspective on events, which means the institution is often in the limelight. In the words of one board member, "anything that happens at ISBCC is Boston Globe material." [3]

> *The culture at ISBCC places a strong emphasis on transparency, open communication and engagement, and empowering the community while building its capacity. This culture played a major role in how ISBCC approached the recruitment of its new imam.*

Imam Webb had been helped in his role by Yusufi Vali who served as Executive Director of ISBCC since 2012. Previously, Yusufi was a community organizer with the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, a chapter of the Industrial Areas Foundation, and worked as a field organizer on Barak Obama's presidential campaign. Yusufi is a graduate of Princeton University, a Marshall Scholar, and a Fulbright Scholar. He holds an MA in Islamic Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies and an MSc in Philosophy, both from the London School of Economics. Yusufi's background in community organizing played a key role in how ISBCC approached the search for its new imam.

Based on his experience working with other faith organizations and from working with Imam Webb, Yusufi realized that a congregation the size of ISBCC would require more than one imam. Yusufi, Imam Webb, and the board agreed after discussions that ISBCC would need a senior imam, an associate imam, and a *qari*.[d] The role of the senior imam was defined broadly as meeting the spiritual and religious needs of the congregation and representing Muslims in the Boston community, in addition to leading three *salahs*.[e] The associate imam would be responsible for meeting the day-to-day social needs of the congregation, such as conducting counseling and adjudication. The qari would lead the remaining two salahs and teach the Quran to the community.

> *From his experience in community organizing, Yusufi and the board realized that the way to find an imam that was the best fit for the needs of the community was to allow the search to be a community-driven process.*

Although other faith groups have central organizations that vet religious leaders so that there is a ready pool of applicants for institutions looking to hire, the American Muslim community currently lacks such an organization. From his experience in community organizing, Yusufi and the board realized that the way to find an imam that was the best fit for the needs of the community was to allow the search to be a community-driven process. To his knowledge, this had not occurred in the American Muslim community before, but slowly, Yusufi initiated a process that allowed him to bring together a team that crafted a community-led imam search process from scratch. The process created by the team worked well and had buy-in from all major stakeholders. It also holds promise for replication in other American Muslim communities.

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[d] Qari: One who reads and recites the Quran using proper techniques.

[e] Salah: A prayer; usually referring to the five daily prayers required of all Muslims as one of the pillars of Islam.

Main Steps in the Imam Search Process

Community Needs Assessment and Proposal to the Board of Directors

Before launching the imam search, ISBCC contracted an outside firm, Dinar Standard,[4] to conduct a detailed community needs assessment. The aim was to identify the organization's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities so that ISBCC could map a plan to address its shortcomings and better meet the needs of its congregation. Having gone through this exercise meant that ISBCC's leadership had a good idea of what the community felt was currently lacking, allowing Yusufi and his staff to begin an imam search process that would address these gaps, build on the organization's strengths, and look for a leader who would meet the community's requirements.

As part of the needs assessment, the firm hired for the job conducted a number of community surveys and focus group interviews. Yusufi and his team relied on this data to design the imam search process, in consultation with a five-person advisory committee that they recruited from the community. This recruitment was possible because the ISBCC staff was authentically engaged with and knew the community members well enough to identify the individuals who were best suited for the job. The advisory committee featured individuals with expertise ranging from management consulting to law and academia.

> *The first step for Yusufi and the ISBCC staff was to bring together an imam search committee that was representative of the diverse community and had the requisite expertise and knowledge that would allow it to genuinely lead the entire process.*

Once an initial broad approach for recruiting the new imam was created, Yusufi presented a detailed proposal to the board of directors that laid out the four main steps in the recruitment plan and the stakeholders whose input would be required along the way. The board approved the advisory committee's recruitment plan and the new community-led imam search process was on its way.

Creating an Imam Search Committee

The first step for Yusufi and the ISBCC staff was to bring together an imam search committee that was representative of the diverse community and had the requisite expertise and knowledge that would allow it to genuinely lead the entire process. In making the proposal, Yusufi asked the board for recommendations for other individuals to serve on the imam search committee. The initial advisory board was to evolve into the search committee, with additional members representing different constituencies.

The function of the advisory committee was to draft a proposal for the imam search process, whereas the function of the search committee was to implement the proposed process. The initial members of the imam search committee were appointed in consultation with the board. Yusufi saw that the search committee needed some key areas of expertise, including individuals with religious expertise, knowledge and experience of being an imam, experience with designing and managing projects, and expertise in academic research on imams.

The next step was to solicit feedback from the community on the composition of the imam search committee. ISBCC organized a community forum, the first in a series of similar forums. Based on the feedback from the community forum, the team identified six additional constituencies that lacked representation on the committee. These included groups such as teens, immigrant mothers, and daily worshippers at the mosque. For each constituency, the ISBCC team asked community members for recommendations on individuals who could fill the role. In this manner, by the end of the process, the search committee consisted of 20 members representing the following constituencies and expertise:

1. Young professionals
2. Vision of Islam in America/Connection to Muslim American Society (MAS) Boston
3. Character (*tarbiyyah*[d])
4. Converts
5. Ability to plan and manage sustainers (congregation members who make monthly donations that sustain ISBCC, distinct from occasional donors)
6. Government/politics
7. Islamic knowledge
8. Women
9. Interfaith/intrafaith
10. Social justice/local needs
11. Overall staff fit in relation to current ISBCC employees
12. Connection to Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) and religious figures
13. Community elders/first-generation immigrants
14. Youth under 18
15. Imam research/academia
16. Immigrant mothers (to address the cultural challenges of raising children in a new environment)
17. Local community connection
18. Teens
19. Representative of different mosques/Islamic Center of New England (ICNE)
20. Daily worshippers

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[f] Tarbiyyah: The development and nurturing of one's personal growth.

Executive Director Yusufi was also a part of the committee, but not in a leadership role. He abstained from voting on issues and instead focused on ensuring the committee functioned smoothly and stayed on track to deliver results. The committee chair was Stephanie Marzouk, a Boston attorney who had been involved with ISBCC since 2009, and was recruited for the role by Yusufi.

Designing the Process

Once a committee was put together, it began discussions on crafting an appropriate process to find the best imam. The design for the imam recruitment process that was finally agreed to was based on the model used to hire faculty in academia. One of the main architects of the process was Nancy Khalil, a PhD student whose research focuses on imams in America, and who had previous experience with hiring faculty and imams. In Nancy's opinion, the academic model was best suited to meet the mosque's needs:

> *To ensure that the imam search committee members heard directly from the community, ISBCC staff trained the search committee members on how to facilitate such a community forum.*

> *I drew on my experiences in [academia], which I felt were more similar to what an imam search should look like. Some of the other committee members had experience in tech or corporate America, which is a very different type of hire. In my opinion, that wasn't going to be the best fit for how to meet all the different needs that meet the criteria the community had put forth in what they want to do to hire an imam, or what they want in an imam.[5]*

To help with the design, Nancy had conversations with faculty members who had been on search committees to learn from their experience. Additionally, ISBCC committee members who worked in academia called to give their advice and feedback. Hearing from professors with backgrounds in medicine and business was informative and helpful in designing the process.

However, the search committee realized that the process would have to be tailored to the unique needs of the ISBCC community. Rather than blindly signing on to the academic model, the committee discussed each step of the search process and moved on only if it felt comfortable, and revising the academic model as needed.

Articulating the Ideal Imam

The next step of the process required identifying the characteristics of an imam that mattered the most to the community. ISBCC organized another community forum with an open invitation to the entire mosque community. To ensure that the imam search committee members heard directly from the community, ISBCC staff trained the search

committee members on how to facilitate such a community forum. By leading the forum as facilitators, committee members were further empowered to own the process. About 150 forum participants divided into small groups of about 8 to 10 individuals, and each group was asked to rank what to them were the three most important characteristics in an imam. The groups were asked two simple questions: What is the one thing you would definitely like to see in an imam, and What would you not like to see in an imam?

Results showed that the following three traits were the most valuable in an imam to serve the ISBCC community:

1 OPEN	2	3
Open accessibility to the community.	**Religious scholarship and knowledge of Islam.**	**Culturally relevant to Islam in America, and able to effectively represent Boston's Muslims in the media and broader community.**
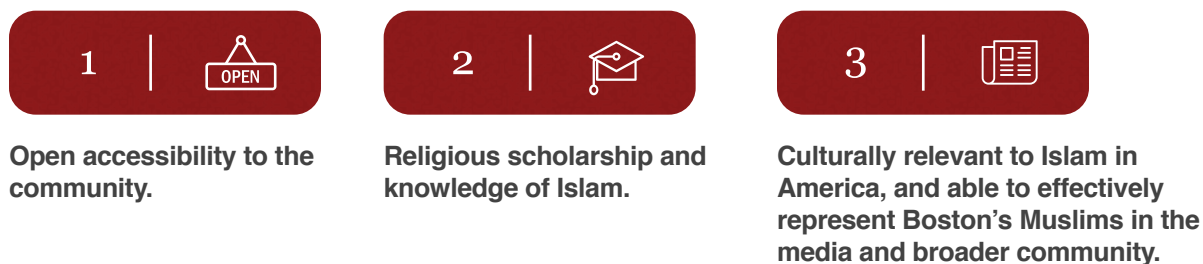
Once these key traits were identified and the search committee knew what kind of individual they were seeking, the team commenced searching for the ideal ISBCC imam.

Job Announcement and Recruitment Efforts

Based on the community's input and prior discussions within the board and among mosque leaders and board members, the search committee drafted a job description for the imam. The job description identified three key areas of responsibility for the senior imam:

(1) Grow the community spiritually and religiously (tarbiyyah)

- Lead *fajr*, *maghrib*, and *isha* salahs[g] and deliver *khatirahs;*[h]
- Be accessible to community through time after prayers and office hours;
- Visit community members during important life events (e.g., *nikkahs,*[i] hospital visits, etc.); and
- Conduct Friday khutbahs, halaqas, *qiyaams*[j] and *ilm,*[k] and tarbiyyah workshops.

(2) Build and manage religious programs team and plan programs:

- Work with leadership to hire key religious programs team members;
- Lead team to create and execute a holistic, integrated plan for religious programs;
- Jointly develop a plan for involvement of the scholar-in-residence in programs; and
- Train and empower men and women in community to lead religious programs.

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[g] Fajr: One of the five daily prayers, held prior to sunrise; Maghrib: One of the five daily prayers, held at sunset; Isha: One of the five daily prayers, held at night.

[h] Khatirah: A short talk.

[i] Nikkah: Marriage ceremonies.

[j] Qiyaam: Late-night voluntary prayer.

[k] Ilm: Knowledge.

(3) Represent the ISBCC publicly:

- Represent ISBCC at critical interfaith, intrafaith, political, and media settings;
- Build strong relationships with Massachusetts Muslim leaders, interfaith/intrafaith leaders, and public officials where appropriate; and
- Work with the executive director to train leaders in the community to represent ISBCC at outreach events.

Once the job description was drafted (see Appendix I), it was widely circulated in all Muslim networks that ISBCC staff members and leaders could reach. The community was also recruited to help; Yusufi sent a notice to the community email list with the job description asking for help in spreading the word and for recommendations of names of potential candidates.

> *I was always under the understanding that the best candidates were already busy doing something else, and we would need to [actively] recruit them.*
>
> *—Yusufi Vali, Executive Director, ISBCC*

At the same time, Yusufi realized that the search process would not be complete without active recruitment efforts. Yusufi and members of the search committee telephoned prominent imams and Muslim leaders around the country and asked for recommendations for highly talented imams. According to Yusufi:

> *I was always under the understanding that the best candidates were already busy doing something else, and we would need to [actively] recruit them. So, we started calling a whole host of different people across the country, religious leaders, and said "Name some up-and-coming imams for us. Give us that list." Then the recruitment process started, and we started getting some resumes.[6]*

Once the recommendations started coming in, Yusufi reached out to those who had been recommended to ask them to apply for the position. Yusufi visited the mosques of some candidates and he invited other candidates to visit ISBCC, meet the community, and apply for the position.

Using these two methods, the search committee gathered a total sample of more than 40 resumes of potential imam candidates.

Interview Process

The next step was to shorten the list of candidates. Using community feedback and internal discussions, the search committee created a scorecard—essentially a list of quantitative metrics of what the community sought in an ideal candidate. Each candidate was graded against the metrics on a scale of 1 to 5. Using the community identified metrics, elimination of candidates was a fairly simple process, and the team quickly narrowed the down list to 12 candidates.

For each of these 12 semifinal candidates, the search committee conducted Skype interviews in teams of three interviewers per candidate. The interview questions were designed to elicit the applicant's personality and to gain an understanding of their Islamic knowledge, their passion for the work, vision alignment, work experience, and knowledge of American culture. Search committee members scored each candidate in this semifinal group against the quantitative metrics, and included some qualitative feedback on their overall impressions of the candidate.

At the end of the interview process, the search committee had a short list of four highly accomplished candidates. Each of these four candidates was then asked to visit ISBCC.

> *Using community feedback and internal discussions, the search committee created a scorecard—essentially a list of quantitative metrics of what the community sought in an ideal candidate.*

Site Visits and Community Feedback

Each finalist and their spouse were invited for a weekend visit to ISBCC. The itinerary for these visits was a combination of meetings with mosque leadership and staff, and formal and informal interactions with the community. Each candidate had interviews with the search committee, the board, and a group of teens. During these interviews, questions were posed to determine how the candidates would respond to certain situations (see Appendix II). Some interview questions presented scenarios that an imam might face in the execution of his duties such as a confrontational media appearance, an inappropriately dressed female mosque visitor, or a Muslim youth who confides in the imam about his homosexuality. In judging the applicant's responses search committee members looked for creativity in finding solutions; ability to positively represent Muslims; and values such as inclusion, diversity, and compassion. This was interspersed with some informal meetings; candidates had lunch with ISBCC staff, and also met with key constituents who were not a part of the search process, such as "ISBCC Sustainers," community members who make regular financial contributions to ISBCC. To interact with the broader ISBCC community, candidates also gave a khutbah and led a Friday night halaqa. After each event, candidates were given ample time to meet with community members and to answer their questions.

After each interaction, feedback was gathered from the constituents, and the performance of each candidate was evaluated quantitatively and qualitatively. For community engagement through khutbahs and halaqas, the search committee gathered feedback from the community by handing out simple surveys (see Appendix III) immediately after the event. To increase response rates, the surveys were deliberately kept very concise and direct, and asked community members whether they could see the speaker as the imam of ISBCC, and whether they had any other comments.

In addition to opinion surveys, ISBCC organized another open community forum to solicit feedback on each candidates' performance and generate a ranking for the four finalists. As before, the forum was facilitated by the search committee members to allow members to hear directly from the community. Participants were split into small groups of 8 to 10 people, and asked to rate each candidate. The search committee referred back to the ideal imam characteristics identified earlier by the community to distill the findings from the forum.

Separately, the search committee also held internal discussions to rank the candidates. The internal debate examined the knowledge and experience of each candidate, and their vision for their role as an imam. The committee evaluated how each candidate would balance American culture with upholding traditional Islamic values, and how each candidate could effectively meet the needs of diverse constituents such as American Muslim youth and older, first-generation immigrants.

Eventually, the final ranking generated by the community feedback mirrored the ranking agreed to by the search committee, a testament to the fact that the committee was truly representative of the broader ISBCC community and committed to meeting its needs.

Final Selection

Once the search committee identified a finalist, Yusufi presented the committee's recommendation to the board. The board had previously agreed to honor the choice made by the search committee and approved the final selection. A formal offer was then extended to the new imam of ISBCC, Sheikh Yasir Fahmy.

Sheikh Yasir Fahmy was the imam of one of the largest mosques in New Jersey, where he was born and raised. Sheikh Fahmy holds a Bachelor's degree from Rutgers University and worked in finance for three years before traveling to Egypt to study at Al-Azhar University. After seven years at Al-Azhar (five of which overlapped with Imam Webb), Sheikh Yasir earned a degree in Islamic Studies and attained *ijazah*[l] in numerous subjects such of *fiqh*,[m] *hadith*,[n] and *aqeedah*.[o] He joined ISBCC in August 2016.

Time and Budget

From start to finish, the entire imam search process lasted about 13 months.

The total budget for the search process was $10,000. The main expense for the process was the cost of inviting the four semifinalists for site visits. The cost of each candidate's visit ranged between $1,500 and $2,000.

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[l] Ijazah: The grant of permission or authority, usually represented by a certificate, to indicate that one has been authorized by a higher authority to transmit a certain subject or text of Islamic knowledge.

[m] Fiqh: Islamic jurisprudence.

[n] Hadith: A collection of traditions containing sayings of the prophet Muhammad that, with accounts of his daily practice (the Sunnah), constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Quran.

[o] Aqeedah: Religious creed.

Keys to an Effective Community-Led Imam Recruitment Process

Community Perspectives

Once the search was complete and the new imam had been hired, almost all major stakeholders expressed complete satisfaction with the process and the results. According to one community member, a man:

> *I was not part of the core imam search committee; I was just a congregant. However, I felt like I was part of the broader process in that there were a number of events, including jummah and halaqas, with feedback forms, etcetera, where I had a chance to provide input. I thought it was really well done in terms of the right balance of transparency so that the broader congregation felt like they were in the know, they were aware of the criteria, and they felt like they had some input into the process. I also liked the way the committee was structured. It was headed by a woman, which I thought was really good. Overall, I think the process worked quite well.[7]*

For another community member, a woman and a convert, the process presented a welcome improvement on how some other faith groups often approach leadership hiring:

> *Most of the time, depending on what faith community you belong to (I grew up Christian) you don't really get a choice of which pastor you get in that church. If you don't like them, you go to a different church, and that's kind of how it goes. So, the format itself [at ISBCC] was kind of cool, to be able to say "Hey, this is what I like. This is what I don't like."[8]*

She was also appreciative of the diversity of the search committee, and that it was representative of the broader community:

> *I knew the people who were on the search committee. They [ISBCC leadership] tried to be mindful of picking from each demographic from the community. So that was cool. I like that. They [chose] people who were younger, teenagers. They [chose] from the Somali community, from the desi [South Asian] community, converts. They tried to be strategic about it, so no one felt alienated.[9]*

Another veteran community member who has been a part of ISBCC since its inception, and who attended all imam search-related community events appreciated the diversity of the committee. He also valued the transparency of the process and that mosque leaders made an effort to explain the process to the community:

> *I was happy because the imam search committee had members from different ethnic backgrounds—African American, Arabian and Asian, and Somali. So, it had diversity. They even had a youth representative. So that was very well thought [out]. And then also because they explained the process [to the community] and what they [were going to] do in the imam search process. They explained that there was a process.*[10]

Although there was overwhelming support in the community, there were also some criticisms. For example, some community members felt that the African American demographic was not adequately represented and that the community should have been just as involved in the hiring of the second imam for the associate imam position. One critic is Taymullah Abdurrahman, Muslim chaplain at Harvard University, and a member of the imam search committee. In Taymullah's view, ISBCC as an institution has certain blind spots that played into the imam search process. The mosque is located in a majority African American inner-city neighbor-hood, yet most staff positions and programming are aimed at college-educated young professionals. This leads to a "99 percent/1 percent" divide, in which the voices of the 99 percent are not adequately represented or addressed.

> *I was happy because the imam search committee had members from different ethnic backgrounds—African American, Arabian and Asian, and Somali. So, it had diversity. They even had a youth representative. So that was very well thought [out].*

According to Taymullah:

> *My entire dialogue with them has always been "You're in a 99 percent neighborhood. You have to appeal to the people in this neighborhood." So, I think that that's a big blind spot, when they have signs that promote young professionals. What does that mean, young professionals? It means young Arabs and South Asians who have degrees and have graduated from college, and are engineers, and dentists, and doctors. And it leaves an entire majority of the people who are in the mix who are African American, Somali, West African, and those people who don't fit into that young professional category. So, for me, the young professional title is a euphemism for anyone who's not an uneducated convert, and that's dangerous. We have to be sensitive around that language. I do think they mean well. I just think they have blind spots.[11]*

Yusufi recognizes these criticisms, and links some of them to the team's shortcomings in communicating the process to the community.[12] He is, however, clear-eyed about the limitations of a community-led process and the need for compromise:

> *You're not going to find Mr. Perfect because that's just impossible. I mean this is kind of like marriage, you know? You're just not going to [be able to please] everyone. But if you can see what the community needs, then you can build a team that can begin to deliver on those needs.[13]*

Yet, the imam search process at ISBCC can be termed a success and a vast improvement on all available models in the Muslim community today. Despite the criticism, Taymullah also recognizes that the imam search process implemented by ISBCC is the best he has seen, particularly the community forums. According to Taymullah:

> *I've never seen it done this way. So, the first time around, of course it can be done better when it's all said and done. But I think this is the best way I've seen it done. And I've sat in many different committees where you have a 10-[person] board, and they'll call me in to ask a candidate religious questions, but that doesn't speak to the auntie's needs, or the college student's needs. So, I think the forum, having the community involved and having every different voice on the committee is also important. I think they did a great job at that.[14]*

This broad support for the imam search process merits a deeper examination of the factors at ISBCC that enabled the process to take shape.

Role of the Board

From the perspective of all major stakeholders in the process, including the mosque leadership, the search committee, and Sheikh Fahmy, perhaps the single most important factor that allowed the process to evolve is the positive role played by the board of directors. The board at ISBCC has always maintained a hands-off philosophy, empowering the mosque leadership to take decisions while keeping their eye on long-term macro-level strategic goals for the organization.

This philosophy was also at play at every step of the imam search process. Two board members were part of the imam search committee, but they deliberately refrained from taking on leadership roles, ceding space to community members. One of these committee members was Hassan El-Alami, a board member and President of the Muslim American Society of Boston (MAS-Boston). El-Alami explained his leadership philosophy as follows:

> *I trust people and I give them some space to put in their best. I only intervene if there is something that is against the policy, or something is not Islamic, or something like that. Otherwise, I give them [ISBCC leadership] total freedom to experiment, and to go and do things. So, when Yusufi came up with the idea of involving everyone and having this community meeting [for the imam search], I said "That's new. That's nice. And go for it."[15]*

According to Sheikh Yasir Fahmy, the positive role played by the board was an important factor that convinced him to come to ISBCC:

> *ISBCC board members were extremely positive, and they did not view themselves as owning the space and being the ultimate authorities in the space, which is the case in most [masjids]. But rather, they are people who are very much behind the scenes. They're not on the microphone. They don't even allow themselves to have that position where they're visibly the leaders or anything like that; they really just play the role of a supporting entity to ensure that on a macro level the institution is thriving.[16]*

This, according to Sheikh Yasir Fahmy, is in contrast to most mosques, where the board inadvertently undermines the imam:

> *Many [masjids], let's say you do a jummah prayer, and the person who's on the microphone immediately after salah is one of the board members doing this, and then another board member's doing that. And they're basically not acting like a board; they're acting like more of an executive committee. They're very much present on the ground, and it's very distracting and it gets in the way of the authority of your religious leaders.[17]*

This same view of the positive role of the board was shared by the imam search committee as well. According to Committee Chair Stephanie Marzouk:

> *Two board members on the committee [had very good] insights but they wanted to take a back seat and really let the committee take over. And I think that's kind of the way that the board is with ISBCC in general. They have a very hands-off relationship with the imam. They let him run things and they're in the background somewhat, which I think is unusual for mosques where the board generally takes a much more kind of closer oversight of things.[18]*

Stephanie appreciated all the space the board gave to the community members on the imam search committee:

> *The board members were always there as reference or if we had questions. They would occasionally come to meetings, but they didn't really take a leadership role in the committee. So, when we had the candidates come for interviews, the board had a separate meeting with them, and of course the board was the final decision maker. But I don't think they ever vetoed a candidate or anything like that. I think they wanted to respect our decision-making process, which I really appreciated.[19]*

The role played by the board had a compounded effect on the imam search process, since the control that the board ceded to the mosque, the mosque leadership decided to use to empower their community.

ISBCC Leadership Philosophy and Governance Structure

The leadership philosophy at ISBCC played a critical part in the execution and success of the imam search process. Executive Director Yusufi Vali's professional background in community and interfaith work helped reinforce an ethos at ISBCC that affects the organization's functioning in a positive way.

According to Sheikh Muhammad Shaakir, one of the members on the imam search committee and a former imam, this is a positive departure from the dynamic dominant in the Muslim community today:

> *Sometimes leadership mentality is a problem. Certain mosques are led by a group of people who share the same culture with the same thinking. For example, a couple of doctors and professional people who are the board, and the only people who can communicate with them is a group of people who are connected to them.[20]*

For Sheikh Shaakir, Yusufi's outlook on mosque governance in general and the imam search process in particular was instrumental in its success:

> *At ISBCC Yusufi tried to implement, I believe, something different by looking to the nature of the different groups and people, and communities around the mosque: who they are, what they need and how we can make an improvement. Having a young person who worked in an interfaith community, different from the background of the board [is important]. He actually realized that we can do things a better way if we simply trust each other and try to understand and approach this [imam recruitment] from a different angle.[21]*

A genuine community-focused approach in the leadership philosophy leads to governance policies that prioritize empowering the community and building its capacity. Stephanie Marzouk noted that she had no prior experience leading such a project when asked by Yusufi to chair the imam search committee. However, Yusufi coached Stephanie throughout the process, giving her feedback and advice after committee meetings. This made the experience more rewarding for Stephanie:

> *After the meeting, [Yusufi] would say, "So here are some things you can do differently. Here's what you need to do before the next meeting." He would remind me to get together an agenda, to send things out to people. This was amazing for me, and I'm really very grateful to him for doing this. I feel like he saw it also as developing this capacity within the committee, and empowering different people to take on different roles. So yeah, I'm really glad about that.[22]*

This kind of a growth mentality leads to an institutional intelligence that then serves to attract valuable talent to the organization. For example, for Sheikh Yasir, who was initially not looking to apply for the vacancy and was actively recruited, the leadership ethos at ISBCC played a major part in drawing him to the role. Sheikh Yasir appreciated that ISBCC was on a path to institution-alization and understood the importance of expertise. This was evident in ISBCC's decision to divide the imam's respons-ibilities into three separate roles. ISBCC has the foresight to understand that the upfront cost of hiring three individuals instead of one will pay returns in terms of the organization's success and growth.

> *This attitude of support, respect, and working together to achieve something bigger was apparent in the imam search process. For one, the ISBCC staff was authentically connected enough with the comm-unity to be able to assemble an initial group of individuals that not only built an exceptional team for the imam search process, they also created a novel hiring process from scratch.*

In addition, the mosque leadership and staff sees itself in the role of providing genuine support to each other and the community. That support and respect was extremely valuable for Sheikh Yasir:

> *Before I even said anything, it was clear [from ISBCC] that "Listen, we understand the sensitive role of a senior imam and the amount of pressure that's on a senior imam. So our role is to ensure that you have the full capacity to govern this space and in a meaningful, successful way, be the religious, spiritual guide and architect of the space. Our responsibility as a staff, as a team, even as a board, is to ensure that you thrive in that capacity." So that sense of support, and just knowhow of an intelligent institution that is in tune with the times is what really piqued my interest. Because you just don't hear that kind of language passed around. The amount of respect that exists here for scholarship and for senior religious leadership is not regularly found.[23]*

This attitude of support, respect, and working together to achieve something bigger was apparent in the imam search process. For one, the ISBCC staff was authentically connected enough with the community to be able to assemble an initial group of individuals that not only built an exceptional team for the imam search process, they also created a novel hiring process from scratch. This deep understanding of their community is testament to the fact that ISBCC's commitment to engaging with its community is not mere lip service. Second, the team that came together for the imam search process continued to uphold the same values of harmony and service such that the process proceeded smoothly, without internal conflicts, and with full consensus at every step.[24]

This leadership philosophy at ISBCC is rooted in sound concepts such as community voice, transparency, and mature politics at the board level. Unlike most mosques, there are no elections at ISBCC. This, according to Sheikh Yasir Fahmy, is beneficial because it avoids the politics, lobbying, and infighting that often mires mosque leadership elsewhere. There is no bureaucracy nor are there any barriers to entry and growth at ISBCC. The only barriers, according to Sheikh Fahmy, are resource related, not structural.[25] Whereas Yusufi Vali concedes that the governance structure at ISBCC still needs work, a firm grounding in core values and principles ensures that negative internal dynamics stemming from politicking and lobbying are avoided.

Community Diversity and Unity

ISBCC is located in the historic, inner-city neighborhood of Roxbury, surrounded by some of the top schools and universities in the world. As the largest mosque in New England, ISBCC attracts a large and diverse congregation that extends across racial, ethnic, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The ISBCC community is so diverse that no single ethnic or racial group can claim dominance in numbers over another. This diversity, coupled with the leadership style, creates a unique blend of harmony that is not usually found in other mosques. Often, American mosques are divided by an urban/suburban divide, where each mosque hosts a distinct racial or ethnic group as the majority. This has never been the case at ISBCC, and it plays a role in why a new idea such as the imam recruitment process can blossom within its bounds.

Additionally, the history of how ISBCC came into being can be linked to its prevalent culture of inclusion and empowerment. As previously mentioned, ISBCC was established over a two-decade effort that faced multiple external hurdles, including lawsuits from other organizations, and allegations of links to terrorists. Amid these attacks, the ISBCC community learned from an early stage to remain internally united and to build bonds with allies. A part of this learning process was the foresight of the founding members to actively recruit gifted individuals from the community in leadership roles, and then empower them. This tradition of finding and recruiting exceptional leaders and then giving them the space to flourish continues at ISBCC today.

Although other mosques may not be able to replicate the unique demographic blend or the history and location of ISBCC, they can embrace the governance policies that have allowed the organization to thrive. And while other mosques are advised to emulate ISBCC's leadership philosophies, micro-level governance policies must be tailored to meet the needs of each community. Merely transplanting ISBCC's search and interview process onto a mosque without first conducting a community needs assessment or genuinely soliciting community feedback to understand the community's criteria for an imam is unlikely to yield strong results.

Lessons Learned

The following key lessons that were learned from an examination of ISBCC's imam search process can help guide mosque leaders when creating a similar process for their communities.

1. **At an organizational level, the board should take a back seat and empower the mosque staff and leaders to lead the process.** At ISBCC, one of the biggest factors in the success of the process was the hands-off leadership philosophy of the board.

2. **For a genuine community-led and owned process, take steps to empower and build on the strengths in the community.** ISBCC mosque leadership created an imam search committee based on community feedback and then empowered the committee to design a process and make decisions. Rather than viewing the committee as a rubber stamp, the board decided to honor the committee's final selection recommendation. The committee, in turn, authentically engaged with and listened to the feedback from the wider community.

3. **Invest the time and effort that the process demands.** All stakeholders involved in the imam search process agreed that the process was long, and much more involved than the standard mosque hiring practices. However, because the process had potential long-term benefits, everyone agreed that the investment was well worth the returns.

4. **Agree to make a financial investment in high-quality leadership.** This includes dividing the responsibilities of an imam into multiple roles so that each imam can fulfill his function in the best possible manner. In addition, to retain good talent, the organization must be willing to offer generous pay and benefits, choosing the long-term benefit to the organization over short-term cost-cutting measures.

5. **As a first step in the hiring process, conduct a community needs assessment.** Invest in the time to conduct congregant surveys and focus groups, and use the data and findings to design a genuine process. This can occur internally by the leadership team or by hiring a professional firm. To be successful, the imam search process must address the needs of the community.

6. **Conduct community forums to solicit community guidance and feedback.** This should occur at the earliest stage (i.e., the selection of the imam search committee) and be repeated at key stages in the process. It is essential to seek community guidance when identifying the characteristics of the ideal imam.

7. **Select a search committee that reflects a range of diverse and relevant expertise that is reflective of the community.** Make the committee selection process as transparent as possible, and genuinely use community feedback.

8. **Communicate clearly and often with the community.** Explain the imam search process and send regular updates on its progress.

9. **In a large mosque, divide the imam's responsibilities into multiple roles for different individuals.** It is unrealistic to expect one imam to fulfill all the demands on of an entire mosque community. When dividing the roles, clearly communicate to the community what the responsibilities of each imam will be, and how each imam will be recruited.

10. **Prioritize community engagement and transparency, but use good judgment.** ISBCC held multiple community forums during the imam search process to solicit guidance and feedback from the community. This feedback was used to guide the search process and the search committee's decision. At each step, the community was kept abreast of what the process was and how it was proceeding. While community engagement and transparency is commendable, it must be tempered with sensitivity for the hiring process. Thus, when the semifinalists for the imam position were invited to meet with the ISBCC community, they were not advertised as such. Community feedback was solicited on the candidate's' performance on khutbahs and halaqas without announcing that they were imam candidates.

11. **Allow candidates plenty of opportunity to engage with the community they will be serving, not just mosque leaders.** Rather than meeting only with the leadership, candidates appreciate the chance to meet and engage with the congregation.

12. **To attract and retain the best talent, be thoughtful, respectful, and efficient during the hiring process.** At ISBCC, one of the most impressive features of the hiring process was how professionally and efficiently the logistics were handled, particularly around the weekend site visits. The process recognized that the decision to accept a new job is family-oriented, and was inclusive of each candidate's spouse. These elements were highly valued by the highly talented and sought-after finalists who visited ISBCC as part of the selection process.

Appendices

Appendix I: Imam Job Description

<u>POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT</u>

Imam, Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center (ISBCC)
A project of the Muslim American Society of Boston, the mission of the ISBCC is to teach and live Islam in America. Our vision is to build a community of leaders rooted in the Islamic tradition, committed to American ideals, and empowered to serve the common good.

The largest Islamic center in New England, the ISBCC currently serves over 2,000 people weekly and has an annual operating budget of $1.5 million. Blessed with a dynamic and diverse community, located in Boston's historic neighborhood of Roxbury, and surrounded by the world's top universities, the ISBCC is well positioned to become a "model" mosque and community center for the American-Muslim community.

Position
In this high-profile position, the imam will play a pivotal role in building a model community and institution. The imam will work closely with the Executive Director (ED) to set the strategy of the ISBCC and push its vision of Islam in America forward.

Three Main Areas of Responsibility:

(1) Grow the Community Spiritually and Religiously (Tarbiyya)

- Lead *Fajr*, *Magrib* and *Isha salat* and deliver *khatiras* (spiritual lessons)
- Be accessible to community through time after prayers and office hours
- Visit community members during important life events (e.g. *Nikkahs*, Hospital Visits, etc.)
- Conduct Friday *khutbahs*, *halaqas*, qiyams and *Ilm* and *tarbiyya* workshops
- Grow ISBCC Staff spiritually and lead MAS Boston Retreats and Camp sessions

(2) Build and Manage Religious Programs Team & Plan Programs

- Work with Leadership to hire key Religious Programs Team members
- Lead team to create and execute a holistic, integrated plan for religious programs
- Jointly develop plan for Scholar-in-Residence's involvement in programs
- Train and empower men and women in community to lead religious programs

(3) Represent the ISBCC Publicly

- Represent ISBCC at critical interfaith, intrafaith, political and media settings
- Build strong relationships with MA Muslim leaders, interfaith/intrafaith leaders, and public officials where appropriate
- Work with ED to train leaders in community to represent ISBCC at outreach events

Qualifications

The imam will have at least three to five years of professional experience, including working with a congregation with over 300 attendees at Friday prayers.

The imam will have the following experience and attributes:

Credentials:

- Formal degree from a place of traditional Islamic learning and strong *tajweed*
- Undergraduate degree, preferably in Psychology, Sociology, or other Social Sciences, Graduate Studies Preferred
- Demonstrated understanding of the American-Muslim context
- Track record of oratory excellence and experience in basic level of management

Character:

- Acts and lives as a role model for the community, possesses patience and wisdom
- Holds himself accountable for individual commitments and takes on challenges
- Team player, takes ownership of group decisions irrespective of own opinion
- Excellent communicator, listens well and is able to see the other's point of view
- Accessible, genuinely invested in community, dedicated to congregants

Commitment:

- Works for the sake of Allah
- Champions the needs of the marginalized including women, new Muslims and especially youth
- Builds and maintains unity among community's exceptional diversity across race, ethnicity, sect, school of thought, immigration status, socio-economic status, gender, and age

Salary

Depending on Experience

Candidates are requested to apply by sending a resume/CV to [email address].

The Muslim American Society of Boston is an Equal Employment Opportunity employer and actively seeks a diverse pool of candidates.

Appendix II: Interview Scenarios

[Communication Skills: Women's Issue]

Female not covered properly

Possibilities

· female is not wearing hijab
· female is not wearing hijab and wearing a knee-length skirt/shorts
· female is not wearing hijab, wearing a knee-length skirt/shorts and a tank-top

How the imam is approached (what do you do?):

1. Male constituent comes and complains to the imam.
2. Imam spots the female himself.
3. Male constituent confronts the female himself and imam sees this confrontation.

Consider evaluation along the following:

• Does the solution display inclusiveness, uphold ISBCC's vision for diversity?
• Does the solution display taking ownership of the mosque, protecting its constituents and setting the standard for all future instances?
• How does the imam approach how far it is ok to not dress appropriately?
• Does the imam try to keep both the male and the female constituents as constituents?
• Is the solution creative?

Comments & Final Rating: (out of 5):

[Character & Vision: Connecting to mainstream media]

A movie / TV series is released and everyone is talking about it

(Fictitious) Possibilities

"Moses":
  • The movie depicts the Christian version of the story.

"American Freedom":
  • The movie depicts a stereotype Muslim as a terrorist, Muslim women as oppressed and 'American Freedom' as liberating these Muslim women who eventually decide to take-off their hijabs once liberated.

"New York, New York":
  • A TV series covers the lives of all sorts of 'real' people from New York – Muslim/non-Muslim, druggy, educated, rich, poor, etc.

How does the imam address the above, if at all?

Consider evaluation along the following:

  • How creative, out of the box, is the solution?
  • How many different ways (social media, etc.) did the imam consider addressing them?
  • Is the imam able to address and relate the mainstream media with ISBCC, Islam in America and Islam as a whole?

Comments & Final Rating: (out of 5):

[Vision: American Media]

National News invites the imam for an interview along with another imam

Possibilities

"Imam vs Imam":
- The other imam holds opposing views: e.g., janazah prayers should not be read over the bodies of terrorists vs. janazah prayers should be read over the bodies of terrorists. There is a possibility the interviewer will try to instigate a face-off between the two imams on national TV.

"ISBCC historical links to outside funding":
- The interviewer starts to accuse the imam with accepting foreign money from entities who support terrorism

"ISBCC supports homegrown terrorism":
- The interviewer starts to accuse the imam with cultivating and encouraging terrorism by pointing out all the 'terrorists' who have been through ISBCC.

How does the imam address and approach the above?

Consider evaluation along the following:

- How well does the imam handle the opposing imam? Is he able to keep up a good image of Islam in America? of ISBCC?
- How well does the imam try to defend Islam, ISBCC, its supporters and funders?
- Does the solution show regard to preserving a safe place of worship and steps taken to prevent further accusations?
- How creative are the solutions?

Comments & Final Rating: (out of 5):

[Education: Following the Sunnah]

A devoted constituent, who shows up regularly to prayers, is one of ISBCC sustainer, actively volunteers and is an overall pleasant person, confides the following:

Possibilities

"He is gay, in love, and would like the imam to preside over his wedding as MA laws allows gay marriages - it would mean the world to him"
- There is a high possibility of losing the constituent altogether plus he is very well connected through social media (Facebook and Twitter).

"He got really angry with his wife as she disobeyed him and ended up hitting her - justifies it saying Islam allows men to discipline women when they don't obey -
- This isn't the first time, but his wife wasn't really hurt too bad, she didn't need any medical attention.
- There is no remorse, he is asking 'man-to-man' as he is so fed up with his wife, wants the imam to talk some sense into his wife.

"He likes to cross-dress when no one is around"
- He is genuinely embarrassed and wants to know if it's a sin or not.
- He says he can't help it, he really likes it.

How does the imam address and approach the above?

Consider evaluation along the following:

- How does the imam handle trying to preserve a devoted constituent and holding on to righteous behavior?
- Does the imam show any compassion when dealing with the different constituents?
- Does the imam do anything in addition to dealing directly with the constituent; e.g., does he try to address it at a public level (anonymously, etc.)?
- Does he try to recommend the constituent get counseling or other professional help?

Comments & Final Rating: (out of 5):

Appendix III: Imam Search Community Feedback Form

ISBCC Imam Search Community Feedback Form

Candidate Name: NAME REDACTED
Event: Friday Khutbah DATE REDACTED

1 = Strongly disagree
5 = Strongly agree
(Please circle one)

The candidate is open and welcoming-
(He would be easy to approach if I had a question or needed advice)

1   2   3   4   5

The candidate can relate to the needs of Muslims living in America
(He seems like someone who would understand issues we face)

1   2   3   4   5

This candidate is a good choice for the next ISBCC imam

1   2   3   4   5
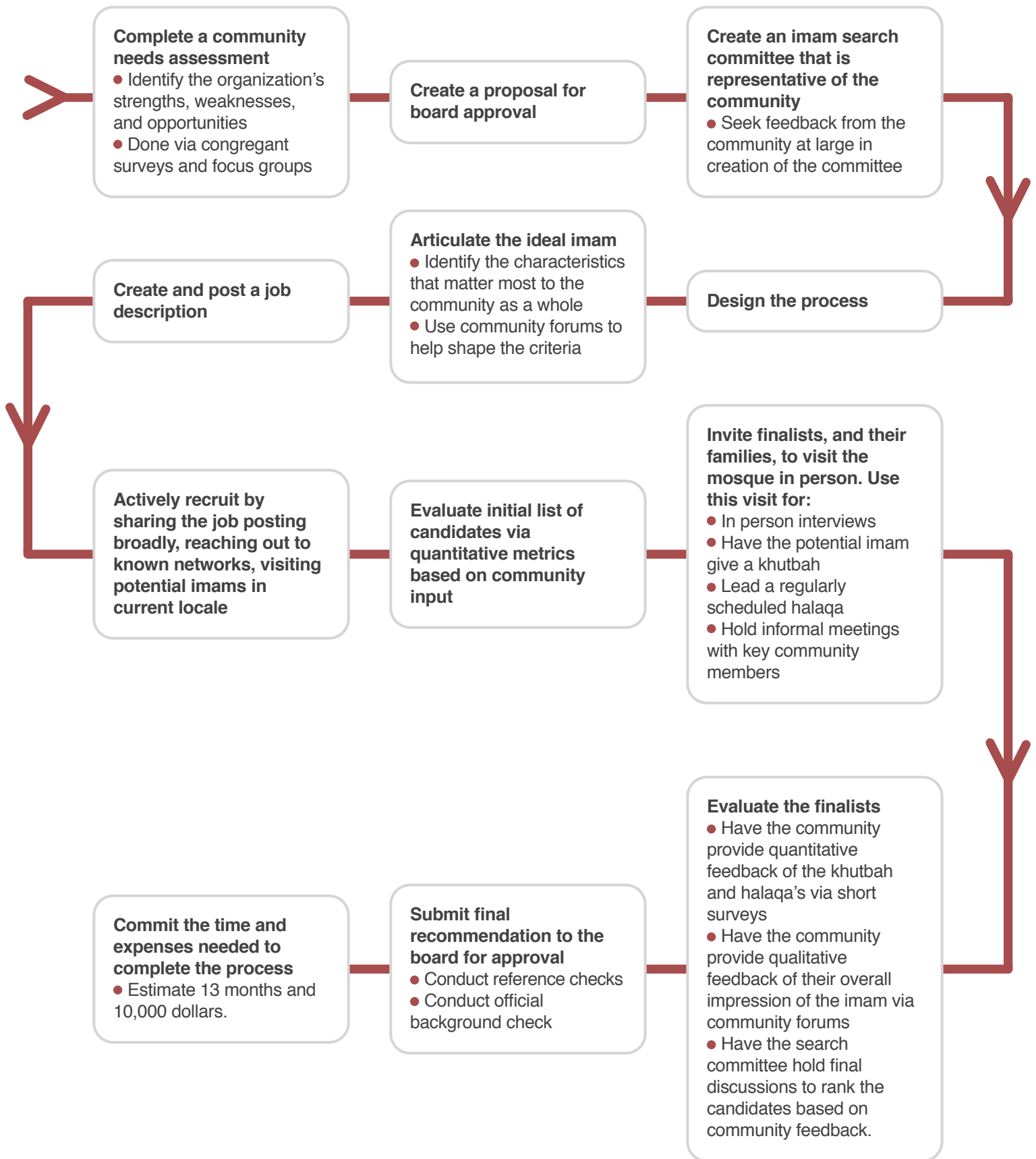
General Comments:

Additional feedback on this imam?
Email the imam Search Committee or set up a meeting with us!
[email address]

Your Age (Optional): _____

Your Gender (Optional): M or F

Appendix IV: Main Steps In The Imam Search Process

Complete a community needs assessment
● Identify the organization's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities
● Done via congregant surveys and focus groups

Create a proposal for board approval

Create an imam search committee that is representative of the community
● Seek feedback from the community at large in creation of the committee

Create and post a job description

Articulate the ideal imam
● Identify the characteristics that matter most to the community as a whole
● Use community forums to help shape the criteria

Design the process

Actively recruit by sharing the job posting broadly, reaching out to known networks, visiting potential imams in current locale

Evaluate initial list of candidates via quantitative metrics based on community input

Invite finalists, and their families, to visit the mosque in person. Use this visit for:
● In person interviews
● Have the potential imam give a khutbah
● Lead a regularly scheduled halaqa
● Hold informal meetings with key community members

Commit the time and expenses needed to complete the process
● Estimate 13 months and 10,000 dollars.

Submit final recommendation to the board for approval
● Conduct reference checks
● Conduct official background check

Evaluate the finalists
● Have the community provide quantitative feedback of the khutbah and halaqa's via short surveys
● Have the community provide qualitative feedback of their overall impression of the imam via community forums
● Have the search committee hold final discussions to rank the candidates based on community feedback.

Endnotes

[1] http://isbcc.org/about-us/

[2] For details, see Faiqa Mahmood, The Boston Marathon Bombing and the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center (ISBCC) (Washington, DC: Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2017).

[3] Hassan El-Alami, telephone interview by Afif Rahman, September 1, 2016.

[4] http://www.dinarstandard.com/

[5] Nancy Khalil, telephone interview by Afif Rahman, September 9, 2016.

[6] Yusufi Vali, telephone interview by Afif Rahman, August 24, 2016.

[7] Community Member 2, telephone interview by Afif Rahman, November 6, 2016.

[8] Community Member 1, telephone interview by Afif Rahman, November 6, 2016.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Community Member 3, telephone interview by Afif Rahman, November 7, 2016.

[11] Taymullah Abdurrahman, telephone interview by Afif Rahman, August 28, 2016.

[12] The ISBCC leadership had agreed that the senior imam would be empowered to build his own team, meaning that he would choose an associate imam. This wasn't clearly communicated to the community, and some members assumed that the imam search process would be repeated for the associate imam as well.

[13] Telephone interview with Yusufi Vali.

[14] Telephone interview with Taymullah Abdurrahman.

[15] Telephone interview with Hassan El-Alami.

[16] Yasir Fahmy, telephone interview by Afif Rahman, September 19, 2016.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Stephanie Marzouk, telephone interview by Afif Rahman, August 22, 2016.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Mohamed Shaakir, telephone interview by Afif Rahman, September 3, 2016.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Telephone interview with Stephanie Marzouk.

[23] Telephone interview with Yasir Fahmy.

[24] Telephone interview with Nancy Khalil.

[25] Telephone interview with Yasir Fahmy.

Notes

ISPU conducts objective, solution-seeking research that empowers American Muslims to develop their community and fully contribute to democracy and pluralism in the United States. Since 2002, ISPU has been at the forefront of discovering trends and opportunities that impact the American Muslim community. Our research aims to educate the general public and enable community change agents, the media, and policymakers to make evidence-based decisions. 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.

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