

# Los Angeles Mosques

## Institutionalize Charity and Service

SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT



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## About the Author

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# Executive Summary

**THIS STUDY HIGHLIGHTS** the public service activity of Muslim organizations in Southern California. The report focuses on the activity of mosques and Islamic centers rather than philanthropic organizations specifically committed to public service and charitable causes (e.g., the UMMA Clinic or Islamic Relief).

Muslims often highlight Islam's emphasis on helping the disadvantaged (orphans, prisoners, slaves, the poor, the weak, and the hungry) and promoting justice and equality. Yet the findings presented here suggest that most community leaders feel that the current level of social service provided is deficient. Furthermore, the comments of mosque officials interviewed across ten Islamic centers in Los Angeles, regardless of their level of service activity, reveals that the services provided by Muslims are below the community's potential. While social service activity is said to be a community priority, officials cited countless obstacles in pursuing these activities, including human resource challenges and the lack of financial support.

This report begins by outlining the broad landscape and wide range of service activities held in the mosques: food distribution; healthcare promotion; neighborhood and/or city improvement; educational promotion and support; personal guidance, counseling, and referral; and others. These activities are organized both formally and informally, as well as regularly or irregularly. Discussion of such organizational types gives us a better picture of how the selected centers operate their service activities.

After conveying the general feeling of service deficiency, the report presents approaches to implementing projects adopted in centers that are actively pursuing such activities. Due to the obstacles faced by centers hoping to establish philanthropic services, it is important to note some of the effective and replicable practices in establishing such activities, namely, partnerships and collaborations, non-financially burdensome activities, formalization of existing informal services, and utilization of professionals and experts.

In addition to such practical considerations, the report highlights some prevalent community norms in centers with a high level of service engagement (e.g., religious activism, awareness of social issues, willingness to reach out, active leadership, and community initiative). Implementing the abovementioned practical approaches and consciously fostering these community norms can, perhaps, lead to an increased level of service activity.

Finally, the report highlights the impact of public service in the mosque. A genuine commitment to service may be heightened by better understanding the role of service activities. Given that Islamic education and socialization occurs primarily in the context of community centers, they can provide a grassroots-level access to Muslims and foster a culture of public service volunteerism. Such a role is perhaps unique to Islamic centers and not easily fulfilled by other specialized social service agencies. In other words, such activity within the context of the mosque may serve an important educational function at the individual level and an identity-formation and outreach function at the communal level. The report thus suggests that the primary significance and importance of public service activity in the context of mosques and community centers is to offer an element of Islamic education and socialization that perhaps cannot be provided by other kinds of activities or organizations.

This report demonstrates the increasing concern among American Muslim communities for a fuller integration into the American mainstream and for making more contributions to the greater society. A significant number of Muslims are perhaps beginning to see themselves as a positive element that contributes to the progress of our nation and the world at large. This is, at least, the vision that many leaders seem to have for their communities. We hope this report will be of interest to the general public, scholars, and policymakers who seek to better understand this particular community's practices and visions.

## Introduction

THE CONTROVERSY OVER PARK 51, the proposed Muslim community center a few blocks from Ground Zero, has brought national attention to American mosques. Some of this attention has been negative, as the grass-roots opposition that is specifically against Park 51 evolving into grass-roots opposition movement against American mosques generally, across the country, including in Southern California. One Florida-based church is organizing a public burning of Qurans, and just outside of Los Angeles, in nearby Temecula Valley, protesters held a demonstration in protest of a mosque to be built on land purchased by local Muslims ten years ago.<sup>1</sup> Some protesters insist their opposition is justified by claiming that American mosques are hotbeds of anti-American, extremist activity or even terrorism. Research has shown, however, that the opposite is generally true, that American mosques overwhelmingly tend to be institutions that deter radicalization and nurture positive engagement with society.<sup>2</sup> This report highlights the involvement of Los Angeles mosques in the public sphere, illustrating the concerns and efforts of Islamic centers to establish and institutionalize charitable work and public service. It is clear from this report and other research that the great majority of Islamic centers are attempting to implement effective public service initiatives and programs, and are striving to foster values of social responsibility and civic engagement in their communities. The documentation of their attitudes, efforts, challenges, and successes demonstrates that American Muslims are concerned—like the rest of the American citizenry—with the welfare of their society and are making important strides in becoming a community that is beneficial to all those around it and beneficial to the nation as a whole.

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AND EQUALITY.”

Although an up-and-coming field, research on Islamic institutions and community centers in the United States is greatly lacking. In her book on the state of research on Muslims in this country, Karen Isaksen Leonard argues that the “Americanization of Islam” remains a compelling phenomenon that continues to be understudied.<sup>3</sup> Despite increasing academic interest, very few studies have been conducted on this community’s developing communal dynamics, attitudes, beliefs, and practices. Ihsan Bagby’s 2004 study on the political and religious views of Muslims in Detroit mosques,<sup>4</sup> remains a relatively unique example of social science research documenting the attitudes and views of American Muslim congregations.

One important feature of such community dynamics is the role of philanthropic work in the community. As seen above in the remarks of one prominent official of a Muslim umbrella organization, Muslims regularly stress the obligation to help society’s disadvantaged members and promote justice and equality. Unfortunately, little research has been conducted to explore their involvement in, or attitude toward, philanthropic and public service activities. Given the supposed importance of charity, philanthropy, and justice, what are Muslim communities actually doing in this regard? The recent ISPU report by Lance





Laird and Wendy Cadge on Muslim healthcare organizations<sup>5</sup> is an important step toward better understanding the role of Muslim philanthropic institutions in American society.

This preliminary report seeks to contribute to this field and assess the role of public service activity in the Muslim community. But rather than explore the activities of organizations specifically committed to philanthropic work (as the health organizations report did), this study explores the involvement of mosques and Islamic centers in public service work in order to assess Muslims' community-level, grassroots engagement in such work. It therefore focuses on mosque engagement in service work based on the views and attitudes of Los Angeles community leaders.

The report is divided into four main parts:

- (1) a basic overview of the types and extent of service activity in the mosques featured in this study;
- (2) approaches adopted by mosques for implementing public service activities and trends in centers that are highly engaged in such work;
- (3) possible functions and impacts of public service activities unique to these congregations; and
- (4) a summary of the study's key findings and possible avenues for further research.

This preliminary report does not hope to make conclusive, representative, and generalizable statements about the nature of public service work in American mosques or even in all of Southern California, for that matter. Its goal is primarily to highlight the views and perspectives of community leaders, convey some basic observations, and suggest possible lessons to be learned and directions for further research.

## Research Methodology

**THIS STUDY ADOPTS** simple qualitative research methods: the claims made are based on the statements and reflections of community leaders and organization officials. In total, 23 individuals representing 15 different organizations were interviewed for the study over a span of 10 weeks during the summer of 2008.

For the purposes of this study, the terms public service, social service, and philanthropy are used interchangeably, for all of them refer to a service offered to uplift society and meet the needs of its disadvantaged members.

This report focuses on the public service activities of mosques and Islamic community centers, as opposed to Muslim faith-based organizations whose primary mission is to provide social services (viz., Muslim health clinics or poverty-relief organizations), in order to explore the involvement of communities and congregations in service work. For the sake of this study, mosques, Islamic centers, or congregations (the terms are used interchangeably) are defined as “Islamic institution[s] that conduct Friday Prayer (the weekly congregational prayer) and organize other religious activities to serve a group of Muslims,” as defined by Dr. Ihsan Bagby in his “Detroit Mosques” report.

### CENTER SELECTION

With the assistance of the Islamic Shura Council of Southern California,<sup>6</sup> ten mosques were selected and its officials interviewed. Selection was based primarily on location and ethnic composition. The centers were concentrated in Los Angeles and the directly neighboring cities in the Los Angeles area in order to provide a similar urban context. One exception was made, however, due to the center’s reputation as one of the best established centers in Southern California. Although located in a suburban city, this mosque is nonetheless located in a neighborhood of similar socioeconomic status as several other mosques in the study. Los Angeles was selected because religious congregations in urban/inner-city areas often engage in more service activities than those in suburban areas,<sup>6</sup> thus allowing more opportunities to observe service activities than in a suburban context.

The second selection criterion was ethnic and cultural composition in recognition of the American Muslim community’s great diversity. The study included 3 predominantly African-American mosques, 2 predominantly South Asian (Indian/Pakistani) mosques, 2 primarily “Arab mosques”, and 3 ethnically mixed mosques. Several attempts were made to include a predominantly Iranian mosque, yet an interview could not be arranged.

It must be noted that these are rough categorizations, as most of these mosques serve more than one ethnic group. Nonetheless, these specific categorizations highlight the dominant culture found in each mosque and center, as is often unofficially acknowledged by the greater community.<sup>7</sup> For example, both of



the “Arab mosques” mosques have large non-Arab constituencies; however, they are administered primarily by Arabs and considered “Arab mosques.” Similarly, one of the predominantly South Asian mosques has a very significant Arab constituency. Yet because its leadership and general “feel” or culture are South Asian, it is considered an Indo-Pakistani mosque. On the other hand, the second South Asian mosque and the three African-American mosques are largely homogenous. Although not clear-cut cases, these ethnic categorizations remain useful. As there appear to be no East Asian, Southeast Asian, or Afghan centers in the immediate Los Angeles area, the only major group that ought to be represented yet was not included is Iranian. The selection’s ethnic distribution was therefore fairly comprehensive, given the demographics of Los Angeles’ Muslim community.

Furthermore, the selection of centers had a fairly even distribution with regards to size, age, and level of establishment. Three of them are among Southern California’s largest, oldest, and most well-established mosques. Others are also very old (dating back to the 1970s or early 1980s), and yet are small and not as well-established, while still others are among the newer centers (dating back to the early or mid-1990s) and either large or intermediate in size. The variation in ethnic composition, size, age, and level of establishment provided the study with a wide variety of types of centers to compare and contrast the different practices and trends with regard to social service involvement.

## FURTHER INTERVIEW SELECTION

In addition to the ten congregations interviewed, officials from four local Muslim social service organizations were interviewed to explore the collaboration between such organizations and mosques as well as to gain the perspectives of those actively involved in the field. These organizations were the UMMA Clinic, the ILM Foundation, ACCESS California Services, and NISWA, all of which offer specific social services and, to some extent, involve mosques and community centers in their social service work. (For a description of each organization, see Part II of the report.) These organizations were selected through “snowball” sampling, based on their being mentioned by interviewees and their prominence in the region.

A founding member and current board member of the Shura Council of Southern California was also interviewed, as he is uniquely qualified to provide an overview of the activities and attitudes among Southern California’s congregations. These five additional interviews provided many important insights.

## DATA COLLECTION

Between one and four mosque/community officials, leaders, and activists were interviewed in each center. Interviews generally followed the interview guide (Appendix A) and sought to explore basic information about the center (e.g., size, programs, and member composition); the congregation’s general culture and atmosphere; the center’s relationship with other communities, organizations, and agencies; the formal and informal social services offered by the community and the center; and the attitudes and perspectives of the community and the leadership on certain relevant issues. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded to identify, highlight, and analyze recurring trends and themes in the data and to allow comparisons among centers.

In addition, some of the center’s regular functions (e.g., Friday prayer, weekend programs, banquets, and daily prayers) were attended and observed when possible. Thus primarily through interviews and limited observation of regular mosque functions, each center’s general atmosphere, attitudes, and level of service engagement, as perceived by community leaders, were assessed. For the five additional organizations, interviews with their officials sought to gain an in-depth idea of the work done, how such work is carried out, the organization’s relation to local mosques, and the attitudes and perspectives of the organization’s officials concerning public service activity in the Muslim community.

For the purposes of individual confidentiality and center reputation, all names of the centers and individuals connected with this report are withheld. This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Stanford University and funded by the Chappell Lougee Scholarship summer research grant awarded by the Stanford Vice-Provost of Undergraduate Education.

PART I:

## Level of Engagement in Public Service Activity

IN ORDER TO ASSESS the various approaches, norms, and functions of public service, an overall description of the centers' levels of service activity, including the types of services offered and the extent of such activities, must be given. This section, which relies on the community leaders' accounts and perspectives, provides such a general illustration.

### WHAT IS BEING DONE? TYPES OF SERVICES

#### ORGANIZATIONAL TYPES OF SERVICE ACTIVITIES

The following list makes six distinctions in how congregational social service activities are organized:

1. **Formal/Informal:** Is the service activity part of the mosque's organizational structure or organized informally? Are financial and human resources (i.e., funds and staff/volunteers) officially allocated and assigned to run it?
2. **Self-Run/Partnership:** Is the service activity run, paid for, or organized by the mosque itself or the result of collaboration with other organizations?
3. **Consistent/Irregular:** Is the service activity held on a consistent basis and established as a regular mosque program or done on an as-needed basis and organized at irregular intervals?
4. **Financial/Non-Financial:** Is the service activity a project that requires special funding or is it sustainable without mosque funds?
5. **Volunteer-Based/Non-Volunteer-Based:** Does the service activity require a significant number of volunteers from the center or can it be run effectively by the organizers alone?
6. **Congregational/Greater Society:** Does the service activity primarily target the needs of the mosque's constituents or does it cater to the needs of all members of society?

Although it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between these types, these distinctions nonetheless provide a useful means for assessing the types of services offered by congregations, as will be seen next.

#### KINDS OF SERVICE ACTIVITIES

Centers engage in a wide variety of services: monetary and material assistance (for both individuals and organizations); food distribution; healthcare promotion; neighborhood/city improvement; educational promotion and support; personal guidance, counseling, and referral; and numerous other activities that are somehow related to those above or stand on their own.

“... THIS MONEY IS HELD AS  
A TRUST FOR COMMUNITY  
MEMBERS WHO NEED  
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE  
AND IS DISTRIBUTED TO  
THOSE WHO COME TO THE  
CENTER FOR ASSISTANCE.”

TABLE #1 (Continued on next page spread)

Below is a comprehensive list of the different services in which the study's mosques reported some level of involvement, as well as a brief description of each. They are listed in order of the categories listed above, namely, monetary, food, health, city improvement, education, and guidance. Given that activities generally do not fall into only one category, they have not been clearly classified. Moreover, some of the more active centers are involved in projects not listed here.

#### **ZAKAT DISTRIBUTION**

Essentially all mosques collect the *zakat* due on every Muslim and are entrusted with its proper distribution. Upon its receipt, this money is held as a trust for community members who need financial assistance and is distributed to those who come to the center for assistance. This service is generally only for needy Muslims, because they know that mosques have *zakat* funds and because *zakat* is generally conceived as a Muslim fund. It is not always understood, however, in this exclusive sense.

#### **FINANCIALLY SUPPORTING CHARITIES**

Money from the mosque's *zakat* funds and other parts of its budget are allocated to support community charities and organizations (e.g., the UMMA Clinic, the ILM Foundation, and Islamic Relief), as well as non-Muslim service organizations.

#### **RAISING MONEY FOR DISASTERS**

The community is mobilized to raise funds for disaster relief, such as Hurricane Katrina (2005) and the Asian tsunami (2004).

#### **KIND HEARTS PROJECT**

Money is raised by the community's children for various organizations. (See case studies)

#### **HABITAT FOR HUMANITY**

Volunteers participate in a day-long activity by building homes with Habitat for Humanity. (More information on Habitat for Humanity will follow in the report.)

#### **CANNED FOOD DRIVES**

Canned food is collected and distributed to the needy.

#### **CLOTHING DRIVES**

Clothing is collected and distributed to the needy.

#### **GARAGE SALES**

A garage sale is held to help low-income individuals in need of such items.

#### **THANKSGIVING SERVICE**

Thanksgiving turkey baskets are collected and arranged at mosques, with food supplies and coupons for the main course, a variety of canned goods, and other items. In collaboration with local interfaith councils, baskets are distributed to women's shelters and other needy groups.

#### **COLLECTING SUPPLIES/PACKETS FOR THOSE IN NEED**

Supplies for the needy (e.g., school supplies, medical supplies, and hygiene kits) are collected at the mosque and then arranged and distributed to those in need, often in collaboration with other organizations.

#### **FOOD DISTRIBUTION**

Volunteers from the mosque work with organizations that run homeless feeding projects (e.g., homeless shelters, churches, and the ILM Foundation). For example, they help prepare and serve meals to low-income and homeless individuals. Some centers also have independent projects and distribute food in poverty-stricken areas.

### **FOOD PANTRY**

Needy families and individuals come to the mosque once a week to receive grocery bags containing a week's supply of food.

### **RAMADAN IFTAR DINNERS**

Mosque doors are opened during Ramadan for nightly iftar dinners to which local needy individuals and families are invited.

### **HUMANITARIAN DAY**

Volunteers participate in the annual Humanitarian Day, organized by the ILM Foundation to serve the needy in downtown Los Angeles. (More information on Humanitarian Day follows in the report)

### **HEALTH FAIRS**

Mosques have organizations such as NISWA or the UMMA Clinic, both of which conduct health fairs for the local community. The facility is used for check-up stations, doctors and nurses check individuals and discuss problems, and blood drives often occur on-site.

### **BLOOD DRIVES**

Mosque facilities are used by blood banks (e.g., the Red Cross) for day-long blood drives. Members of the local community come to donate blood.

### **KIDNEY DONORS**

Organizations are brought to the mosque to get community members to sign up as potential kidney donors.

### **BURIAL SERVICES**

Some mosques have on-site morgues/mortuaries, while others partner with such organizations as JEBA (Janaza Educational Burial Assistance) to offer burial services to community members.

### **DRUG COUNSELING**

Individuals with drug problems are referred to professional counselors within the community or to agencies without. These services are advertised in the neighboring community. Volunteers also help at agencies that work with drug addicts.

### **CHILD VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE**

Mosque members organize a professionally run camp for children suffering from gang warfare, domestic violence, abuse, and other traumas in collaboration with other agencies.

### **FOOTBALL CAMP**

Mosque members participate and help with a football camp run by the ILM Foundation for inner-city youth faced with difficulties.

### **BIG SUNDAY**

Volunteers participate in this annual Greater Los Angeles event. (More information on Big Sunday will follow in the report)

### **STREET CLEANING**

Volunteers help with the mosque's, city's, or another organization's street-cleaning projects.

### **PLANTING**

Volunteers help with planting projects at local community gardens or areas in the area that need trees. These are often run by the city or other organizations.

### **PAINTING**

Volunteers help in a project to paint run-down areas in the city.

### **CHARTER SCHOOL**

One mosque founded an elementary school for local community children to compensate for the low quality of public schools and the local people's inability to pay for private education. Funded by the government and run by the Muslim community, this full-time school serves approximately 240 local and predominantly non-Muslim students.

### **PUBLIC SCHOOL TUTORING**

Local public school children are invited to the mosque to receive tutoring in non-religious topics (e.g., math, English, and science).

### **FOSTER CHILDREN**

Programs are held at the mosque to recruit Muslim foster families and facilitate the process.

### **FACILITY USE**

Organizations serving needy groups or under-served Muslim groups are given space in the mosque to conduct their activities. Some examples are organizations serving blind and deaf Muslims, and LALMA (the Los Angeles Latino Muslim Association). Community lectures, workshops, and similar activities are also held.

### **RAISING AWARENESS**

Seminars, workshops, lectures, and programs are held to educate the community about poverty, domestic violence, mental health, the environment, and other issues of social concern.

### **COUNSELING**

The mosque's imam/religious director often provides counseling for family, spousal, parent-child, and community conflicts on an informal basis if asked to do so. Some mosques also have relations with NISWA, ACCESS, and similar organizations to offer mental health, domestic violence, and other types of counseling. While such services are not exclusive to the Muslim community, generally only Muslims come to the mosque for assistance.

### **REFERRALS**

Individuals who come to the mosque with problems or difficulties that cannot be adequately assisted through the zakat fund are directed to appropriate professional service providers.

### **JOB PLACEMENT**

The mosque director informally tries to find employment for individuals in need.

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Community members are taught professional skills to help them secure employment and to excel at work, such as classes in computer literacy.

### **FREE TAX SERVICES**

Trained volunteers help low-income individuals fill out their tax forms.

### **PRISON SERVICE**

Muslim inmates receive religious material, instruction, comfort items, and other requested items.





## HOW MUCH IS BEING DONE? THE EXTENT OF SERVICE ACTIVITY

### RANGE OF SERVICE ACTIVITY

At the bare minimum, all mosques interviewed have some informal mechanism to assist needy individuals who ask for help. Normally this takes the form of distributing *zakat* funds; for those mosques with no such fund, it takes the form of referrals or guidance. All mosques have some standard way of assisting those who approach them specifically for help, whether through financial assistance, counseling, or referrals to professional individuals or outside agencies. Even those with almost no social service activities provide such informal services, although the level of efficacy varies greatly from mosque to mosque.

To provide a reasonable picture of the extent of the selected mosques' social service activity, it may be helpful to illustrate their range of such activities.

The first mosque, which is one of oldest and arguably most well-established and influential mosques in the area, is clearly the most active and engaged one. Relatively speaking, it is very diverse and draws its leadership and membership from a great multitude of backgrounds, including first-, second-, and even third-generation immigrants from all over the world, as well as significant numbers of indigenous Muslims. With regards to public service activities, it is involved in *zakat* distribution, counseling, referrals, professional development, burial services, health fairs, facility use, prison service, feeding the homeless, distribution at the food pantry, Humanitarian Day, Big Sunday, blood and clothing drives, foster children, raising awareness, financially supporting charities, raising money for disasters, Thanksgiving services, and collecting supplies/packets for the needy. The center's *zakat* distribution program is the most effective and formal one observed. In addition, it has the only self-maintained, formal, on-site social service program (with the notable exception of the charter school): the food pantry. The mosque clearly considers social service work an important priority and thus implements projects and programs more effectively than the other mosques.

The second mosque, perhaps the least involved in public service of those included in the study, is made up primarily of Arab and South Asian immigrants. In addition, it is built on the model of mosques from those regions, as opposed to the American model of a community center. With regards to public service activities, the center only provides *zakat* funds to needy Muslims who



come to it for assistance. At times, NISWA uses the facility to hold meetings. In the past, an attempt was made to hold a professional development class to teach computer skills at the mosque, but this program failed to materialize. Beyond such small efforts, the mosque administrator admitted: “Frankly... other than providing *zakat* money to needy people, we have not established any kind of social services activities here.” Many of the mosque’s leaders and members do not consider such activities an important priority.

Between these two examples lies a wide variety of mosque involvement. One other mosque reported significantly high levels of service activity, especially given its limited capacity, as it participates in almost as many activities as the first mosque described above. Another mosque could also be said to be involved in few if any service activities, close to the level of the second mosque described above. The other six mosques fall somewhere in between, participating in a select number of activities and often focusing on one particular concern or interest.

### EXTENT OF SERVICE ACTIVITY BY ORGANIZATIONAL TYPES

This section seeks to use the abovementioned six distinctions to provide a clearer picture of the extent of service activity in the ten selected mosques. Within each organizational type listed, we highlight the trends observed in the selected mosques.

#### 1. *Formal/Informal*

In the centers surveyed, the majority of mosque involvement in social services tends to be informal, as they are generally not part of the mosque’s structure and official organization. Thus no funds or human resources are specifically allocated for them and they are not subject to accountability and review. Rather, they tend to be organized when the opportunity or need arises and when financial and human resources are available. Individuals take charge of such projects without official positions.

Some notable exceptions are the *zakat* distribution programs (while many centers distribute these funds informally, a few have established formalized procedures, such as official *zakat* committees and applications), formal burial services, and food distribution activities in some centers. One center has even established a charter school.

This observation is supported by the comments and observations of various community leaders. For example, the president of one of the most actively involved mosques said that its members hope to expand to the level of “providing actual services and following up, and having a person be in charge of following up with people who need help.” Such leaders believe that the current activity is typically not organized at such a formal level.

The Shura Council founding member, an active member and leader of the community for over two decades, highlighted this trend most clearly, commenting that in most mosques “*there is no clear-cut defined distribution that, ‘we are going to allocate 10% to homelessness, battered women, abuse, seniors, etc.’... there is no such planning to achieve those*

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*goals... They do not follow through with clear-cut committee members and reporting and reviewing... real managerial review, that is lacking... Muslims are always generous, but the point is transparency and accountability... Now new initiatives are taking place where clear-cut social service committees are being formed... There are in every community always some people who volunteer their time, services, and money, [but] not necessarily channeling through the institution.”<sup>8</sup>*

The level of formality is very often closely related to the center’s self-management and consistency, as will be seen below.

## **2. Self-Run/Partnership**

The majority of social service activities among the centers studied rely on collaboration and partnerships, as can be seen from the list above. Such relationships are generally formed with external organizations, coalitions, or city governments. This becomes apparent in events and projects held both inside and outside the center. Examples of on-site collaboration include supporting another organization by collecting funds (e.g., the Kind Hearts Project) or holding a blood drive on the center’s premises; examples of off-site collaboration include participation in Humanitarian Day or Big Sunday.

Whether a center’s service projects are self-run or collaborative is often closely related to how formalized its social services are. Formal services are most often run by the mosque alone. For example, one mosque’s weekly food pantry is an instance of a now-formalized food distribution program that is run by the mosque alone. Exceptions to this general trend do exist, as in the one center that distributes food and hygiene supplies to the homeless in collaboration with an external philanthropic organization. This program became a formal part of the mosque’s official operation when specific individuals were put in charge of running it and ensuring its success. Despite such exceptions, most formalized activities are self-run, most informal activities are collaborative, and the majority of service activities are collaborative in nature.

For a more detailed discussion of the tendency toward partnerships and some of the related implications, see Part II: “Practical Approaches for Service Activities.”

## **3. Consistent/Irregular**

There is little consistent and regular social service activity in the centers featured here; however, there are some exceptions here as well. The majority of mosque involvement tends to be sporadic one-time projects or programs, such as volunteering for a day with a charity organization or organizing a drive to collect funds or supplies for a specific cause.

There are exceptions, however, such as the weekly food pantry and mosques regularly participating in food distribution activities (e.g., volunteering at a mission on the first Saturday of every month) or regularly volunteering at annual events (e.g., Humanitarian Day or Big Sunday). In general, formalized services are organized on a consistent basis, given that they are part of official mosque programs and have allocated resources and individuals to ensure their continuity. Informal activities, on the other hand, are most often organized when

the need arises or an opportunity for such a project presents itself. Thus they tend to be one-time projects or held sporadically and irregularly.

Although some of the informal services (e.g., counseling and *zakat* distribution) are offered whenever the need arises, I do not consider these to be consistent, regularly run social service programs. Formalized programs, such as the *zakat* distribution committee of one mosque, meet regularly and allocate consistent time to achieving that particular program's goal. Such activities are indeed few in number.

#### **4. Financial/Non-Financial**

The financial involvement of Islamic centers in social service work is limited. *Zakat* distribution is the primary financially based service offered. Given that this money is most often donated by mosque members specifically for that purpose, it cannot be viewed as coming from general mosque funds. Most services involve mobilizing community members to perform some task; few involve the mosque having to allocate funds for the service, such as the food pantry. Some mosques also allocate funds to charities (e.g., the UMMA Clinic, the ILM Foundation, or NISWA). Informal projects (e.g., preparing kits or packages for the needy) usually involve a small allocation of funds for materials; however, they require only a minimal and negligible amount of funds.

As noted above, most services are offered in collaboration with organizations that often assume the financial burden. In center-run services, some sacrifice by the members (e.g., time or money) is often required. Clearly, however, very few mosques offered services that placed a financial burden upon the center itself. This is not surprising, given the extent to which mosque officials repeatedly emphasized that funds are very limited and that meeting the bare necessities of mosque maintenance is often a significant challenge in itself. This leaves little to nothing for social services, which are viewed as noble additional undertakings but not as essential to the mosque's continued functioning.

#### **5. Volunteer-Based/Non-Volunteer-Based**

The distinction between service activities requiring active volunteer supervision (e.g., feeding the homeless, volunteering for another organization, or organizing a food/clothing drive) and those that do not (e.g., *zakat* distribution, financial support for charities, or counseling) is significant. The level of community involvement here is closely related to the mosque's general level of service activity. The most active mosques clearly are the ones most involved in service projects requiring community involvement and volunteers; in the least active mosques, however, volunteer-based service is essentially nonexistent because they are typically only involved in *zakat* distribution and counseling/referrals. This suggests that more active mosques are able to implement various volunteer-based programs and recruit the needed volunteers.

For a further discussion of the importance and implications of community involvement and volunteering, see Part II and Part III.

#### **6. Congregational/Greater Society**

Another useful distinction to make is that between community-specific services and those aimed at the broader society. The great majority of these latter services are offered only by a few centers, primarily those two or three that are actively involved in social service work. In general, centers that have few social service activities naturally focus on their own needs and do not have the capacity to offer services to non-members. The significance of this distinction is further discussed primarily in Part III.

It should be noted that although some community leaders may prefer one organizational type over the other, there is no reason to assume an objective preference for one distinction over its counterpart (e.g., a preference for formal over informal). Rather, such distinctions can have various benefits in different contexts and should be seen merely as one way to acquire a clearer understanding how Islamic centers implement public service projects.

## COMMUNITY LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE EXTENT OF SERVICE ACTIVITY

As the leaders responsible for executing their centers' missions and visions, mosque officials offer a valuable perspective on the extent and capacity for involvement in social service. Most of them cited two main themes repeatedly:

- (1) a unanimous assertion that they view social service as an important priority and often note that it should be pursued more than it currently is and
- (2) the difficulty of establishing such services in the face of minimal resources and the duty to meet numerous other essential needs. In this section, the quotations by various leaders serve to highlight these two themes.

A leading official of one of the least active mosques, a small center made up of South Asian immigrant families, commented: *"We hope to make the center more of a place where charity is given out and people come here to get help. We are not up to that right now, but we do the best we can with the resources we have. Usually the facilities we have are inadequate... I think that it should become more of a priority... we should do more... We are doing some, I'm not saying that we are not doing anything, but we should have a much more organized way of doing this."*<sup>9</sup>

One of the most prominent leaders in the South California Muslim community expanded on this thought. Although he is a high-level official at a suburban mosque that is considered one of the region's most well-established centers, his center has a mediocre record of service involvement. *"Our concern is the education of our children and the youth. That's what we are paying much more attention to, providing a good education to Muslim children. So most of our resources go there, to the school... As far as social service is considered, it's very limited at the moment... The community is establishing centers, masajid, taking care of basic needs of the community at this moment... There is some involvement but it is not enough... We need more people, more trained staff. There's a lack of trained people, in counseling, in social service... Funding is also another area. If we had more funds, we can do more activities, establish a separate office for this activity, hire somebody... With religious services, prayers, teaching, education, counseling, marriage, funerals, publications, local programs, national programs... our hands become tied. We need more people... The primary obstacle is manpower and human resources."*<sup>10</sup>

Even in mosques where social service involvement is at its best, officials often feel that their activities are not enough. For example, one of the area's newer mosques, despite its moderate size and limited resources, has a relatively wide array of programs and public service activities. *"These [social service activities] are not really on a sustained day-to-day basis... Really the feeling is that we are not doing enough in this area ... In terms of helping people that are in need, maybe we need to promote that or expand that... it's very limited, but it's been growing as we grow... We wish we could have more resources to do more, but we try to help as much as possible... When you think of the resources, we have a school going here, we have our own community, our own programs. Most of the people here are low-income or middle class, and we don't have any funds from anybody, and basically it is the community paying for itself. We have employees to pay, the activities... it just costs too much, we are spread too thin. We hope one day that we would be able to do more to our neighbors, to help them more, but until we get more resources it will be hard for us to do."*<sup>11</sup>

The religious director of the most active mosque (described above) expressed a similar sentiment: *“We’re not quite yet there in terms of serving the community... we don’t have a consistent volunteerism as part of our culture at the Islamic center or the Muslim community in general. It’s definitely lacking... We have a long ways to go. There’s a lot more that we can do. The [broader] community wouldn’t notice if we weren’t here... The problem is, most Islamic centers are not tapped into securing enough funding from the community, to hire enough staff, to not only fulfill the needs of the community but then look beyond that. Most mosques are just barely scraping by to just barely serve the needs of the community, to have the prayers, clean the place, have a small school, etc.... Just meeting the basic needs of the community exhausts the resources of the community.”*<sup>12</sup>

These comments, along with many similar reflections not included here, reveal that mosque officials, in addition to feeling restricted by limited resources, often perceive their mosque’s level of public service activity as deficient and hope to expand it in the future. Given that they generally attempt to shed a positive light on their mosque, it is very telling to hear almost all of the officials interviewed admit these limitations.

The comments of community activists and leaders of other organizations point in a similar direction. In the critical view of the Shura Council founding member, who immigrated from Pakistan more than two decades ago, *“their [Muslim communities’] potential is not reflected in providing the social services... The only reference to social work is to feed-the-hungry programs or to disasters, when calamities happen... A low priority is given to such work. If a calamity hits, it becomes a point on the agenda, and even a special meeting is called... otherwise, this particular item is not listed by itself in the agenda... There are services; the only thing is, with the amount of opportunity we have, we could improve the level of service in this area... I think the awakening is slowly coming that this is very important goal.”*<sup>13</sup>

An official at the UMMA Clinic, an American-born Muslim activist in his early thirties, commented: *“We’re far behind other religious communities in terms of building social service institutions... There’s been a strong emphasis on international relief, and I think that the domestic model is becoming much stronger. We see that with Humanitarian Day, the support for that throughout the US Muslim communities, joining in this grassroots effort.”*<sup>14</sup>

A founding official of NISWA, an immigrant woman from the Indian subcontinent and a long-time community activist, reflected on the state of public service in the Muslim community: *“There are needs for the youth, needs of the seniors, many many needs which cover all aspects of our life, and they’ve been ignored up until now... Our consciousness of social issues has just dawned on us... First-generation immigrants are so rooted in earning a living, putting down roots, have so many other concerns.”*<sup>15</sup>

As leaders of the Muslim community in Southern California with broad perspectives of mosque activity, such comments indicate a general sentiment that the level of social service activity is lower than what is hoped for and lower than the community’s perceived potential. While such activity seems to be a significant priority, officials nevertheless cite obstacles and challenges to explain why their communities are still deficient in this regard. Again, this is not to say that social service is, in some objective sense, less than it should be; rather, it is to indicate that community leaders generally agree that it is lower than it should be.

“... FIRST-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS ARE SO ROOTED IN EARNING A LIVING, PUTTING DOWN ROOTS, HAVE SO MANY OTHER CONCERNS.”



## PART II:

# Approaches to Public Service Activity



## HOW TO BE ENGAGED?

### PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO SERVICE ACTIVITIES

Given that communities generally perceive public service activity as lacking and yet hope to expand it, this section seeks to highlight how active centers implement such activities. The difficulties and obstacles faced while establishing philanthropic services makes it important to note the successful practices and implementation approaches that can be replicated.

### PARTNERSHIPS WITH EXTERNAL AGENCIES, ORGANIZATIONS, AND GROUPS

One of the most effective approaches is to collaborate with community organizations and agencies, interfaith groups, government institutions, and other local and national groups.

Collaboration and partnership can take many different forms:

- **Mobilizing volunteers:** Mosques mobilize volunteers to help out at an organization-run event (e.g., the annual Big Sunday or Humanitarian Day, a tree-planting project, a day of work on building a home with Habitat for Humanity, or helping at a Christian mission that feeds the homeless). Such opportunities are numerous and easy to arrange.
- **Recruiting professionals:** Islamic centers sometimes identify professionals within the community who can participate in specific organization-related tasks or direct them to volunteer with such organizations. The most typical example is encouraging medical professionals to volunteer for the UMMA Clinic, NISWA, and similar organizations.
- **Events at the center:** Mosque members may ask such organizations to provide a service at their center. These can range from the Red Cross setting up a blood bank; the UMMA Clinic holding a health fair; or ACCESS or NISWA presenting immigration, domestic violence, foster care, and similar programs.
- **Organize events together:** Mosques collaborate with organizations in planning and organizing a service event for the local community. The most typical example is organizing interfaith events, such as the Thanksgiving charity service.
- **Providing financial support:** Mosques sometimes support such organizations from their mosque funds (typically from the *zakat* fund) or by mobilizing the community to raise funds.
- **Referrals/Publicity:** Mosques may support the work of other organizations and be simultaneously assisted through simple agreements to publicize



TABLE #2

Mosques work with a great variety of such organizations and agencies. Some prominent organizations that collaborate with these mosques are listed here.

**The ILM Foundation**

[www.humanitarianday.com](http://www.humanitarianday.com)

This community organization strives to uplift needy communities through social service and to unite Muslims to help the needy and the homeless. It founded Humanitarian Day, during which ILM “coordinates a united coalition during the month of Ramadan in an effort to serve the homeless and circulate resources between diverse Muslim communities with those less fortunate.” (See the Humanitarian Day case study which follows.)

**The UMMA Clinic**

[www.ummaclinic.org](http://www.ummaclinic.org)

This South Central Los Angeles free health clinic was founded and is run by Muslims to “promote the well-being of the underserved by providing access to high quality healthcare for all, regardless of ability to pay.”

**ACCESS California Services**

[www.accesscal.org](http://www.accesscal.org)

This culturally oriented community-based organization seeks to empower under-served Arab-American and Muslim-American communities through direct services, referrals, and/or enrollment in community and government assistance programs. It offers services related to health, education, finances, immigration, employment, and family issues, among others.

**NISWA**

[www.niswa.org](http://www.niswa.org)

This social service organization seeks to assist Muslims with family and social issues (e.g., domestic violence, youth needs, and foster care). Based in South Bay, it offers shelter, counseling, referrals, and related services.

**Mauun and Dawaah**

[www.mauunanddawaah.org](http://www.mauunanddawaah.org)

This is a charity organization dedicated to providing services in response to the social needs of the Greater Los Angeles Muslim community.

**JEBA**

[www.mauunanddawaah.org](http://www.mauunanddawaah.org)

Janaza Educational Burial Assistance (JEBA) helps low-income Muslim families meet the burial needs of deceased loved ones and community members.

**Project Islamic H.O.P.E.**

[www.islamichope.org](http://www.islamichope.org)

This national civil rights organization advocates for the human rights of oppressed people regardless of race, gender, or religion. Primarily a grassroots movement located in Los Angeles, it organizes the community on various community-related issues and is involved in feeding the homeless and similar projects.

**Big Sunday**

<http://bigsunday.org>

Big Sunday, the largest annual Los Angeles-wide community service event, mobilizes and empowers volunteers to improve the larger community. Tens of thousands of people volunteer at over 300 nonprofits, schools, and other agencies.

**Habitat for Humanity**

[www.habitat.org](http://www.habitat.org)

This international non-profit Christian housing ministry recruits volunteers to build houses for needy families.

**The Red Cross**

[www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

In addition to serving as a blood-bank and providing various services, this organization has centers all over the country and often sets up blood banks in various locations.

**The Wilshire Center Interfaith Council**

[www.wcic.info](http://www.wcic.info)

This interfaith organization addresses the problems of hunger and homelessness in the Wilshire Center area of Los Angeles and also provides housing, hot meals, and additional household and personal items to the needy.



“... THERE IS A  
PARTNERSHIP.  
THERE IS SUPPORT,  
ENCOURAGEMENT.  
THEY SUPPORT EACH  
OTHER, THROUGH  
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SUPPORT, WHATEVER  
THEY CAN DO TO  
SUPPORT EACH OTHER.”

their work and recruit clients, volunteers, participants, and attendees. For example, centers often refer their members to counseling services at ACCESS or NISWA.

One African-American mosque with very minimal resources and programs relies on many informal ties to other organizations to carry out its activities. The imam, an immigrant from West Africa, commented: *“There is a network and link between our masjid [mosque] and other organizations... All these organizations, their members are members in our masjid [mosque], and they organize their meetings in the masjid [mosque]. So there is a partnership. There is support, encouragement. They support each other, through volunteering and through financial support, whatever they can do to support each other.”*<sup>16</sup>

Collaboration and partnership with external organizations are important approaches to providing more social services. In taking advantage of the opportunities that arise, an Islamic center may implement public service programs with other organizations, regardless of whether they are formal/informal, consistent/irregular, financially-based/non-financially-based, and for Muslims/non-Muslims. In other words, such partnerships allow mosques enough flexibility to engage in a variety of social service activities regardless of their lack of financial and/or human resources.

#### NON-FINANCIALLY BURDENSOME ACTIVITIES

Another approach is organizing activities, events, and projects that only require planning and community mobilization. Some examples of this approach include:

- **Clothing, food, and coin drives:** The mosque just finds the recipient organizations or individuals for the goods collected, provides a way to collect them, and mobilizes the community to participate.
- **Homeless service outings:** Members take food, hygiene/medical packets, and other supplies to the inner city and distribute them to homeless and other needy individuals.
- **Garage sales:** The mosque only needs members to bring in items for sale, advertise the event, and get volunteers to help run it.
- **Counseling and referral programs:** Qualified members must be willing to provide their time to offer advice, referrals, and other services.

Although one of the officials’ most common responses to inquiries about congregational public service activities was their stated concern with the lack of financial resources, such approaches are often overlooked. Since the idea of philanthropic work is closely connected with giving material assistance, it is often easy to forget that such service can be offered without any financial burden falling on the Islamic center.

## FORMALIZING EXISTING SERVICES

Islamic centers sometimes formalize and structure existing informal social service activities, thereby making them more efficient, reliable, and beneficial.

This can be done at many levels. For example, informal *zakat* distribution or counseling services can be formalized and structured by implementing a system with a specific process, accountability and review, appointed individuals responsible for specific tasks, and so on. One Islamic center had an appointed *zakat* committee responsible for meeting with needy individuals every Friday to follow up with their needs, find ways to help them get out of their situation, and offer other services. Similarly, counseling services extended by professionals are regularly announced and reviewed by mosque officials to ensure efficacy. As a result, services that might be ineffective due to their informal and unstructured nature can gain credibility and efficacy.

Partnerships with other organizations can be formalized as well. Rather than sporadic collaborations for one-time projects without any long-term formal relationships, some mosques establish official relationships and partnerships and formalize their involvement. For example, one mosque has a long-term agreement with the Red Cross to hold a blood drive at the center every Monday throughout the year. Another example is establishing a relationship with an interfaith coalition. Some mosques assume leadership roles and active positions within these coalitions and thus become officially responsible for a certain level of public service activities.

Formalizing existing informal service activities is thus a good way to establish them on a long-term sustainable basis and make them an official part of the mosque's organizational structure.

## UTILIZING PROFESSIONALS & EXPERTS

One important practice of Islamic centers is identifying community professionals and experts and the utilizing their expertise to provide a specific social service that otherwise might not be available.

For example, medical practitioners of any kind (doctors, nurses, dentists, pharmacists, nutritionists, psychiatrists, etc.) can volunteer for another

organization, provide professional counseling and referral networks, hold educational workshops and seminars, or hold on-site events for needy individuals. In one such case, physicians approached mosque officials and advocated for an on-site health fair in collaboration with the UMMA Clinic. These physicians then volunteered at the clinic. Identifying such individuals makes many activities, which would otherwise require significantly more energy and money, possible.

Similarly, lawyers and social workers can be identified and utilized for their respective services. For example, one Islamic center that is well-acquainted with its community's social workers and professionals was able to establish an efficient system of referrals and counseling for those in need such assistance.

## WHO IS ENGAGED? PREVALENT COMMUNITY NORMS

Beyond some of the more practical and direct approaches, it may be useful to depict the community norms that are perhaps more prevalent in mosques with high levels of social service activity. In this context, "community norms" refer to the community dynamics, perspectives, and atmospheres of mosques with regard to religious activism. Although such norms are not easy to foster, being cognizant of the need to cultivate them in one's community may contribute to an increased level of service activity.<sup>17</sup> Some of these norms are given in the following sections.

## LEADERS' UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM

One important community norm is the leadership's attitude and perspective toward the community's role in society, the mosque's function, giving and charity, and community priorities. For example, mosques that have officials who emphasize social activism with faith or the importance of charitable work are often far more engaged in service activity than others. For instance, the president of one of the most active mosques, an immigrant from North Africa and a leading community figure for the past fifteen years, commented numerous times on the importance of activism: "*There's no separation between being spiritual and being effective in the society. To be really spiritual in the Islamic sense, you*

*have to be active in the society and you have to be effective and you have to be a good neighbor to your neighbors, and so on... our focus is to motivate people and charge them spiritually so that they could be effective in the society.”<sup>18</sup>*

The imam of an African-American center echoed the same theme: *“It’s important for us to understand [that] Islam began as a social religion. And the social aspect of Islam is gone... We have to change that, have to broaden the spectrum of activity in Islam and reach out to the community. There’s a lot of work that other people are doing, that the Muslims really have the duty to do... Especially in the area we’re at in Los Angeles. We have a community there that’s filled with drugs, mental health issues, people need counseling... The Prophet was around people with a lot of adversity in their lives. We’re not elitist, we’re humble. Go around to people who have adversity, who need help.”<sup>19</sup>*

The Shura Council founding member also remarked: *“Honestly, there are no obstacles... it’s just promoting the product, making them realize how important it is. We need to make our community realize that the Qur’an has over-emphasized helping the needy.”<sup>20</sup>*

## **AWARENESS OF SOCIAL ILLS**

Another important community norm is awareness and consciousness —on the part of the leadership as well as community members —of the problems and needs existing both within their own communities and in society at large.

Again, the leadership of one of the most active mosques exemplified this awareness by instituting programs that address such concerns. The president commented at length, for example, on the situation of the poor and homeless in the area, citing drug problems, the lack of housing, unemployment, government and NGO intervention, and community involvement. Clearly the mosque’s leadership and members in general have a much greater grasp of the problems than other mosques interviewed in the study —a fact that has led to a high level of service activity.

As the community outreach official at the UMMA Clinic stated: *“We have a very generous community alhamdulillah [thank God]... but you have to remind people that there is homelessness and poverty and major, major social catastrophes that are happening domestically.”<sup>21</sup>*

The Shura Council board member emphasized this point as well: *“Another reason why the involvement is low is that people are taking for granted that Uncle Sam is taking care of them... ‘They are getting social services, food stamps, housing subsidy, etc. That’s what my taxes are for...’ They need to know there are many, many people who don’t even get that.”<sup>22</sup>*

## **LEADERS’ WILLINGNESS TO OUTREACH**

A community’s willingness and ability to reach out to other communities and organizations, to establish and maintain relations, and then to actually work with them is also important, for these open many opportunities that many Islamic centers usually would not have.

The study's two most active mosques provide excellent examples of this community norm, for they have built extensive relations with city officials and agencies, invite them to participate in events, have them visit the center regularly, and so on. In addition, they are regularly involved with local neighborhood associations and events, such as community barbecues, throughout the year. For example, one mosque administrator is an elected youth commissioner with the city who also volunteers with the sheriff's department. This opens various opportunities for collaborative service projects.

The mosques have also initiated and established partnerships with Islamic Relief, the UMMA Clinic, the ILM Foundation, Big Sunday, Habitat for Humanity, and similar organizations. Such outreach efforts and relationships enable them to participate in new service events and activities. The administrator, an active community member who immigrated from the Middle East as a youth, describes how the Islamic center usually becomes involved: *"Sometimes we get called from the city, and they say: 'Hey, we have this thing coming up. Do you want to participate?' And we say: 'Sure.' That's the majority of the cases. I get a call from the city or from somebody that works there, or from any of my contacts basically."*<sup>23</sup>

While speaking of one mosque's "willingness to get involved and engage with other communities," the UMMA Clinic's community outreach official observed: *"You need that kind of willingness among the leadership in order to do some of those programs... It needs to be a two-way street. The masjids [mosques] need to have an outreach component too. They need to be looking to foster these partnerships... where they're willing to call the church down the street, willing to call the nonprofit down the street, work on joint events, work on collaborative events... There are certain masajid where the UMMA Clinic does not have a health fair, because they are not open to it. It's not their thing to invite the local residents, to invite the mayor... it's just not the way they operate."*<sup>24</sup>

The need to engage with others may also be significant with regards to reaching out to other Islamic centers. For example, some leaders cite the importance of communication between suburban mosques and those that are more entrenched in the inner-city and thus more aware of the area's social concerns and needs. One prominent community leader noted the

need for such communication, for *"most of the activity, if you're dealing with the inner-city, comes through those inner-city masjids [mosques] getting active and having some relations with immigrant communities. Immigrant and African-American communities aren't communicating, don't have a relationship..."*<sup>25</sup> This gap is just one example of the need for outreach and engagement in general, as centers that are not highly engaged may become aware of opportunities to become so through such communication.

## ACTIVE LEADERSHIP

One important community norm in this context is active leadership. Only if the mosque's leaders want to become involved will the community as a whole be able to build relations with others; take advantage of any opportunities that arise; initiate new projects and programs; identify and utilize the community's human resources; determine such activities' level of priority; and be able to motivate, inspire, and mobilize community members to contribute, volunteer, and organize.

Those mosques with proactive, energetic, and creative leaderships engage in significantly more service activities than others. This observation has been emphasized and reinforced by various community and organization leaders.

The UMMA Clinic outreach official, who has dealt extensively with mosque leaders, related: *"I think a large part of it [success of social service] will be determined by who the leadership is, who are the teachers, who is able to inspire people... For example, certain communities have no problem getting their communities out to Humanitarian Day, they promote it and boom, they mobilize the community... Other communities struggle to get those numbers out..."*<sup>26</sup>

According to the director of the ILM Foundation: *"I think the hunger to serve is there in the community, but the leadership may not always be in touch with that hunger. They're just, like, doing the same old thing and haven't really surveyed the community to find out that they would really like to get out there and do some other activities."*<sup>27</sup>

*"There is sympathy [for philanthropic causes], but it boils down to organizational goals, leadership zeal, drive, and discipline,"* said the Shura Council official. *"We need active leadership responsibility."*<sup>28</sup>



## COMMUNITY MEMBERS' INITIATIVE AND MOTIVATION

Although the leadership plays a crucial role, the activism of community members, independent of the community's leadership, also plays an important role. Most notably, community members must be willing to take the initiative and participate in programs, step out of their proverbial "comfort zone" and engage in new activities, and serve others.

The least active mosque described in the first section provides a clear example of leaders who say they consider establishing service activities an important goal and yet make no progress in doing so because its members are reluctant to involve themselves. From the leader's comments, it is clear that they lack the willingness to go beyond "normal" mosque functions, namely, those of a strictly religious and devotional nature. The mosque administrator, an immigrant who arrived several decades ago and who is relatively new to the leadership of the mosque, speaks of this atmosphere at great length: *"Most of the immigrant community that I find by and large doesn't want to get involved, it's a new concept for them... If I could get 20 people from this community to participate with me in the interfaith activities, then I'd be very happy. You just can't find people... If I were to go up on a Friday after jumuah [Friday prayer] and say to the youth group or all the kids, let's take a tour, which a lot of the churches and other organizations do – they visit a mosque or a synagogue or a Buddhist temple, etc.... If I were to say let's go do that... I think the fear factor will kick in... I want to take them to various places... but again, somebody might point a finger and say, it's haram [forbidden]... I give CAIR [the Council on American Islamic Relations – a civil rights and advocacy group] an evening to come and pitch what they do... and I get some flack from some people that this is not a place for them to come and speak... We bring in speakers from the ACLU [the American Civil Liberties Union] and other organizations, and there is no attendance..."*<sup>29</sup>

Such comments, as well as the mosque's general atmosphere and programs, clearly show that the community is not willing to engage in new or non-traditional activities. This center, unsurprisingly, had the lowest level of service activity in the study, with essentially no involvement beyond *zakat* distribution.

The president of another center made up of immigrants from South Asia and the Middle East similarly

commented: *"We found out that all the Hindu communities, Christian communities, Jewish communities, they were all helping the homeless. He said: 'What do you think?' I said: 'We should do it also. Why not? Why should we be here, part of this country, live here, and be silent about this...?' When we started this program, our people opposed me, they said he is feeding the kafirs [disbelievers]... so they won't give donations. So we stopped announcing it. Still many people think it's not good to do it."*<sup>30</sup>

Clearly, in addition to the qualities listed above, leaders must have their communities' cooperation and support to carry out effective public service activities.

Given the practical approaches listed in the section above, there seems to be room for an increased level of service activities, as hoped for by community leaders. In addition to implementing practical strategies, communities that take social service activities seriously can also work to foster certain community norms, as discussed above. With these two approaches in mind, Muslim congregations that are committed to the ideals of philanthropy and social work may increase their level of service engagement. One possible avenue for such change, in the words of the Shura Council official, is through the Shura Council and other organizations that promote common causes among mosques: *"In the last three years, we started strategic planning sessions. We identified each year some key goals to achieve. And those goals are then promoted within the Shura Council membership to work on those goals. For example, leadership training, workshops to train imams, seminars, etc. We meet regularly and have the means to communicate with leaders... Unfortunately, social service was not on this planning session... National organizations have to embark on a campaign, a clear-cut defined campaign to educate the community, leadership, and organizations to deliver and make things better."*<sup>31</sup>



### PART III:

## Impact of Congregational Social Service

AS MENTIONED EARLIER, all mosque officials interviewed see social service activity in the mosque as an important priority that should be pursued. But why this is so, however, is not very clear. Clearly the importance of charitable work in general is obvious, due to Islam's emphasis upon it. Yet it may be said that organizations focusing specifically on philanthropic work (e.g., the UMMA Clinic, the ILM Foundation, and Islamic Relief) can do a significantly better job than mosques, which should focus on dispensing spiritual and moral instruction. Given this, why should mosques be involved in social service activity at all, as opposed to focusing on moral/spiritual education? Why should they not delegate philanthropic work to Muslim organizations established to address such causes?

This section suggests some ways in which the function and significance of congregational social service activity in mosques may differ from those found in philanthropic organizations. (For in-depth examples of the functions discussed below, see the two case studies presented in this section.) This difference in function is primarily due to one important contrast between congregational and non-congregational service: the former's grassroots volunteerism.

### SERVICE THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM

In Part I, a distinction was made between volunteer-based and non-volunteer-based social service activities. This is significant because of the difference in impact that such a distinction highlights. As mentioned earlier, mosques with high levels of service are involved in many activities that require great numbers of volunteers because, since they cannot sustain activities that require large financial resources, their activities are volunteer-based or organized with other organizations. In general, congregational social service activity involves a number of mosque members.

The religious director of the most active mosque made this point repeatedly: *"Any activity that we hold here, the community is part of it. We depend on their involvement and their help and support in running those things."*<sup>32</sup> Thus most service activities, such as the youth group feeding-the-homeless project or the weekly food pantry, are carried out by those volunteers who run the services provided. This grassroots involvement is a highly significant aspect of congregational social service.

While philanthropic organizations such as the UMMA Clinic can also provide services through volunteerism, the trend is that as such organizations become more efficient and professional service providers, the role of community volunteers decreases. The UMMA Clinic community outreach official commented that "as an organization becomes more advanced and you get more sophisticated," it becomes difficult to maintain a high level of volunteer involvement, and there is often a "loss of interest among volunteers." This is a regular trend in philanthropic nonprofits.

The fact that many such philanthropic organizations still require many volunteers to run their programs, however, does not diminish the importance of the mosque's involvement. In fact, that very involvement enables such organizations to run their programs and, frequently, to maintain the grassroots volunteer-base that allows them





to thrive. The ILM Foundation is a prime example: through its connection with local mosques, this philanthropic organization is able to maintain its high level of volunteer activity. (See the case study for a more in-depth discussion of the ILM Foundation.)

The mosque's involvement is an important way of developing widespread grassroots involvement in philanthropic activity. The possible impact and significance of such grassroots volunteerism can be classified as follows: educational, identity-shaping, and outreach. These functions will be discussed below.

It must be re-emphasized, however, that the functions described in the following section cannot be spoken of as clear-cut "effects" of social service activity, for many of the subsequent impacts are also seen as factors that lead mosques to increase their participation in service activities, as discussed earlier. The causal connection between service activity and the norms discussed below is neither conclusive nor unidirectional.

## SERVICE AS EDUCATION

The educational function for members is perhaps the most significant and clear impact of congregational social service activity. By participating in service activities and being exposed to other communities and social concerns, their personal development, awareness of social issues, and engagement in society are often influenced.

### *Personal Development*

The first significant educational function of grassroots social service activities is the ensuing personal development. By taking an active part in serving and interacting with communities and individuals in need, members often experience significant personal growth.

In discussing the role of community volunteers in service activities, the religious director of the most well-established and active mosque commented on the "satisfaction that [community members] gain from doing this work," noting that "in the process, they learn something and go to a higher level" of personal growth. The many members who participated in the mosque's interfaith Thanksgiving service, for example, were "really moved" by the interaction with the greater community and the joint effort to care for the needy.<sup>33</sup>

The imam of one of the most prominent African-American mosques, another center with a high level of volunteerism, spoke at great length on the significance of public service work: "It's one thing to talk about [service], but when you go out there and do it, it's really gratifying... We really enjoy being down there and serving the people. It's something we look forward to... It helps the community to understand better. Islam is about human nature, dealing with one human being and another... When you go downtown, you understand the importance of just being human... We pass by people and we don't care about people. But when you stop and really attend to the needs of people, you really understand the importance, as a Muslim, [of] how we need to think in terms of serving people."<sup>34</sup>

The director of the ILM Foundation, an African-American born to converts, also spoke about the impact of service activity on volunteers: *“The religion is premised on belief and behavior, and to taste it you have to apply both. So once they get out here and implement and execute a verse in the Qur’an where it says to supply neighborly needs... we read it all the time, but once you do it you get a whole different feeling that is allowed to generate within yourself when you provide that kind of service... They just feel the blessings to them to help someone else and to see the response from the recipient, who is in a worse condition than they are, to be able to express such high gratitude and pray for them. It gives them a new sense of life, to not feel so down about their own trials, because they’re seeing people in a worse condition with an even better attitude... And for the first time those verses jump out. They’re seeds, but they have not been watered through action. Once the action happens, it waters them.”*<sup>35</sup>

Many Muslim leaders and activists thus view social service involvement as being an important contributor to an individual Muslim’s religious and moral development. They see such involvement as a way of more fully experiencing Islam’s ethical teachings.

### **Social Awareness**

A closely related function of social service work, on both an individual and a communal level, is exposure to social issues and cognizance of the problems facing the local community and the larger society. By engaging directly with totally new issues, members become familiar with problems and issues that are often far removed from their own lives. Thus, this activity can be seen as a learning experience. This is especially important in suburban communities, for example, that have little to no exposure to inner-city social problems and social work.

In discussing the tours of Skid Row given to young people from local Muslim communities, the ILM Foundation official remarked: *“We remove some of their misconceptions, that homeless people are dirty or they’re all on drugs, or that they deserve to be out there. But in doing a tour, they get to hear from homeless people themselves, get a chance to witness some of the conditions and the vulnerable population... And when they leave that tour, they have a totally different respect and understanding that you can’t read, you have to witness. Orange County kids feel like it busts the bubble of Orange County. They don’t see none of this. They think they gotta go to Palestine to see poverty. So*

*when they come out, right there on Skid Row, it just busts the bubble. And they think, ‘Gosh, I had no idea.’”*<sup>36</sup>

This function is not limited to issues of homelessness or inner-city poverty. In speaking to ACCESS officials, they discussed how communities were initially hesitant to seek out ACCESS for help, “because the community is conservative and it’s taboo to ask for help” for family counseling, mental healthcare, and other services. After years of community initiatives and involvement with various Islamic centers, however, “that has changed” as the community learns more about such issues. As a result, it has become less problematic to seek help.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, according to NISWA’s director, its presentations and joint activities on family problems are *“received very well by the masjid [mosques] and by the audience... They come up to us later, and they have a lot of questions... it has an effect on them... People who are unaware of the realities outside come to us and say, ‘Oh we didn’t know about that...’ I do think there is a growing awareness of the issues.”*<sup>38</sup>

### **Beyond Awareness: Engaging**

Another important potential impact of service activity is the volunteers’ increased level of involvement and engagement, instead of mere awareness, in local affairs and social issues. By participating in these activities, at times they may be moved to become engaged with the issues to which they have been exposed.

The ILM Foundation’s motto for this idea is: *“Converting one day to a lifetime commitment.”* The official spoke at length about the potential for social engagement. Reflecting on examples of young people who had been engaged in public service for years following their initial exposure, he commented: *“And another level comes, and you feel like, ‘I’m responsible... I’m like a guardian now, I’m concerned about what’s affecting them.’ Now you start looking into the laws, the advocacy aspect, why they are in that condition. Then you start mobilizing and networking, galvanizing resources to make their lives better, or at least put an end to the cycle of homelessness.”*<sup>39</sup>

NISWA’s director also commented on the potential for awareness to lead to action and engagement. In response to presentations on domestic abuse, individuals from various mosques donated large sums

of money to purchase a domestic violence shelter for the organization. This was seen *“as a result of our presentations showing that domestic violence exists in the Islamic community and that something needs to be done. And it was done.”*<sup>40</sup>

Through exposure to social concerns and interaction with different communities and organizations, congregational service may at times perform a significant educational function for the community, as individuals may find themselves becoming more in tune with Islam’s ethical teachings and gradually becoming more socially conscious and engaged.

## SERVICE AS IDENTITY-SHAPING

One potential outcome of this educational function is that the community’s religious identity may begin to be molded as a result of its members’ collective change in perspective and understanding of the world and Islam. Many leaders express the hope that their communities’ Islamic identity will slowly assume a more socially conscious direction. They suggest that service activity may lead to the development of a Muslim culture that is more rooted in service, philanthropy, and civic engagement; that the Muslim community’s conception of itself will become intimately tied to its commitment to service. Of course a service-oriented identity or culture can lead to more service activity. Rather than assuming that one causes the other, however, the two should be seen as parts of a reinforcing cycle, each one contributing to the other one’s growth.

The hope that service may shape a community’s identity was expressed by those mosque officials who view social service activity as an important part of this identity. They further hope that this identity will become increasingly entrenched in their communities. Speaking on the role of service activities in his center, an administrator of one of the most active mosques said: *“Some people regard these [activities] as just PR [public relations], but I don’t. I think that these are very essential components of what we do, essentially, regardless of PR objectives.”*<sup>41</sup> For such officials, these activities strengthen the service-oriented Islamic identity that leaders hope to foster.

Another mosque official, an Indian immigrant whose predominantly South Asian and Arab center has mediocre levels of service activity and yet faces opposition to such work, also expressed the hope that the community’s understanding of Islam would develop along the lines of public service: *“When we started this program, our people opposed me. Still many people think it’s not good to do it... The social welfare of the society is a part of us; we cannot alienate ourselves. This is not Islam. We are supposed to share and care for our neighbors around us. If they are not well we cannot be well, [because] we’re interdependent. Whenever there is somebody in need, we should help.”*<sup>42</sup>

The founding member of the Shura Council repeatedly emphasized that serving the needy is “the very essence of the way of life” of Islam and that “if that agenda is promoted and brought to the attention of the community,” then the community’s priorities would hopefully change as well.<sup>43</sup> Such community leaders hope that an increased focus on congregational service activity may gradually lead the community to increasingly adopt and implement



philanthropic norms, which they see as an essential part of a proper Islamic identity.

The officials of philanthropic organizations seemed to share this idea as well. The director of the ILM Foundation bluntly said that *“when we first started, they didn’t see the need, the purpose, of feeding the homeless in downtown... [but] a lot of that mentality is changing. There is a domestic climate and awareness that is growing in our community... We are hoping that, by more people getting involved [in service], that we can enhance our identity [in terms of?] humanitarian activity.”*<sup>44</sup>

In discussing whether *“social service will really begin to take root in the Muslim psyche,”* the UMMA Clinic outreach official stressed that the community often forgets that *“we have to be faithful to our tradition, the tradition of sacrifice, of giving.”* As a way of practically implementing values that are often only spoken of, social service activities *“can go a long way insha’ Allah [God willing] to prove the fact that we mean it when we say that building neighborly relations is important in Islam. We say that, we hear that, but we don’t see that much evidence of it.”* For such community leaders, active public service has the potential to make the community’s service-centered identity more of a reality than it currently is. *“They feel like they’re making a statement through their donation, through their volunteerism, that this is Islam in America, that Islam in America is a growing and wonderful phenomenon that will make, insha’ Allah, [God-willing] a major and positive impact all across civic and social lines. And people want to play a part in that.”*<sup>45</sup>

## SERVICE AS OUTREACH

Another potential outcome of this educational function is a better outreach to the American public. At the beginning of this report, a distinction was made between Muslim-specific services and those meant for the broader society. This distinction is significant largely because of the impact that non-“Muslim-focused” services may have on the Muslim community’s outreach and public relations efforts. Numerous community leaders emphasized the fact that public service is an important way of improving relations with non-Muslim communities, promoting a positive public image of Muslims, performing *da’wah* (religious advocacy), and promoting Muslim integration into mainstream American society.

The imam of an African-American mosque commented on the impact of such engagement: *“People are apprehensive towards Muslims because they don’t understand. People are seeing Islam now for itself and it makes a big difference... Islam is something they think is foreign. It’s important for us to show them up close what Islam really is. Through service activities, you touch a lot of people you wouldn’t really touch otherwise. We don’t proselytize or anything, just serve them... serving them the way they should be served.”*<sup>46</sup>

Another African-American mosque official noted the importance of congregational service as *“being an example of what is wholesome in the Muslim community ... have to act as a light to the larger community.”*<sup>47</sup>

In discussing what he sees as a deficiency in public service, the UMMA outreach official highlighted a concern with Muslim integration: *“We still largely do not know our neighbors. We live in isolation. We don’t know the people around us.”* Through engagement in philanthropic service for the greater society, he insisted, *“Muslims are able to explain and articulate Islam in a way that they haven’t been able to before.”*<sup>48</sup>

An official of a South Asian mosque with low levels of services commented on the need for engagement with the broader society. By doing so, *“you become aware and you adjust your community. You bring them up, their level of understanding of the American society. Otherwise we could stay as a ghetto. We don’t want to stay as a ghetto. We want to be integrated. Not to the point where we lose our identity, but still, we should make our place known.”*<sup>49</sup>

One of the most active mosques, a predominately Arab and South Asian center with mostly Arab immigrant leadership, perhaps provides the best example of how social service engagement may improve a community’s relations with the public. Its president, an immigrant from North Africa, spoke of the change in the community after years of engaging with the public: *“I remember when we first started here. We lived like in a shell. We were not exposed to the larger community. Nobody knew about us, we didn’t know about organizations or people. But now we have good relations with all the churches in the area, the institutions, the city. We participate in every activity. We are known. We are part of the society and people know about us, know about our presence. Our neighbors know who we are, and we try to always keep good relations with them... This area, I think it kind of improved a little by our being*



## THE KIND HEARTS PROJECT

The Kind Hearts Project, an annual program organized by one of the most active mosques for three consecutive years, teaches the community's children "how to give with the heart." A simple coin-drive organized for the center's full-time weekday and weekend schools, it seeks to educate the students and raise money to support a local cause. Donation cans are placed in every classroom, and organized competitions are held to encourage the schools' approximately 350 students to participate by collecting spare change and donating it to the project. The project director, who goes from class to class, tries to motivate them by showing pictures and videos of the cause for which they are working. The project has collected as much as \$5,000 each year and has dedicated the funds to the UMMA Clinic, a children's hospital cancer department, and a nursing home for the elderly, respectively. Through this project, the mosque was able to take advantage of partnerships with other organizations and institute a project that exposed many of its members to volunteerism and service norms.

The project director, an immigrant from Eritrea and a mother of three, spoke at length about its impact on the students: *"The kids, they were so excited, they were so happy. If our kids do that, why don't we do more? And the community became a bit more relaxed about why we were helping other people. It's not the money, but the unity. The community unity is very touching... So we are doing it for what? What the Prophet told us to do— to reach others. For me it is really learning. Every year I go I learn different things. I make friends outside the masjid because of this project, forever, for life. Still they call me and write to me... And we learn from the process. They learned how to give. It was very touching for them. So it means they have [gotten] the message. They were very proud of themselves, and at the same time they were sad... We should do it more... Let our community reach others. For example, this nursing home, they didn't even know about Muslims. They've never even worked with Muslims. So that gave us the opportunity to get close with other people, to get to know us. Whenever they see Muslims they will remember how nice Muslims were. Not only bad Muslims. I would like to see this kind of community service more and more... We need this kind of outreach."*<sup>53</sup>

These reflections illustrate the functions described above concerning personal development, social consciousness, and outreach to the greater community. As a program geared specifically toward the community's children, its educational impact is likely to be greater than that of other service activities.



here... If you are an institution and you are in an area, people will judge you by your actions, not by what they hear in the media."<sup>50</sup>

Based on the above discussion, as well as the reflections and perspectives of community leaders, we have enumerated how public service in Islamic centers may serve a distinct and important function. The mosque's grassroots-level access to the Muslim population, as well as its consequent ability to foster

public service volunteerism, gives congregational social service an important role that is perhaps unique to Islamic centers, one that is not easily fulfilled by other specialized social service agencies. Of course, to make more conclusive and authoritative claims regarding the impact of social service work on the community, more scientific empirical research must be conducted. Hopefully, this discussion has provided a clear picture of the community leaders' perspectives on the issue, which should benefit future researchers.

#### CASE STUDIES:

The two examples of public service projects on this spread are presented in order to highlight many of the trends and observations noted throughout the study.

#### HUMANITARIAN DAY

The ILM Foundation's annual Humanitarian Day, held since 2000, has enabled about 12,000 Muslim volunteers to serve about 50,000 homeless individuals. This event brings together volunteers from mosques all over Southern California during Ramadan to set up stations throughout Skid Row to serve the area's needy by distributing food, medical and hygiene supplies, and other goods and services.

The organizers present the idea of Humanitarian Day to mosque officials, who then pitch it to their communities and mobilize volunteers. The event thus serves as an important avenue for Muslims to engage in public service activities and be exposed to new experiences. *"Because there's not a lot of civic engagement going on, the ILM Foundation has served as one of few outlets for many of these communities to participate... It's overwhelming. We've had to turn away volunteers. One year we had 800 volunteers out there, almost the same as the number of homeless people... But we're tapping into the hunger to serve."*<sup>51</sup> According to an organization official, members are demanding more social service volunteering opportunities; however, there are

not many outlets within the community. This seemingly inhibits their personal growth.

*"The service is its own addiction. Once they engage, it takes on its own life. That energy circulating all around leaves a very strong impression on you. It becomes addictive. You can't get this anywhere. They want their fix... We haven't created a mechanism for them to see that this is not a fix, [but] a natural thing we should be doing... When the parents wanted to stop coming after three or four years, it was the children that pulled them the seventh and eighth year, because they wanted to make sure this stayed in their lives... it just makes the religion real for them, more practical."*<sup>52</sup>

Humanitarian Day thus allows mosques to easily participate in social service activities through a non-financial partnership, for all the leadership needs to do is mobilize the volunteers. Community leaders deem the experience it affords to be of great significance, as it may serve the functions discussed above. But according to leaders like the director of the ILM Foundation, such opportunities are rare and should be increased.

# Key Findings

## LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Community leaders in all of the mosques and organizations selected perceive service activities to be deficient and in need of being increased. If this is the case, then (A) strategies and approaches should be found to overcome the perceived obstacles and challenges and (B) the communities should make an effort to foster a stronger commitment to the ideals of public service.
- With regards to strategies for overcoming perceived obstacles, practical implementation approaches have been identified. These are:
  - Supporting and collaborating with community organizations and agencies, interfaith groups, government institutions, and other local and national groups. This involves mobilizing volunteers and recruiting professionals, hosting events at the Islamic center, coordinating events with the organization, providing some financial support, referring individuals to the organizations, and helping to publicize each other's work and events.
  - Organizing activities, events, and projects that only require planning and community mobilization, such as clothing, food, and coin drives; homeless service outings; garage sales; and counseling and referral programs. Given that one of the mosque officials' most common responses to public service inquiries is the lack of financial resources, this important approach is often overlooked.
  - Identifying the community's professionals and experts (e.g., medical practitioners, legal experts, and social workers) and then utilizing their expertise to provide some social services that otherwise would likely be beyond their means. These experts can volunteer for another service organization, provide professional counseling and referral networks, hold educational workshops and seminars, or hold on-site events for needy individuals.
  - Formalizing existing informal social service projects, thereby making them more efficient, reliable, and beneficial.
- Familiarity with the six organizational types discussed in Part I and Part II may help communities realize that there are many ways to organize service activities. If some projects are not feasible at the moment, another organizational type may be more appropriate. If some projects have been implemented, adopting a new organizational format may improve the service offered.

- Beyond such practical considerations for implementing services, communities have to identify those norms and trends that may help strengthen their members' commitment to public service and then try to reinforce them. These include a commitment to religious activism, an awareness of social ills and concerns, a willingness to reach out to other communities and organizations, an active and inclusive leadership, and community initiative and motivation.
- Islamic centers should understand the possible functions of service activity for their members beyond the actual direct impact of such service. These functions include fostering personal development, social awareness, and civic engagement, as well as contributing to the mosque's identity formation and outreach efforts at the community level. Given this educational function, service activities should perhaps be seen as an integral part of how the mosque provides religious education to its members and establishes a healthy American Muslim identity, rather than "extra" activity that is only marginally related to its goals and mission.
- Given this educational function, both weekday and weekend Islamic schools should adopt service-learning curriculums as a part of their Islamic education programs. This could include charity collection drives, hands-on service projects (e.g., feeding-the-homeless outings or neighborhood improvement projects), tours, fieldtrips, movies, presentations, and discussions to expose children to social concerns— all supplemented by those Islamic principles that emphasize the importance of philanthropy and public service.

## DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As stated in the introduction, one purpose of this study was to provide a general illustration of mosque involvement in public service so as to suggest possible directions for further research in that area. One important line of research concerns the functions and impacts of Muslim public service at the grassroots level, as discussed in Part III. Further research should assess both the individual and communal impact of service engagement in the ways discussed above, as well as explore such functions with a greater depth and precision, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Another important direction for research concerns overall community perspectives on philanthropic issues, using both quantitative and qualitative analysis to better illustrate the community's diverse attitudes and beliefs about engagement in philanthropic causes and public service. In-depth quantitative research on the extent of Muslim financial contributions to philanthropic causes may also contribute to our understanding of Muslim public service. The efficacy, challenges, and limitations of Muslim philanthropic organizations should be closely assessed, again using both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

For all such research, studies in different cities and regions of the nation should be conducted to compare and contrast the trends observed. Furthermore, studies should focus on both urban and suburban mosques and organizations to compare public service engagement in these very different centers, as well as upon immigrant and indigenous groups, not to mention ethnic and sectarian groups, to assess their different attitudes and dynamics. By conducting more in-depth research in such areas, the American Muslim community might acquire a clearer idea of the current practices and perspectives in Muslim public service, the significance and functions of public service in both the American Muslim community and American society at large, and the role of the mosque in America.



## Interview Guide for Mosque Officials

**INTERVIEWS WITH OFFICIALS** were conducted in a semi-structured format, generally following these guidelines yet also going with the flow of the information provided by the officials.

### **PERSONAL:**

Position/role in the mosque.

Role.

Work.

How involved/active?

How long a member?

### **GENERAL CENTER INFO:**

What is the mission of the center?

What are the primary goals and objectives of the center?

What type of programming is offered regularly at your center?

How does this reflect the mission of the center?

How many members does your center claim?

What defines a “member”?

How many people come to Friday prayer?

Other programs?

About how many are actively involved in the community?

How old is the mosque?

When was it established?

What is its history?

Is there a predominant ethnic group in your mosque?

What is it?

About what percentage of the population would you say is part of that ethnic group?

Immigrant/second-generation/indigenous populations?

What is the approximate median income of the mosque’s attendees?

What were the recent Friday sermons you remember about?

What are the lectures and programs held at the mosque normally about?

How involved are the women in the community?  
What role do they play?

How involved are the youth in the community?  
What role do they play?

How do you see the role of the center within the greater society?

What relation does and should the Muslim community have to the surrounding American community?  
How should the community engage with the rest of society, socially, politically, culturally?

How do you perceive the Muslim experience and status in America since 9/11?

## **SOCIAL SERVICES**

Has your center participated in or supported non-strictly-religious social service, community development, or neighborhood organizing projects of any sort within the past year:

If so, please elaborate on the depth of these services:

- food
- housing/shelter
- clothing, homeless services
- health
- legal
- education (non-religious)
- domestic violence
- tutoring/mentoring
- substance abuse
- employment assistance/professional training
- prison visitation
- other

How long has the service been offered?

How often are the services offered?

How many people do they serve?

How formalized are these services?

Are there services offered in an informal network?

How many mosque community members participate (either as volunteers or staff members) in providing these services?

Who do these services primarily serve?

Who are the recipients?

What proportion of your monthly budget is allocated to these services? How are the services financed?

Are the services offered at or by the mosque, or does the mosque partner with other outside organizations? Which organizations, Muslim or non-Muslim, does your mosque partner with?

If so, what are the motivations for participating in these services?

If not, why are these services not being offered by the center?

Why do you think such services are important or not important?

What priority do you feel social services should have in your community?

Who should such social services be provided to?

What social services are most important for the center to provide?

Should funding for the community center be allocated to social services for the local external community, or used strictly for community needs (i.e. more strictly religious)?

If your mosque had the capacity to apply for grants to receive government funding for social services, would you consider taking that step?

Why or why not?



# Endnotes

1. [www.scpr.org/news/2010/08/24/temecula-mosque](http://www.scpr.org/news/2010/08/24/temecula-mosque)
2. Duke University Study.
3. Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Muslims in the United States: The State of Research* (Russell Sage Foundation Publications: 2003).
4. Ihsan Bagby, "A portrait of Detroit mosques: Muslim views on policy, politics and religion," *Institute for Social Policy and Understanding* (2004).
5. Lance Laird and Wendy Cadge, "Caring for Our Neighbors: How Muslim Community-Based Health Organizations Are Bridging the Health Care Gap in America," *Institute for Social Policy and Understanding*.
6. The Shura Council is a network of over sixty mosques and Muslim organizations in Southern California, as well as the highest consultative body of Muslim leaders in Southern California. See [www.shuracouncil.org](http://www.shuracouncil.org).
7. Mark Chaves, "Congregations' Social Service Activities," *The Urban Institute* (1999).
8. Again, centers were selected with the assistance of a senior Shura Council board member and one of its founders, who has two decades of experience with the Muslim community in Southern California. Dr. Mazen Hashem, a lecturer in sociology at University of Southern California and California State University of Northridge, also helped in the selection process. His previous study on Friday sermons included over fifty mosques categorized by ethnic composition (viz., Arab, South Asian, Mixed, African American, Iranian/Shi'a, East Asian, and Afghan) and location.
9. Interview by author, Corona, CA, August 19, 2008.
10. Interview by author, Lomita, CA, June 28, 2008.
11. Interview by author, Garden Grove, CA, August 11, 2008.
12. Interview by author, Hawthorne, CA, June 27, 2008.
13. Interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, July 4, 2008.
14. Interview by author, Corona, CA, August 19, 2008.
15. Phone interview by author, July 17, 2008.
16. Phone interview by author, August 23, 2008.
17. Interview by author, Corona, CA, July 19, 2008.
18. It is important to note that such norms should not be seen as "causes" of social service activity. As will be shown in the following sections, many of the norms described below can also be considered as "effects" of service activity. Thus both norms and service work are seen as parts of a reinforcing cycle, each one leading to increased levels of the other one.
19. Interview by author, Hawthorne, CA, June 27, 2008.
20. Interview by author, Pasadena, CA, July 25, 2008.
21. Interview by author, Corona, CA, August 19, 2008.
22. Phone interview by author, July 17, 2008.
23. Interview by author, Corona, CA, August 19, 2008.
24. Interview by author, Hawthorne, CA, June 27, 2008.
25. Phone interview by author, July 17, 2008.
26. Interview by author, Corona, CA, August 19, 2008.
27. Phone interview by author, July 17, 2008.
28. Phone interview by author, July 22, 2008.
29. Interview by author, Corona, CA, August 19, 2008.
30. Interview by author, Culver City, CA, July 9, 2008.
31. Interview by author, San Gabriel, CA, August 14, 2008.
32. Interview by author, Corona, CA, August 19, 2008.
33. Interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, July 4, 2008.
34. Interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, July 4, 2008.
35. Interview by author, Pasadena, CA, July 25, 2008.
36. Phone interview by author, July 22, 2008.
37. Phone interview by author, July 22, 2008.
38. Interview by author, Anaheim, CA, August 11, 2008.
39. Phone interview by author, August 23, 2008.
40. Phone interview by author, July 22, 2008.
41. Phone interview by author, August 23, 2008.
42. Interview by author, Hawthorne, CA, June 27, 2008.
43. Interview by author, San Gabriel, CA, August 14, 2008.
44. Interview by author, Corona, CA, August 19, 2008.
45. Phone interview by author, July 22, 2008.
46. Phone interview by author, July 17, 2008.
47. Interview by author, Pasadena, CA, July 25, 2008.
48. Interview by author, Corona, CA, July 19, 2008.
49. Phone interview by author, July 17, 2008.
50. Interview by author, Lomita, CA, June 28, 2008.
51. Interview by author, Hawthorne, CA, June 27, 2008.
52. Interview by author, Hawthorne, CA, June 27, 2008.
53. Phone interview by author, July 22, 2008.
54. Phone interview by author, July 22, 2008.





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