The Community Collaboration Initiative (CCI) was a three-year collaboration of nonprofit leaders, donors, practitioners, academics, and researchers designed to build sustainable collaborations in the Muslim-American nonprofit sector.
Table of Contents

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................. 1

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... 2

About LFSOP ...................................................................................................................... 2
About MPI .......................................................................................................................... 2
Special Acknowledgements ............................................................................................... 2
Funder Acknowledgements ................................................................................................. 2
Community Collaboration Initiative Team .......................................................................... 3
MPI Research Team ............................................................................................................ 5
MPI Council of Advisors .................................................................................................... 9

Executive Summary ......................................................................................................... 10

Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 11

Community Collaboration Initiative (CCI) ...................................................................... 14

CCI as a Third-Party Facilitator ...................................................................................... 15
Recruiting and Training Dedicated Facilitators ............................................................... 16
CCI Participating Organizations ....................................................................................... 16
Bringing Organizations Together Through Meetings ..................................................... 19
CCI Year One ................................................................................................................... 20
CCI Year Two .................................................................................................................. 22
CCI Year Three ................................................................................................................ 24

Outcomes .......................................................................................................................... 27

Muslim-Led Nonprofits Collaborating with Each Other by Building and Developing Trust ...................................................................................................................... 27
Muslim-Led Nonprofits Building and Strengthening Successful Intrafaith Collaborations .............................................................................................................................. 27
Muslim-Led Nonprofits Engaging with the Philanthropic Community .......................... 28
Muslim-Led Nonprofits Moving from a Scarcity Mindset to an Abundance Mindset ............................................................................................................................... 29
Challenges and Lessons Learned .................................................................................... 30

Conclusion and Recommendations .................................................................................. 31

Works Cited ....................................................................................................................... 32

Testimonials from the CCI Supporters ............................................................................. 35
Acknowledgments

About LFSOP
The Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy in Indianapolis is dedicated to improving the world by training and empowering innovators and leaders to create positive and lasting change. The school offers undergraduate, graduate, certificate, and professional development programs, and research and international programs through The Fund Raising School, the Lake Institute on Faith & Giving, the Mays Family Institute on Diverse Philanthropy and the Women’s Philanthropy Institute.

About MPI
The Muslim Philanthropy Initiative is a project of the Dean and the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving and is a part of the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. It focuses on understanding and helping further enhance contemporary and traditional aspects of Muslim philanthropy in all its facets. MPI convenes scholars and philanthropy professionals to explore issues and research in the field, hosts symposiums and seminars, and provides education and training. By seeking to further research in this under studied area, helping to develop thought leadership and inform conversations, and training philanthropic and nonprofit leaders within Muslim philanthropy, the initiative helps build capacity in the Muslim philanthropy sector while adding to the body of knowledge about the rich tradition and practice of philanthropy in Islam.

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Shariq Siddiqui, JD, PhD
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Community Collaboration Initiative Team

Lina Grajales, Project Assistant
Lina Grajales is the Executive Assistant to the Director and Project Coordinator at the Muslim Philanthropy Initiative. She has a bachelor’s degree in business administration. As such, she has completed related training in higher management. Moreover, she has great knowledge of collaborative intelligence and team building. She has over seven years of work experience in related fields, from administrative assistant to customer service specialist to team manager of customer service for Business Process Outsourcing. In Colombia where she resides, she has volunteered at the YMCA Risaralda since 2012 and has been part of the board of directors since 2017. She was elected secretary for the YMCA Risaralda board of directors and has been the board chair since 2021. She was part of the Global Shapers Community Pereira from 2019-2022. Currently, she is doing a specialization program in Project Management.

Camille Irvine, Facilitator
Camille initiated her career in television and radio production and held positions at Post Effects, Bill Kurtis Productions, the Jenny Jones Show, and the Jerry Springer Show. After accepting Islam as her faith in 2000, she focused on developing Islamic media for Muslim Americans in order to challenge widespread misinformation and misrepresentation. In 2001, she co-created and produced the first daily Muslim talk radio show in English called Radio Islam. As a producer of the show for 7 years, she elevated the diverse and expansive lived experiences of Muslim Americans. She created show content, mentored a rotating set of hosts and collaborated with Muslim organizations and prominent Muslim leaders across Chicagoland. She continues to bring together her professional skills and knowledge of the Muslim American community as a facilitator for the Community Collaboration Initiative, an action-based research project hosted by Indiana University’s Lilly School of Philanthropy.

Azhar Mithaiwala, Facilitator
Azhar Mithaiwala is an Atlanta native and proud Alum of The Dar Un Noor School where he currently serves as the Chairman of the Board of Education. Professionally, Azhar works as a project manager in the Quality & Safety department for the largest health system in GA. Azhar completed his M.A in Philanthropic Sciences from the Lilly School of Philanthropy and holds a B.S. in Biomedical Engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology. Residing in his hometown of Atlanta, Azhar enjoys traveling, playing cricket, and hosting a supper club with his wife Tasnim and 3-year-old son Ali.

Ali Ottman, Facilitator
Born and raised in Chicago, Ali Ottman has had the pleasure of serving the Chicagoland community for over a decade in numerous ways, such as working on youth development projects and research studies revolving around the food deserts of the inner city. Ali attended UIC where he graduated with a B.S. in Kinesiology and a M.Ed in Instructional Leadership. Currently, he is working as an analyst in the healthcare industry. Ali’s daytime job doesn’t stop him from finding ways to learn from and serve various communities throughout Chicago, so he’s very excited to get started with the Community Collaboration Initiative!
Shariq Siddiqui, JD PhD, Principal Investigator
Shariq is an Assistant Professor of Philanthropic Studies and Director of the Muslim Philanthropy Initiative at the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. Shariq has an MA and a PhD in Philanthropic Studies from the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, and a JD from the McKinney School of Law at Indiana University. He holds a BA in History from the University of Indianapolis. Shariq’s research focuses on Muslim philanthropy and the Muslim nonprofit sector. Most recently, he conducted a national survey of full-time Islamic schools in the United States, resulting in a co-authored 2017 monograph, Islamic Education in the United States and the Evolution of Muslim Nonprofit Institutions. Shariq also serves as co-editor of the Journal of Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society, Journal on Education in Muslim Societies, and the Series Editor of the Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society Book Series. He has been a nonprofit practitioner for over 20 years for local, regional, national, and international nonprofits. Previously, Shariq served as the Executive Director of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA).

Dilnaz Waraich, Champion
With over twenty-five years of experience in education, community organizing and interfaith engagement, Dilnaz exemplifies this generation of engaged and compassionate civil servants. As an immigrant from India and product of the CPS school system she has been able to overcome the inherent limitations that these institutions impose. As a formally trained educator, her moral code and drive to affect change is what breathes life into her philanthropic, community organizing and interfaith engagements. Dilnaz is an influencer and holds multiple board appointed and committee positions through the Chicagoland area with WBEZ Chicago Public Media, Northwestern University School of Education, Interfaith Youth Core, Chicago Theological Seminary, Catholic Theological Union, and Muslim Community Center. Dilnaz has dedicated her family’s philanthropic efforts in engaging with diverse stakeholders, furthering pluralism and helping build bridges. Dilnaz holds a Master in Literacy degree from Northwestern University, and an MS and a BS from Loyola University. And is currently working on a Master on Spiritual Leadership.

Roohi Younus, Program Manager & Facilitator
Roohi Younus, Co-Founder and Principal at R&R Strategists, has been consulting with non-profit organizations for over 11 years. She has worked with the leadership at prominent organizations around the country to help envision and execute strategies related to development, branding, marketing, volunteer management, compliance, logistics and more. Roohi also co-founded MUSE Bookings, a speaker and artists bureau that provides booking services to American Muslims. She also served as the inaugural Executive Director of the Mohammed Webb Foundation in 2014 and has been a board member since 2016. Roohi graduated from DePaul University in 2001. She resides in Woodridge, IL with her husband, three children, and parents/in-laws at various times of the year.
Dauda Abubakar
Dr. Dauda Abubakar has a PhD in Anthropology with a special interest in Islam in West Africa. He holds the position of student mentor at the Zakat Foundation Institute (ZFI) and is currently affiliated with the University of Jos, Nigeria as a senior lecturer. Abubakar has for many years participated in different research projects in different areas of interest, especially in the area of the practice of Zakat in Nigeria. He has published several articles in journals and contributed chapters in books on Zakat and Muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria. His recent book is titled: “They love us because we give them Zakat: the distribution of wealth and the making of social relations in northern Nigeria” published in 2020 by Brill. Abubakar is currently involved in a project on the practice of Zakat in the contemporary world under the Muslim Philanthropic Initiative, at Indiana University.

Mariam Ajmal
Mariam Ajmal is a Master’s in Philanthropic Studies student at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), and a fellow of the Zakat Foundation Institute. She has over 7 years of experience in the education sector, spanning teaching, teacher training, and education management. Her focus area of work revolved around the afterschool learning segment and working on institutional partnerships. Mariam is passionate about utilizing the potential of philanthropy to impart quality education.

Jehanzeb Cheema
Jehanzeb R. Cheema is currently an Assistant Professor at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia where he teaches courses in Data Mining and Business Analytics. He is also a Senior Research Fellow at the Muslim Philanthropy Initiative. Jehanzeb’s research focuses on examination of demographic differences in student literacy in areas such as reading, science, and mathematics. He has previously taught applied statistics courses as an instructor at the University of Baltimore and as a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Jehanzeb holds a doctoral degree in Education from George Mason University (GMU) with a specialization in Research Methodology, and a doctoral degree in Economics from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) with specializations in Labor Economics and Development Economics. He also holds a Master of Science degree in Health Informatics with a concentration in Health Data Analytics from GMU, and a Master of Arts degree in Economics from UWM. His undergraduate background includes majors in Finance and Economics from Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, and in History and Economics (with a minor in statistics) from University of the Punjab.
Ken Chitwood
Ken Chitwood is a religion scholar whose research focuses on Islam and Muslims in the Americas, hemispheric American religion, trans-local religion, Christian-Muslim relations, global Christianity, Muslim minorities, & ethnographic methods and manifestations of religion-beyond-religion in a global and digital age. Ken is the founding Editor of the Latin America and Caribbean Islamic Studies Newsletter. He is also an award-winning religion, travel, and culture news writer serving as the Editor of ReligionLink and a journalist-fellow with the University of Southern California’s Center for Religion and Civic Culture’s Engaged Spirituality Project.

Iman Fathima
Iman Fathima is a linguist, who studies how various forms of discourses influence social realities. She is currently a Muslim Philanthropy and Humanitarian Studies fellow at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at IUPUI. From 2017-2021, Iman co-led an NGO, I Can Malaysia, as its deputy director of research and advocacy. She had also previously served as the organization’s program manager, overseeing education and welfare initiatives for Rohingya refugee children in Kuala Lumpur. She also volunteers as a consultant for new nonprofit initiatives. She’s an alumna of International Islamic University Malaysia, from where she received her bachelor’s degree in International Communication and a master’s in Applied Linguistics. As a third culture kid, Iman has had the privilege of serving diverse communities and hopes to utilize both her education and lived experiences to the benefit of this project.

Zoha Gardezi
Zoha Gardezi is in the first year of the MA program in Philanthropic studies at Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. She has also been enrolled in the Zakat Foundation Institute (ZFI) Fellowship since August 2022. She is from Lahore, Pakistan. Prior to her master’s degree and ZFI Fellowship, she did a bachelor’s in environmental science from Forman Christian College. She has interned in non-profits and policy think tanks like WWF and the Center for Economic Research in Pakistan (CERP). Currently, she is a Graduate Assistant for the Muslim Philanthropy Initiative.

Lina Grajales
Lina Grajales is the Executive Assistant to the Director and Project Coordinator at the Muslim Philanthropy Initiative. She has a bachelor’s degree in business administration. As such, she has completed related training in higher management. Moreover, she has great knowledge of collaborative intelligence and team building. She has over seven years of work experience in related fields, from administrative assistant to customer service specialist to team manager of customer service for Business Process Outsourcing. In Colombia where she resides, she has volunteered at the YMCA Risaralda since 2012 and has been part of the board of directors since 2017. She was elected secretary for the YMCA Risaralda board of directors and has been the board chair since 2021. She was part of the Global Shapers Community Pereira from 2019-2022. Currently, she is doing a specialization program in Project Management.
Nazmul Haque
Nazmul Haque is a Graduate Assistant at MPI. He is pursuing his Master’s in Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, IUPUI. Mr. Haque has years of experience working in the non-profit sector and supervising research and surveys. Haque has completed his Bachelor of Social Science (BSS) and Master of Social Science (MSS) from the Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka. His research interest covers international labor migration, refugees and statelessness, the non-profit sector, human rights, political violence, and corruption.

Micah A. Hughes
Micah A. Hughes received his PhD in Islamic Studies from the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He specializes in the study of religion, secularism, education, and civil society in modern Turkey and the United States. He is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Muslim Philanthropy Initiative at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at IUPUI working on two projects related to zakat and pluralism. In addition to his work at MPI, he serves as Associate Editor of The Maydan, an online publication of the Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies at George Mason University, where he is project manager for The Maydan Podcast, sponsored by the Henry Luce Foundation.

Mohannad Mofawaz
Mohannad Mofawaz is a PhD student at Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. Mohannad decided to dedicate his privilege to creating systems that protect the most vulnerable populations. While completing his B.S. in Industrial Systems Engineering in his home country of Saudi Arabia, he mulled over the ways that he could best contribute to social equity. He then made a career change and earned his M.A. in philanthropic studies. He served as the COO and Strategy Manager at Al-Fowzan Academy at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Mineral, focusing on improving nonprofit leaders across Saudi Arabia.

Zeeshan Noor, PhD
Zeeshan Noor is a Research Manager / Affiliate Faculty for the Muslim Philanthropy Initiative of the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. He holds a Ph.D. in Public Affairs with a concentration in public and nonprofit management from the University of Texas at Dallas. His research focuses on philanthropy, the use of digital media in the nonprofit sector, donor behavior, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), and organizational leadership. Dr. Noor serves as the Chair of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA)’s Section on Professional and Organizational Development (SPOD), and a CoChair for the ASPA Annual Global Public Administration Capstone Panel Committee. He also serves on the board of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA)’s Membership Committee. In addition, he serves as a DEI Council Member of the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee.
Afshan Paarlberg, JD
Afshan Paarlberg is a visiting assistant professor with the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. She leads The Ihsan Standard—a community-engaged research and legal project of the Muslim Philanthropy Initiative. She is also pursuing her Ph.D. in philanthropic studies. Afshan’s mixed-methods research, publications, and practice focus on diverse philanthropy, immigrants and refugees, and nonprofit governance. Afshan holds a J.D. from The University of Houston Law Center. She also has a B.A. with Honors in Middle Eastern Studies and a B.B.A. in Finance, both from The University of Texas at Austin. In 2020, she was an inaugural Fellow with the Zakat Foundation Institute, obtaining a graduate certificate in Muslim philanthropic and humanitarian studies. Before joining the school, her legal career focused on immigration law, nonprofit governance-risk-compliance, and access to justice initiatives—practices that are crucial to informing her scholarship. Afshan serves as the President of the board of Exodus Refugee Immigration—a statewide refugee resettlement agency. She also serves on the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding board, a nonpartisan research institute.

Abdul Samad
Abdul Samad is a Research Fellow at the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. Abdul’s research centers on the intersections of philanthropy, nonprofit collaboration, stigmatization of marginalized communities and its impact on their civic engagement. Abdul holds a master’s degree in public administration from Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky and a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Muhammad Ali Jinnah University, Islamabad, Pakistan. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in Philanthropic Studies from the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. Beyond the confines of academia, Abdul engages with and consults philanthropic foundations, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies. His achievements include receiving the prestigious ASPA Founders’ Fellows Award in 2015, the ASPA International Young Scholar award in 2018, the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM) Equity and Inclusion Fellowship in 2019, and the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) Graduate Diversity Fellow in 2022. Since 2021, Abdul Samad has been contributing to the Community Collaboration Initiative (CCI) project—a groundbreaking three-year collaboration involving Muslim-led nonprofit organizations in the United States.

Shariq Siddiqui, JD PhD
Shariq is an Assistant Professor of Philanthropic Studies and Director of the Muslim Philanthropy Initiative at the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. Shariq has an MA and a PhD in Philanthropic Studies from the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, and a JD from the McKinney School of Law at Indiana University. He holds a BA in History from the University of Indianapolis. Shariq’s research focuses on Muslim philanthropy and the Muslim nonprofit sector. Most recently, he conducted a national survey of full-time Islamic schools in the United States, resulting in a co-authored 2017 monograph, Islamic Education in the United States and the Evolution of Muslim Nonprofit Institutions. Shariq also serves as co-editor of the Journal of Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society, Journal on Education in Muslim Societies, and the Series Editor of the Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society Book Series. He has been a nonprofit practitioner for over 20 years for local, regional, national, and international nonprofits. Previously, Shariq served as the Executive Director of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA).
Sitashma Thapa
Sitashma Thapa is a Research Associate at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, interested in the intersection of philanthropy, climate change, and advocacy. Born and raised in Nepal, Sitashma has a BA in Environmental Sustainability and Sociology-Anthropology and an MA in Philanthropic Studies. She has previously worked as the McKinney Fellow at Hoosier Environmental Council, and as the Climate & Energy Policy Fellow at the National Wildlife Federation, America’s largest conservation organization. She has worked as a Research Associate for the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy’s research team since June 2022. Sitashma will bring her background in research, advocacy, and the climate space to her work at MPI.

Massumeh H. Toosi
Massumeh H. Toosi is an M.A student in philanthropic studies at Indiana University, Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, and is a graduate assistant with Muslim Philanthropy Initiative. Her general research interests are development, the third sector, and inequality. Massumeh is from Iran and earned her B.A and the first M.A in sociology from Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran. Her master’s dissertation was evaluation research that measured the effectiveness of Iranian NGOs and their philanthropic activities. Alongside her education, she has been the executive manager of the Ethnic Iran project since 2016, which tries to introduce various ethnic groups living on the Iranian Plateau at different times.

Rafeel Wasif, PhD
Rafeel Wasif is an Assistant Professor at Portland State University. His research interests include Public and Nonprofit Management, Philanthropy, International Nonprofits (NGOs), and Data Science. His research focuses on racial and religious minority nonprofits in the United States, specifically Muslim-American nonprofits, and South Asian NGOs. Dr. Wasif obtained his PhD at the University of Washington, Seattle; and was a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, at Indiana University-Purdue University (IUPUI). His work has either been accepted or published in Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly (NVSQ), Voluntas, Nonprofit Management and Leadership (NML), Nonprofit Policy Forum (NPF), and Voluntary Sector Review (VSR). Rafeel has been a Fulbright Fellow. His work has appeared in leading media outlets, including The Conversation, Washington Post, and several international media outlets.

MPI Council of Advisors
Rasheed Ahmed, Executive Director, Zakat Foundation Institute
Dr. Abed Ayoub, CEO and President, United Muslim Relief
Rashid Dar, Program Officer for Global Strategies, John Templeton Foundation
Halil Demir, Founder and Executive Director, Zakat Foundation of America
Rana Elmir, Director, RISE Together Fund/Proteus Fund
Dr. Mahmood Hai, Urologist
Dr. Iltefat Hamzavi, Dermatologist
Anwar Khan, President, Islamic Relief USA
Farhan Latif, President, El-Hibri Foundation

Dr. M. Yaqub Mirza, President and CEO, Sterling Management Group
Zeyba Rahman, Senior Program Officer, Building Bridges Program at the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art
John Robbins, CEO, Penny Appeal USA
Kashif Shaikh, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Pillars Fund
Javaid Siddiqi, President, Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA)
Tayyab Yunus, Founder and CEO, Intuitive Solutions
Executive Summary

The Community Collaboration Initiative (CCI) was a three-year collaboration of nonprofit leaders, donors, practitioners, academics, and researchers designed to build sustainable collaborations in the Muslim-American nonprofit sector. CCI envisioned a sector where all participants would have a voice in moving these organizations from working in silos to working in partnerships in order to tackle their many challenges. This white paper summarizes the opportunities and recommendations that emerged from CCI. It is a guide for communities, practitioners, and researchers interested in engaging in these collaborations, as well as universities and funders that endeavor to nurture them. These findings hold significant relevance for the nonprofit sector as a whole, but particularly for leaders aiming to enhance their understanding of cross-organization collaborations. It draws on the experiences of the organizational participants and the CCI leadership to reveal best practices for future collaborations. This white paper highlights the factors critical to fostering trust, building programs, and ultimately building integrated groups to contribute to more vibrant, sustainable, and equitable communities. It is essential to recognize that collaboration is fundamentally challenging, and collaboration among experts from different communities and institutions is no exception. These partnerships require that individuals with different resources, cultures, incentive structures, schedules, and skillsets find each other, identify a shared challenge, agree on roles, secure funding, and move through inevitable barriers. When these collaborations succeed, they can have a tremendous effect on the overall well-being of society.
Introduction
This white paper examines the collaboration process among nonprofits by focusing on the Community Collaboration Initiative (CCI), a three-year community-based participatory action research project (CBPAR) to build sustainable collaborations among Muslim-led nonprofits by using expert third-party facilitators. CCI’s work is essential, as historically, Muslim-led nonprofits have had few successful experiences collaborating with other Muslim-led organizations. We wrote this report on CCI to highlight insights and learnings from the CCI project. In doing so, we aim to highlight the best practices through which nonprofits, especially those belonging to racialized minorities, can envision and implement meaningful collaborative partnerships.

We begin by highlighting some of the challenges Muslim Americans face, followed by a discussion of existing research on collaboration. Then we delve deeply into this paper’s main topic, CCI. We then suggest best practices based on our findings and conclusions.

Muslim-American Challenges

Muslim Americans have various racial, national, and ethnic origins. According to a 2017 Pew survey, the geographic origins of Muslim Americans span all regions of the world. Yet, despite such diversity, Muslims in the United States find themselves in a hostile and threatening climate that deems them as “others” in the ethno-racial and social hierarchy (Ayers & Hofstetter, 2008; Calfano et al., 2021). This issue has been particularly true in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks when Muslims became targets of discrimination and hate crimes (Cainkar, 2002; Alsultany, 2013; Alshrari, 2020). Consequently, the existing research on racial and ethnic minorities acknowledges and enables us to study Muslim Americans as a religious minority whose political identity is grounded in the collective faith of Islam—a nontraditional Western religion often mistaken as being incompatible with American democratic values (Huntington, 1996).

Because of the diversity of Muslim Americans, as a whole, they have not been able to establish large organizations looking after their interests. Muslim-led nonprofits in the United States have had much more success and have been remarkably effective in interfaith collaboration, working with organizations outside their faith group to fight Islamophobia and acting as an ally to other marginalized groups.

On the other hand, intrafaith collaboration among Muslim-led organizations remains minimal, as most Muslim-led nonprofits do not regularly engage meaningfully with other Muslim-led nonprofit organizations, resulting in silos within the sector. While intrafaith cooperation includes joint press releases, attending each other’s events, and offering mutual support, it does not translate into joint programmatic initiatives.
A meaningful intrafaith partnership can strengthen missions, develop a specialization, create economies of scale, and build a more effective nonprofit organization (Siddiqui, 2014). However, while most Muslim-led nonprofits recognize the benefits of collaboration, they have hesitated to spend resources and practice deep engagement.

The Muslim-American nonprofit sector in the United States is still very young. Muslims in the United States have used philanthropy to navigate and develop their Muslim-American identity by establishing professional organizations. These organizations are as diverse as the Muslim Americans themselves. These bodies serve multiple functions, including helping Muslims and non-Muslims in the United States and abroad through relief organizations. Similarly, Muslim Americans have set up many organizations in the United States to support those who practice the Islamic faith and educate Muslims and non-Muslims alike on Islam’s tenets and values. Muslim Americans have used philanthropy to further the cause of social justice. Muslim-led nonprofits have been crucial in setting up institutions that advance their faith, religious identity, and place in American society. According to GuideStar, 3,020 active Muslim nonprofits exist in the United States. However, the number is much higher because IRS data do not identify dual-purpose organizations and instead places them in one category. For instance, it categorizes Islamic Relief as a relief organization even though it is a very well-known Islamic Organization.1 Additionally, the United States has an estimated 3,000 mosques (Bagby, 2020) and 200 full-time Islamic schools (Khan & Siddiqui, 2017).

Despite the growth in Muslim-led nonprofits, the Muslim nonprofit sector in the United States is still in its infancy. While these instances of institution-building are essential milestones in history, they do not represent a cohesive and concerted effort to build Muslim-led institutions in the United States. Often, Muslim organizations are primarily dependent on their founders. Such organizations usually do not outlive their founders (Khan & Siddiqui, 2017). The Muslim nonprofit sector suffers from an acute lack of resources and the institution-building efforts needed to promote the sector. The Muslim nonprofit sector still needs institutional development, resource development, capacity building, and, more importantly, help from the government and philanthropic community. Moreover, there are very few examples of successful collaborations among Muslim-led nonprofits.

**Research on Collaboration**

There is a consensus among scholars that collaborations benefit nonprofits, including increasing savings in administrative costs, increasing the range of services, bringing diverse leadership and voices to projects, increasing brand exposure, and strengthening and expanding nonprofit voices (Gazley & Guo, 2020). Several theories have been used to explain why collaboration can benefit nonprofits.

The Resource dependence theory views collaborations among nonprofits as a means for securing needed resources and avoiding uncertain external environments (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). On the other hand, the network perspective argues that the need for resources, information, and more credibility drives nonprofits to collaborate with other organizations (Podolny & Page, 1998). Similarly, the institutional theory posits that collaborations enable nonprofits to adhere to the norm of working together, thus enhancing

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1 The IRS uses the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) system for classification, which defines Islamic organizations as “Organizations whose members are followers of Islam, the religious faith and cultural system that is based on the belief in Allah as the sole deity, in Mohammed as the prophet of Allah and in the Koran as the revelation of Allah to Mohammed and the divinely authorized basis for the religious, social, civil, commercial, military and legal regulations of the Islamic world.” For more information, see https://nccs.urban.org/project/national-taxonomy-exempt-entities-ntee-codes.
their legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Several studies have employed these perspectives to suggest that collaborations enable nonprofits to increase legitimacy and improve their services and financial stability (Kim & Peng, 2018; Gazley & Brudney, 2007).

It is important to recognize that the process of collaboration is multifaceted. For instance, collaborations may vary by intensity, from informal cooperation to formal partnerships (Kohm et al., 2000), and by frequency, from one-time collaboration to a complete merger of organizations (Osborne & Murray, 2000).

According to Gazley and Guo (2020), scholarly research on collaborations generally can be divided into three broad categories. The first field focuses primarily on antecedents, that is, the preconditions of collaborative activity, such as human, organizational, and environmental characteristics that may influence processes and results. Outcomes clarify the effects, whether intended or unintended, of collaborative activity. Processes describe the activities used to manage a partnership, such as meetings, process evaluations, data collection, etcetera. Thus, processes define the relationships that enable coalitions to evolve into successful collaborations (Gazley & Guo, 2020).

Studying the collaboration process is crucial because, although organizations may not have control over collaborative antecedents, they can control the process to ensure more robust partnerships. Moreover, having a more robust process can improve the likelihood of successful outcomes, even when the antecedents of collaboration are lacking. Studies suggest that the collaboration process largely determines the antecedents’ effect on outcomes (Chen, 2010). Thus, studying the process to understand why collaborations do or do not work is more important.

The collaboration process comprises highly complicated conflicts, complexities, and adaptations (Mulroy, 2003; Thomson & Perry, 2006), and trust between organizations and individuals may take time to develop (Tu & Xu, 2020). Additionally, participants need to agree on the collaboration logistics and deliverables. As a result, most collaborations fail to achieve their desired outcomes or fail in the initial planning stage.

Failure, however, is not inevitable. The proper steps and managerial practices can help improve collaboration processes and partnerships in several ways. As organizations develop more tools to manage their partnerships, including information sharing, cooperation mechanisms, and clear organizational roles for resource sharing, they can establish trust and improve collaboration (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Dyer & Singh, 1998).

It is further essential to study the collaborative process in the context of faith-based organizations. Prior research suggests that religious organizations are less likely to collaborate with governments and other religious nonprofits that do not share their vision. Therefore, they often need to share the antecedents of collaborations. Therefore, studying the process whereby such organizations can collaborate successfully is important. Research suggests that a strong inverse relationship exists between a nonprofit’s religiosity and its willingness to collaborate with other organizations (Ebaugh et al., 2005). Consequently, highly religious coalitions avoid all forms of contact with other community organizations.
Consideration of Muslim nonprofits’ situations, which are often small in size, is vital. Previous research suggests that smaller nonprofits usually need more human resources to collaborate extensively and are less likely to participate in the collaborative process (Kim & Peng, 2018).

Next, we turn to our primary subject, CCI, a community-based participatory action research project (CBPAR)PA launched in 2020 that relied on the equal engagement of researchers and community stakeholders. The goals included identifying community-based interventions aimed at engaging community members in planning and implementing programs to address community problems. Community-based interventions have been effective in addressing a variety of social issues, including, but not limited to, reducing crime rates, improving health outcomes, and increasing solidarity. Community-based interventions have also been used to empower community members that resulted in improved civic participation and solutions to various problems (Holkup et al., 2004; Okazaki, 2008; Wallerstein et al., 2020).

Community Collaboration Initiative (CCI)

As leaders in the Muslim-American community, Dilnaz Waraich, Roohi Younus, and Shariq Siddiqui learned that no single organization in the Muslim-led nonprofit sector in the United States had the capacity or resources to resolve the host of problems in the community, including, but not limited to, racial and social injustice, Islamophobia, inequality, and how to institute systemic changes. They were also aware of Muslim-led nonprofits’ need to engage in collaboration. Dilnaz is president of the WF Fund. This fund provides grants and guidance to U.S. nonprofit organizations, which includes several Muslim-led nonprofit organizations. Shariq is an assistant professor of philanthropic studies whose research focuses on Muslim-American philanthropy and Muslim-led nonprofit organizations. He has been a practitioner in the Muslim-led nonprofit sector for more than two decades. Roohi is a nonprofit practitioner with years of experience serving the nonprofit sector. She has extensive experience as a strategic consultant, event planner, and community leader within the Muslim nonprofit sector in the United States. All three are Muslim-American scholars, practitioners, and philanthropists and have sought to collaborate using the identity leaderships of philanthropist (Dilnaz), practitioner (Roohi), and scholar (Shariq). The three were friends for years prior to the CCI project and have consistently engaged with each other in thought leadership about and concern for the Muslim-led nonprofit sector and Muslim-American community.
To better understand the challenges faced by the Muslim-led nonprofit community, Dilnaz partnered with Roohi and Shariq to learn about their experiences and knowledge in that area. In 2019, Dilnaz contacted a survey of Muslim-led nonprofits in the United States and asked them about their current challenges. She received 43 responses, and one of the major findings was that Muslim leaders in the nonprofit sector were not in the habit of collaborating with other Muslim-led nonprofits. She discovered that Muslim leaders in the nonprofit sector were under immense pressure, were fighting Islamophobia, and at the same time, were struggling with limited resources. As a result, most Muslim-led nonprofits were operating as small entities with few resources and were accustomed to working in silo environments, often considering each other as competitors rather than collaborators. Moreover, it is noteworthy that this situation is common to Muslim-led organizations. Research suggests that small and faith-based organizations are less likely to collaborate than other groups (Ebaugh et al., 2005).

Similarly, Shariq’s research and work in the Muslim-led nonprofit sector led him to three major concerns. First, Muslim nonprofit leaders preferred collaborating with interfaith organizations rather than intrafaith organizations in their search for internal and external legitimacy. Second, Muslim-led nonprofits sought to raise funds through a transactional approach as opposed to a developmental approach that would lead to further relationships with major donors, including philanthropic foundations. Third, Muslim-led nonprofits were forced to do much with few resources. This was further exacerbated by a lack of collaboration that could result in joint programming and potential mergers that would create economies of scale and enhancement of expertise.

Roohi shared that collaborations have increasingly become a nonprofit industry standard for a variety of benefits. The need to collaborate and communicate with peers has become even stronger from both an organizational perspective and a personal well-being perspective. By working with Muslim organizations, the CCI project can inspire an intrafaith culture shift within the Muslim nonprofit sector, ultimately moving from a scarcity mindset to an abundance and shared wealth mindset.

The three knew that Muslim-led nonprofits belonging to these diverse racial groups had different economic and socioeconomic backgrounds and often did not come together to achieve agreement because they are so busy trying to solve many problems that it is difficult to find time to work across organizations as well as a lack of capacity that restraints their ability to form meaningful, long-term partnerships. Moreover, Muslim-led nonprofits were particularly wary of external authority due to their post-9/11 experience with the government. Other issues can also influence how and whether they work together. For example, without external help and facilitation, prior negative relationships between some organizations may affect their ability to trust and work together. Thus, because of their interconnected concerns, findings, and interests, Dilnaz, Roohi, and Shariq sought to find a way to foster collaboration among Muslim nonprofits through establishing CCI as a third-party facilitator.

CCI as a Third-Party Facilitator

Third-party facilitators’ expertise can help in all aspects of collaboration, including, but not limited to, financial and legal analysis, fundraising strategies, and capacity building. The limited research available on third-party facilitators supports their value to collaborative processes. Having a third-party facilitator can help build trust between organizations, especially if the facilitators already have relationships with the organizations (Lambright et al., 2010; Tu & Xu, 2020). Nonprofits seeking deeper collaborations that cover multiple programs may find using a third-party facilitator advantageous.
A third-party facilitator also helps redress financial insecurities that can come when working on a collaboration. Additionally, such facilitators can provide nonprofits with expanded resources, increasing organizations' willingness to work together. However, of the limited research on the role of a third party in nonprofit collaborations, most studies focus on either government nonprofit collaborations or the business sector (see, e.g., Shapiro, 1987), whereas research needs to focus on the best practices that third parties can employ to improve the collaboration process (de Bakker & den Hond, 2008; Zietsma & Winn, 2008). For instance, third parties can work as conveners to bring stakeholders together (Wood & Gray, 1991). These conveners may not have formal authority but can use their legitimacy, reputation, and informal influence to encourage stakeholders to join forces. They can help build diverse linked constituencies (Westley & Vredenburg, 1991), help bridge cultural differences (Crane, 2000), and display persistence and entrepreneurial capacity to cope with threats and maintain support (Stafford et al., 2000). Such bridging organizations can facilitate the success of collaboration processes (Selsky & Parker, 2005).

Based on the above and after consultation with Muslim-American leaders and talking among themselves, Shariq, Dilnaz, and Roohi decided to establish CCI. CCI leveraged 25 Muslim-American nonprofit organizations' enthusiasm and expertise in establishing ways to work together toward solving common problems. The three-year project focused on interactions and incremental goals that established a basis of trust.

The CCI team consisted of three researchers, one program manager, one program assistant, one major donor/benefactor, and five facilitators. CCI divided the 25 organizations into five cohorts. Each facilitator was responsible for a group of organizations, and each cohort was categorized based on its area of focus. Each cohort worked with dedicated facilitators for three years, and participants in each cohort were representatives of individual nonprofit organizations.

**Recruiting and Training Dedicated Facilitators**

Working with a large and diverse group of people required real effort and upkeep. Moreover, there was a need to hire facilitators who understood the Muslim community and who were able to work within a culturally competent framework. As a result, CCI decided to hire facilitators from the Muslim community who previously had direct personal knowledge of the Muslim community and a positive track record of working in community collaborations, including a high emphasis on community perspectives and an understanding of the broader community. The facilitators went through detailed training with the CCI leadership and were a source of cohesion and of keeping the CCI organizations gelled over the three years.

Facilitators were responsible for team building, facilitating meetings, working frequently with organization members, coordinating meeting agendas, and recording meeting minutes; they were also responsible for establishing trust among participating organizations and their members, staying connected within the community, and working toward annual goals.

**CCI Participating Organizations**

CCI organized the nonprofits into five groups, each with a general focus area, based on their area of expertise: (1) Public Policy and Advocacy cohort, (2) Legal Services cohort, (3) Health and Wellness cohort, (4) Community Centers cohort, and (5) Community Organizing cohort. The cohorts met each quarter to discuss ways in which they could collaborate. The CCI team wanted to ensure that they selected devoted
and committed members. The team solicited the nonprofit organizations through personal connections and snowball sampling. The main criterion was that Islamic values would inspire these organizations’ missions.

Representatives from all CCI participating organizations met with the CCI team monthly and quarterly from January 2020 to December 2022. Monthly meetings were held between individual organizational representatives and the CCI team. Quarterly meetings were held between the CCI cohorts and the CCI team during year one. The CCI team prepared and distributed the minutes of each meeting to each participant involved, hence ensuring ongoing communication with members of the nonprofit organizations—including members who were unable to attend meetings—to bring them up to date on what occurred. The CCI team maintained uninterrupted relationships with participant organizations and their staff and board members and connected members who were not previously involved in collaborative initiatives.

The CCI project included members from 25 participating organizations at the beginning of 2020. After the first year, three organizations left because of capacity issues. Twenty-two organizations remained with CCI until the end of the project. Each organization was represented by one board member and a staff member. At the same time, these organizations also needed to be committed and dedicated to working together, especially as CCI was not offering specific financial incentives to the organizations working together.

The following tables show specific arrangements and data from our survey.

### Table 1: Organizations Arranged According to Each Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Organizing</th>
<th>National Public Outreach Public Policy and Advocacy</th>
<th>Legal and Criminal Justice Reform</th>
<th>Muslim Community Centers. Community Organizing Hubs for Compassion</th>
<th>Health and Well-Being Services and Advocacy for the Underrepresented</th>
<th>Foundation Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (CIOGC)</td>
<td>American Muslim Health Professionals (AMHP)</td>
<td>Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)-Chicago</td>
<td>Islamic Foundation North (IFN)</td>
<td>Arab American Family Services (AAFS)</td>
<td>Zakat Chicago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim Alliance of Indiana (MAI)</td>
<td>eMgage (EMGAGE)</td>
<td>Muslim Legal Fund of America (MLFA)</td>
<td>Nigerian Islamic Association (NIA)</td>
<td>Islamic Circle of North America Relief (ICNA Relief)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana Muslim Advocacy Network (IMAN Associates)</td>
<td>Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota Muslim Leadership Coalition (MMLC)</td>
<td>Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviving Islamic Sisterhood for Empowerment (RISE)</td>
<td>Muslim Civic Coalition (MCC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Syrian Community Network (SCN)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The organizations that were part of CCI exhibited considerable diversity. While some large organizations had been in existence for more than 20 years, most were recent and had small budgets (median, $1 million to $4.99 million) and staff (median, 1 to 10 members). Among the nonprofit members’ staff, there was considerable racial diversity. However, the largest collaboration partners were White Caucasians and Asians. It is important to recognize that Whites in this category are not only converts or Europeans but also are from the Middle East, Turkey, and Persia who are categorized as White by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Our survey results show that the organizations’ median time of existence was 11 to 20 years, which suggests that the Muslim nonprofit industry is still incredibly young. Only six organizations had been in existence for 21 to 40 years, only two had existed for more than 40 years, and only two had existed for fewer than four years.

Table 2: For How Many Years Has Your Organization Been in Existence?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than two years</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–4 years</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–10 years</td>
<td>17.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–20 years</td>
<td>46.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–40 years</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 40 years</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Roughly What Are the Annual Expenditures of Your Organization?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below $100,000</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000–$249,999</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$250,000–$499,999</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500,000–$999,999</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1 Million–$4.99 Million</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5 Million–$9.99 Million</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: How Many Staff Members Are in Your Organization?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1–10</td>
<td>70.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–50</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51–200</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The staff capacity of most organizations involved was also limited. Most organizations had a minimal number of staff members (1 to 10). No organization had more than 200 members.

Racially, we can say that there was considerable diversity in the nonprofit leaders who were part of the collaboration. While the largest percentage consisted of Asians or White Caucasians, other races, including African American, American Indian, and “Other,” were also represented.

Table 5: Which of the Following Races Do You Consider Yourself to Be (select all that apply)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White or Caucasian</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, our survey results reveal that these organizations’ participation in collaborations was limited. Some organizations had participated in formal collaborations; however, a substantial proportion had never participated in formal collaboration, and at least two organizations had never been part of a formal or informal partnership prior to joining the CCI project.

Many of these organizations were hesitant to collaborate because they felt that, by doing so, they would be competing with their peer organizations for resources. Moreover, they had a competitive mindset and generally had reservations about collaborating with other organizations, in part because they believed that such an approach would require them to consume too much of their active funds, as well as to compete for resources. Another barrier they struggled with was lack of institutional support and of the staff needed to sustain the collaborations. Interestingly, they were not overly concerned about losing some of their independence in the collaboration process.

Thus, our initial diagnostic survey revealed that most of the organizations in the group were small to medium-sized, with very limited capacity and experience working in formal and informal collaborations.

**Bringing Organizations Together Through Monthly and Quarterly Virtual Meetings**

Shariq, Dilnaz, and Roohi wanted to facilitate meaningful and sustainable collaborations through the CCI process. They wanted to avoid facilitating the collaboration process by providing financial incentives. Instead, they wanted to build social capital translating friendliness, goodwill, and optimism into trustful relationships between the organizations. They decided that it would be best to slowly build trust and social capital between organizations by engaging them in regular meetings and getting these organizations to start learning to trust each other by working on small projects together. These meetings served as spaces for learning each other’s best practices.

During the first year, the CCI team asked the cohorts to work as a group on smaller projects. The participants had to reach agreement on which project they would work. The team’s rationale was to bring the organizations together, help them build mutual trust, and learn how to work together and collaborate. The approach was successful: All the organizations joined the five cohorts and worked on small projects. The CCI team again asked organizations to work together in the second year, but on a larger project that year. The organizations came together and were able to conduct the projects successfully. The third year, CCI focused on making these collaborations more long-term and sustainable.
CCI Year One

The CCI organizational representatives met regularly in year one to build trust. The overall attendance rate was more than 75% during that year. Several trust-building exercises were conducted. Some exercises included cross-organization antiracism training, joint virtual get out the count (GOTC) campaigns, and get out the vote (GOTV) work. CCI identified open communication and a flexible support structure as essential to collaboration. New, deeper, and long-term relationships were built among the organizations.

During year one, the CCI organizations developed an overall willingness to collaborate by sharing authority, responsibility, credit, and an attitude that allowed the collaborations to happen. This process established a norm of equality for all members of the participating organizations. This recognition, in tandem with an understanding of common goals, including belief in the project’s worthiness, willingness to collaborate, and a sense of altruism, kept the project moving through various stages of both pressure and accomplishment.

A significant factor in year one was that community building went beyond the 1-1 and group meetings. CCI sought several meetings based on what they were hearing from facilitators and participants. For example, CCI did Muslim antiracism training, which was developed in response to the civil unrest following the death of George Floyd. Table 6 highlights the major activities and accomplishments of year one.

Table 6: Year One Activity and Accomplishments

**Theme:** Building Trust by Working Together

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Accomplishments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Contracts and Rapport Building    | • Participating organizations signed contracts to participate in the CCI project.  
• Groups were formed based on mission alignment.  
• The concept of Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing (FSNP) was used as a means for psychological development of CCI groups as they worked on different projects.  
• Ice breaker activities were conducted to build and strengthen trust at both personal and professional levels.  
• Confidentiality and privacy was assured during 1-1 meetings and group meetings. All meeting minutes were recorded, and participants were given the opportunity to edit anything they felt was inaccurate.  
• Leaders from each cohort were expected to attend meetings. As a data point for the project, attendance was collected.  
• Continuous reflection on what was and was not working. Engaging board members and staff members from participating organizations was a challenge. In response to this challenge, a newsletter was shared along with representatives communicating with their organizations. |
| Foundation Outreach               | • Some CCI organizations received COVID funds from the Chicago Community Trust.  
• Instructed on and/or connected CCI organizations with Field Foundation, Spencer Foundation, Forefront, Sea Change, and Bank of America grants. |
| Explaining Foundation Outreach to CCI Organizations | • Fundraising and pivoting were explained.  
• Organizations were asked which one or two funding organizations they would like to be connected.  
• COVID/Capital Campaigns, etc., were discussed.  
• Strategy planning took place. |
| Seminars and Webinars | • For understanding the length and breadth of the COVID-19 pandemic.  
• For collaborations during crisis.  
• To launch reliable webinar, positioning organizations for grants.  
• For community organizing and basics of grant writing.  
• For effective political engagement for Muslims.  
• For virtual training—cost covered by CCI.  
• For DEI efforts. Diversity within the CCI organizations and their representatives.  
• For conflict resolution from the example of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) with Dr. Najeeba Saeed. |
|---|---|
| Ideas Presented by CCI Organizations for Developing Collaborations Through Trust Building During the First Year. | • Voter engagement/voter education.  
• Relationship-building on shared values and lived experiences was crucial, as well as attendance, capacity, and participation issues among CCI organizations. Some participants were struggling with their organizational capacity, and some participants could not make it to the meetings. Based on the participants and CCI facilitators’ feedback, multiple communication channels were made available to access the information, and individual participants started to reach out to each other for information sharing.  
• COVID-19 response collaboration was significant, including when and how to open mosques and community centers.  
• Organizations shared their mission, work, and agendas.  
• Based on CCI facilitators’ feedback, CCI organizational participants were provided with an opportunity to have 1-1 conversations with practitioners and researchers in the nonprofit sector.  
• One organization applied for a GOTV grant and shared it with other organizations in their group for their joint GOTV work. |
| Following George Floyd Death, DEI Efforts by the CCI Organizations | • Statements against the killing of George Floyd were signed by CCI organizations as a commitment to fighting injustice.  
• CCI organizations planned to increase their understanding of White supremacy, antiracist behavior, and uprisings in the month of July. |
| Key Takeaways From Year One | • CCI participants were asked what did and did not work during the first year of collaboration.  
• We learned from the participants that commitment to and belief in the vision of CCI were the major driving forces behind keeping the collaboration going.  
• Team-building exercises, ice breakers, mission alignment, social justice focus, being vulnerable to each other, and working on smaller projects were some ways in which trusting relationships were built. |

The 1-1 meetings between the CCI leadership team and the CCI organizational participants also helped build informal connections between the participants and the CCI team. Most of the participants in the 1-1 calls mentioned that the calls gave them time to develop empathy, humility, and appreciation for the CCI project. The group meetings abetted by dedicated facilitators also enabled participants from different organizations to be more open and relaxed with each other. One participant said,

“It was a different and unique experience for all of us. Everyone is doing well, being safe, and staying healthy. We talked about different ideas focusing on doing different ways to connect.”
One of the challenges CCI leadership recognized in year one was that the organizational participants often were not in charge of securing grants and funding opportunities for their organizations. The CCI team asked each organization to designate its organizational development manager. In addition, CCI hosted sessions for CCI organizational participants on the intricacies of working with foundations. CCI leadership also encouraged the CCI organizations to apply for Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) funding. These steps gave the organizations an overall idea about prospects for collaboration.

CCI needed to ensure that each organization’s board was aware of what was happening and how it affected the CCI project. Because keeping boards well informed about their representatives’ work with CCI was critical for its success, CCI encouraged all organizational participants to include that work at their board meetings.

Another major challenge during year one was the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the pandemic prompted CCI to seek diverse ways to support the organizations, including familiarizing them with the grant-writing process. This process was new and confusing for some organizations, as they had not requested or received such assistance previously. Researchers and independent consultants stepped in and offered time slots dedicated to listening to the concerns of the 22 organizations. CCI established some guidelines and webinars about important topics for the CCI project and its participating organizations.

**CCI Year Two**

The second year focused on leveraging the first year’s work to help organizations work together on a larger project. As in the first year, the CCI organizational participants met regularly to develop relationships and share programming, including, but not limited to, virtual site visits and potluck events. CCI organizational representatives conducted joint virtual programs during Ramadan. A major problem that most organizations’ representatives discussed was the lack of funding and capacity they faced to execute their missions. In response, one major series of events that CCI launched with its partners was the virtual program called Muslims in America: A Year of Learning for the Philanthropic Community. In year two, two organizations left because of capacity issues, for example, when a representative switched jobs and no one was available to fill the role.

The CCI team also contacted foundations to create more awareness and understanding of the Muslim nonprofit sector and the Muslim community. Many of the foundations were not aware of Islamophobia and the challenges faced by Muslim-led nonprofits. The Year of Learning (YOL) was a collaboration between CCI and several foundations and was an attempt to bridge the gap between the Muslim nonprofit sector and the larger philanthropic community. Muslim-led nonprofits have historically applied for grants from different foundations; however, they have not been successful because the foundations did not have Muslim-led nonprofits on their radar and because of the disconnect between the two sectors. As a result of CCI’s efforts, some organizations associated with its cohorts received funding from institutions, including, but not limited to, the Chicago Community Trust (CCT).

During year two, the CCI leadership found that the participating organizations needed more capacity and opportunities to receive funds from the philanthropic community. At that time, the CCI leadership asked participants how the collaboration process could be improved and how the organizations would like to be engaged. One primary example of the collaborations in year two was the execution of the National Public Policy Conference, which was planned and organized by the Public Policy and Advocacy group. The national conference was a great success and deepened relationships among the CCI participants. Table 7 summarizes the main accomplishments of year two.
### Table 7: Year Two Activity and Accomplishments

**Theme:** Collaboration Through Programming

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Accomplishments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Reflections on Learnings From Year One | • Lack of capacity issues among organizations were highlighted.  
• Lack of foundation support was recognized as a major problem by most CCI participants as well as by the CCI leadership.  
• Participants recognized the potential for long-term collaborations.  
• The intention and the willingness to collaborate among CCI participants were important. CCI leadership played a vital role in inspiring a shared vision to bring everyone back to the table, despite frustrations and growing pains. |
| CCI Filling in a Research Gap       | • CCI functioning as a unique third-party facilitator.  
• Filling a research gap on how collaborations are built, who collaborates and how to get groups to collaborate.  
• Working with young and diverse organizations with minimal staff (11–20) and budget. |
| CCI Intervention                   | • Learning Launch in 2021: Muslims in America: A Year of Learning for the Philanthropic Community.  
• Yearlong events on connecting the philanthropic community with CCI organizations.  
• MuslimARC training was offered for free to all representatives of all CCI participating organizations. As a result of this training, several participants became certified. MuslimARC is a human rights education organization raising awareness and training Muslim communities on issues of racial justice. CCI members were offered the training for free. |
| Key Learnings During Year Two      | • Tackling the lack of participation by some organizational representatives.  
• Continuing the team-building process.  
• Onboarding new members from different organizations. The onboarding process of integrating participants into a long-term project requires a strategic approach to ensure their smooth transition and meaningful contributions.  
• Transitions at the board level were anticipated with term limits. CCI had a process of asking about upcoming changes and had a defined transition process to bring new people up to speed.  
• Developing collective power to open pathways to foundational giving for Muslim-American nonprofits. |
| Process of Collaboration            | • Dividing the work equally.  
• Emerging leaders from different CCI cohorts.  
• Organizations engaging with each other on different collaborative projects outside CCI. |

A major challenge during year two was lack of full participation. According to one facilitator: “Lack of full participation from some organizational participants weakens each person’s participation.” Another facilitator found the same weakness and worked with the facilitators to build and strengthen relationships with all organizational participants. According to one facilitator:
In summary, year two built on collective power to help strengthen partnerships between the participants as well as open pathways to foundational giving for Muslim-American nonprofits. The focus was on utilizing social capital to bring about change from the foundation leaders’ perspectives.

CCI Year Three

Successful engagement with the foundation world during year two helped CCI create the Muslim Collaboration Prizes (MCP) initiative. MCP attempted to create an informed award process centered on equity and collaboration. MCP’s major standout was that each group received a $200,000 grant to work on its collaborative project, with the requirement that each CCI group submit a letter of intent and grant application. The MCP application process was in itself a learning experience for the participating organizations. The CCI groups had to work together on the application, agree to a particular project and how it would be measured, identify their fiscal relationship, create a memorandum of understanding (MOU), and so forth. This created the “muscle memory” for future collaborations.

During year three, the CCI organizational representatives met consistently to complete the MCP applications. When MCP was announced, the CCI leadership team with the help of different foundations created an MCP selection committee.

To further understand the needs of nonprofit organizations, the CCI nonprofits in the Public Policy and Advocacy cohort created a national public policy conference. This conference led to a collective theory of change, a shared narrative, and a collaborative road forward through the application process.

In year three, the MCP selection committee learned from the CCI participating organizations and built an expanded network of trusting relationships. Following the convenings, CCI participants expanded their network and gained mentors. Through the YOL, the CCI leadership successfully created a $1 million pooled fund for the Muslim Collaboration Prizes. This effort created pathways for connections between Muslim-led organizations and organized philanthropy. Through the Muslim Collaboration Prizes applications, CCI members found allies beyond the Muslim community to be champions of the subsector.

CCI identified a successful leadership model for collaboration management: nonprofit practitioners, philanthropists, and researchers. CCI successfully influenced long-term changes in equity and inclusion through the engagement of the Prizes selection committee. It also successfully communicated that faith and philanthropy comprise a powerful, diverse group that needs support. Finally, CCI created a culture that would celebrate and appreciate each other’s wins as everyone’s win. The overall efforts brought together hundreds of leaders from the philanthropic sector.
In addition to MCP, the CCI team realized that it was critical to develop a framework to bring their voices together and facilitate ways through which Muslim nonprofits can best talk about themselves and to represent them in the way they want to be represented.

Thus, in the third year, CCI introduced the Photovoice method, which enabled nonprofits to leverage their voices through photos that they thought represented them best.

Photovoice is a visual research methodology through which people can recognize, represent, and develop their community via a specific photographic technique. Specifically, Photovoice uses participant-taken photographs to encourage discussions and dialogue among stakeholders from different backgrounds. CCI participants took photos representing their challenges and their ability to solve them. The participants captured the photos, made their photo selections, and then wrote captions and narratives that explained each photo. By sharing their stories, the participants demonstrated the importance of collaboration and fostering resilience.

Photovoice projects have three main goals: first, to enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns; second, to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussions of photographs; and third, to reach policymakers, donors, and public officials.

Participants from 22 Muslim-led organizations created a successful virtual Photovoice project that became a safe space where everyone could determine the following collectively and collaboratively: (1) Who is affected by the issues or challenges identified? (2) Why does the challenge exist in the current environment? (3) What are the most meaningful ways to effect the necessary change? The project was born out of the Muslim Collaboration Prizes application process. The Photovoice process started from developing a training manual for all participants, to engaging participants, to taking photos and discussing the photos in their groups, to creating a successful virtual Photovoice exhibit, to engaging a virtual audience. Table 8 summarizes the main accomplishments of year three.

### Table 8: Sustainability Through Collaboration

**Theme:** Sustainability Through Collaborations/Moving From a Scarcity Mindset to an Abundance Mindset

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Accomplishments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflections on Learnings From Year Two</td>
<td>• Developing connections between foundations and the philanthropic community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increasing support from the philanthropic community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increasing motivation and commitment of CCI organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Some CCI organizations received grant money from foundations and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>applied for grant money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The five collaborations worked together on the application process, which included project definition, timeline, scope of work, and an MOU.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCI Filling in a Research Gap</td>
<td>• Effective interventions in nonprofit collaborations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Successes from the Year of Learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Successes from the MCP.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Successes from the Photovoice Virtual Exhibition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collaboration Through Programming

- CCI organizations are continuing to collaborate on projects outside CCI.
- Trust and deeper relationships are enhanced.

CCI Intervention

- Dedicated workshops on fundraising.
- Grant writing.
- Photovoice.
- Establishment of the Muslim Collaboration Prizes.
- Participatory grant writing.

Key Learnings During Year Three

- Collaboration as a win-win, but certain conditions and activities needed.
- Well-thought-out planning and execution required.
- Ensuring inclusion and participation of all organizations and representatives from those organizations.

In year three, some CCI organizations with little or no staff noted that they continued to struggle to participate in the MCP process, as MCP required a significant amount of time. Two related challenges the CCI leadership team faced were (1) the CCI organizations’ lack of understanding of the grant process, which led to a lack of awareness of the strength of MCP, and (2) how to move the CCI organizations from a scarcity mindset to an abundance mindset. As a result, the CCI organizational representatives were informed that MCP was a practical application and that dealing with the challenges they faced with MCP would lead to developing an abundance mindset.

After discussion, the CCI leadership team decided to give stipends to organizations with scarce funds to enable them to allocate time for the process. Furthermore, organizations were told that costs related to working on the MCP application, such as hiring grant writers and designating a project manager, could be budgeted into the application with agreement among all parties. In the spring of 2022, 15 organizations received $1,000, and another six each received $2,500.

The CCI facilitators were instrumental in effectively communicating to all CCI organizations the following message:

“You have braved it for two years without funding. The Muslim-American nonprofit sector is underfunded and under-resourced, and we need to strive together to find creative ways to acquire funding and support.”

At this time, the CCI organizations were reminded of the small wins throughout the CCI projects. According to all facilitators, messaging from CCI was effective in keeping all organizations engaged and consistently working on the MCP applications. CCI also learned that for these collaborations to remain effective and sustainable, inclusion of all representatives from all organizations was important. Feedback was sought on multiple occasions from all participants about their concerns and for participation in all the conversations. CCI also ensured that all decisions were made by consensus and that the opinions of smaller organizations were treated equitably. CCI organizational participants were asked to provide their feedback about what worked, what did not work, and what could have been improved. CCI organizational participants were also asked to provide their feedback about facilitators, as well as about the transparency and integrity of the project.
Outcomes

Overall, many outcomes were associated with the CCI project, as shown in Table 9.

### Table 9: Cumulative Outcomes of CCI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>CCI Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Muslim-led nonprofits collaborating with each other and building and developing trust both personally and professionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Muslim-led nonprofits building and strengthening successful intrafaith collaborations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Muslim-led nonprofits engaging with the philanthropic community, leading to Muslims in America: A Year of Learning for the Philanthropic Community, and the Muslim Collaboration Prizes (MCP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Muslim-led nonprofits moving from a scarcity mindset to an abundance mindset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Challenges and lessons learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Positive, successful experience in collaboration; deeper knowledge of the skills, attitudes, and structures needed for successful collaborations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CCI provided a platform for a collective Muslim voice. While primarily being a third-party initiative aimed at building collaborations among nonprofits, CCI also undertook several interventions during the three years to highlight the issues Muslim nonprofits face. Some of these interventions included the YOL, the Muslim Collaboration Prizes, and Photovoice. Through the Photovoice initiative, CCI participants came together and bonded in a unique way. They were tasked with taking photos that represented their problems, to come up with a narrative that explained those problems, and then a solution to address those problems.

**Muslim-Led Nonprofits Collaborating With Each Other by Building and Developing Trust Both Personally and Professionally**

CCI provided a unique model for Muslim organizations to learn about each other and build both short-term and long-term collaborations with each other. It also provided a unique platform upon which these organizations could build trust with each other.

**Muslim-Led Nonprofits Building and Strengthening Successful Intrafaith Collaborations Through Mutual Learning**

CCI’s organizational representatives showed a commitment to learn about collaboration and how to effectively engage in community development initiatives. All the cohorts in the CCI project had a learning purpose, which the CCI team thought of as the interest in and ability to intentionally learn. CCI organizations displayed a dynamic pattern that reflected a learning organization through its generative learning process and supportive learning environment. CCI developed a commonly defined set of collaborative goals and a collective purpose, moving beyond existing organizational structures. The learning purpose increased the ability to be flexible and open.

In a group meeting, one participant said, “I think there is a real atmosphere of learning. I want to understand better each organization and what they are doing.”
CCI provided a platform for organizations to learn about their peer organizations’ missions, aims, tasks, and competencies. In the meetings, both facilitators and participants emphasized the importance of mutual learning.

All the facilitators noted in their one-on-one meetings with the organizational participants that there was a need to understand each other and share the mission and objectives. By doing so, they showed that by working together, they were stronger and more valuable. All CCI participants agreed that it was essential to know about peer organizations’ missions and goals in order to work collaboratively. For instance, one of the participants said, “It was good to know each organization’s capabilities and what each organization is bringing to the table. Some people have networks. Others have content, skills, and everything in between.”

Working together on smaller projects enabled CCI organizations to ascertain what their peers brought to collaborations and to discover that they could all work together successfully. For example, one participant said:

“As the group started to move toward its goal, I was impressed by the interest of the people. I thought that getting through the exercises was a great way to get low-hanging fruit. Collaboration is about figuring out how they could all utilize each other. There were a lot of experiences and good ideas to come and work out together. This type of collaboration did not happen very often.”

Another participant said, “Some of the ideas generated from the one-on-one meetings were putting together a COVID-19 manual for mosques and bridging the gap between suburban and urban mosques. And finally, bringing the community centers together and connecting their communities.”

Muslim-Led Nonprofits Engaging With the Philanthropic Community: Muslims in America: A Year of Learning for the Philanthropic Community, and the Muslim Collaboration Prizes (MCP)

A major highlight of CCI was that it enabled foundations to understand that Islamophobia exists in the foundation sector. For instance, one participant recalled a time when “a board member suggested checking out an organization with a Muslim-sounding name to be sure they were not on a terror list.”

By sharing such experiences, the foundations showed how Islamophobia affected their work. Some foundation leaders also shared that they were hesitant to fund Muslim-led nonprofits because their organizations were reluctant to support any work directly or indirectly related to religious proselytization. They said they sometimes inadvertently screened out Muslim-led nonprofits as they screened for organizations that did not require people to engage in religious activities to receive services. For instance, one funder had historically funded organizations that arose from a faith-based community but were no longer faith-based.

CCI also provided a unique chance for foundations to learn about Muslim Americans and Muslim-led nonprofits. Some foundation leaders acknowledged that they had very little prior information and awareness
of Muslim-led nonprofits’ work and had limited understanding of the Muslim community. However, the representatives also expressed a willingness to learn about the work of Muslim nonprofits. One participant later said that, before the YOL, they had known “so little about Islam but wanted to learn.”

Additionally, some foundations shared resources with Muslim-led nonprofits that would help them work better with the philanthropic community. Another philanthropic leader said, “We will share resources on best practices, webinars, and fundraising with the Muslim-led nonprofits.”

The YOL was an opportunity to bridge communication between Muslim-led nonprofits and foundations by addressing the following questions: (1) Who are Muslim Americans? (2) What challenges do Muslim Americans face? (3) What are the meaningful ways foundations can help Muslim-led nonprofits navigate those challenges?

The YOL engaged the philanthropic grantors and connected them with a diverse group of Muslim-led nonprofits. A total of 453 organizations participated in various programs during the YOL. While the long-term effect of YOL is still unclear, already some initial positive outcomes have emerged. First, several participating foundations decided to fund the MCP. The MCP provided Muslim nonprofits with CCI funding for the work they were doing collectively in order to amplify the effect of their work. Nearly $1 million was raised, with one major foundation providing half of those funds.

Moreover, several foundations were involved in the execution of MCP. The MCP, in partnership with various foundations—including, but not limited to, the WF Fund, the Tides Foundation, Lever for Change, and the Community Collaboration Initiative at the Lilly School of Philanthropy—created a platform for all CCI-participating nonprofit organizations, where the organizations were mentored by the program officers at various foundations, including, but not limited to, Lever for Change, Chicago Community Trust, Marguerite Casey Foundation, Butler Family Fund, and Ann Arbor Community Foundation. The MCP selection committee comprised volunteers who represented different foundations. The program officer for this project was a seasoned foundation professional with years of experience designing such prizes.

YOL helped in achieving the sustainability goals of CCI organizations. Some of these organizations received foundation funding for the first time, and, in fact, many were applying for foundation funding for the first time. The public relations success of the YOL’s learning launch also resulted in extensive media coverage. The foundational outreach gained access to more than 600 media outlets. The learning launch received coverage on Chicago’s NPR news station, WBEZ, and the post-event reports were released in the Chicago Sun-Times, the station’s flagship paper. Another public relations success was the philanthropic community’s positive response. The work of CCI and the YOL initiative, the result of CCI’s intervention, was discussed on major charitable platforms. Those platforms included, but were not limited to, the Johnson Center for Philanthropy, The Chronicle of Philanthropy, the Center for Effective Philanthropy, the National Center for Family Philanthropy, Habits of the Heart, the Rainbow Push Coalition, and Wisconsin Public Radio.

**Muslim-Led Nonprofits Moving From a Scarcity Mindset to an Abundance Mindset**

CCI helped Muslim nonprofits develop an abundance mindset. Historically, like many organizations, Muslim nonprofits had competed for scarce resources. However, during their participation in the CCI project, they embraced collaboration rather than competition. Moreover, they realized the potential effect of a collective Muslim voice.
Challenges and Lessons Learned

Despite the unique work Muslim-led nonprofits are doing, we find that most of them lack the resources needed to persevere. Muslim organizations are new and small and require mentorship and nurturing to build relationships with the broader philanthropic community. For example, one participating member from a Muslim-led nonprofit said,

“We don’t know, who are the people making grants? It is very difficult to get funding for a Muslim organization.”

Muslim-led nonprofits can use several strategies to overcome these issues. First, they can focus more on their cultural competency and ability to intervene in key demographics. Next, they need to amplify the societal issue they are attempting to address in their work rather than their faith-based identity. Moreover, they can further engage with foundations by sharing their Muslim stories.

Also, foundations often lack awareness of Muslim-led nonprofits and their issues. Similarly, some participants from both the foundation world and the Muslim nonprofit world highlighted that a level of Islamophobia exists in the foundation community and has an effect on Muslim-led nonprofits. Foundations can also take several steps to help Muslim-led nonprofits. As an illustration, foundations can talk with them and, thereby, become aware of these nonprofits’ concerns and devise targeted interventions to help them. Foundations can further assist Muslim organizations with a lack of capacity by helping them craft better proposals. Moreover, they can help Muslim-led nonprofits by including them when addressing diversity and equity issues and by including them in their broader network. Foundations should be encouraged to use Muslim-led nonprofits’ data in order to tag the different organizations as resources for research and education focused on Muslim-American communities. The data can help clarify where philanthropic dollars are going and how they will be used.

Another critical learning outcome is that the CCI organizations began reaching out to various foundations. They learned that to get funding, they needed to have a greater understanding of the grantmaking process and continue building a multiracial effort. The organizations learned how to write grants and build capacity within their organizations. CCI supported the organizations and arranged several workshops on grantmaking processes.

Although the CCI project succeeded in bringing organizations at the same level to work together, several issues need to be addressed going forward. In an ideal world, strong collaborations would be built quickly; however, in reality, expedited collaborations can cause problems. Because of COVID, being able to meet was limited. As a result of that experience, we realized that a better approach may be to allow organizations to determine the appropriate speed of their collaborations and perhaps avoid premature collaborations that could lead organizations to distrust each other.

While the organizations were extraordinarily successful in meeting regularly, the main issue they faced was the need for more capacity. As mentioned earlier, several of these organizations needed to be better resourced. Some organizations had only one person, and very often these organizations needed the intellectual and physical capacity to commit to a sustained collaborative effort, which in some cases may also be an issue for organizations with more staff. Thus, capacity, delegation of authority, and organizations’ commitment of time may need to be defined in the future.
One of CCI’s strengths in bringing together a range of nonprofits to work on common causes was addressing the diversity of organizations. In our survey, the organizations varied in size and scope. They also were at different levels of development and had varying levels of capacity, as well as different objectives for successful collaboration. There was a lack of heterogeneity in organizational trust, as some organizations knew each other well, while others were not familiar with each other at all.

Also, the types of activities the organizations worked on together varied substantially. For instance, in some cases, they produced webinars effortlessly and used their resources to operationalize them. In other cases (e.g., voter mobilization), the work required considerable input and resources from all the organizations involved; therefore, these organizations needed more time and information to achieve their goal, rather than being urged to find quick solutions in their collaborations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The CCI project successfully brought together 22 Muslim-led nonprofits to collaborate and solve common problems. The project’s level of participation shows that organizations are eager to come together and work for a common cause. Based on the survey, a qualitative analysis of the meeting minutes, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, we find that overall, there is considerable enthusiasm for collaboration. The organizations believe that the CCI project helped them advance their causes to a larger audience, allowing them to share their resources and focus on their specific competencies. However, there is fear among the organizations that self-interested organizations may be unwilling to open their boundaries and focus on the collective good.

Our qualitative and quantitative findings show that organizations are highly successful in coming together to select and work on small projects that help them develop mutual trust. COVID, which required that participants’ interactions occur mostly through Zoom, also affected collaboration, as participants could not forge bonds as they might in personal interactions. On the other hand, COVID provided them with a way to share vulnerabilities, as people in the groups could bond strongly through the issues they faced. Moreover, this situation led to innovative interactions, including virtual visits to each other’s organizations and Masjids. Also, COVID-19 pandemic and the George Floyd protests increased recognition among the organizations about the need to be more racially and ethnically diverse and to act as allies for other minorities.

However, despite the initial trust-building measures’ success, some issues need to be addressed in future research. One of the main problems is capacity, which may hinder organizations that otherwise are entirely willing to collaborate. Another issue that needs to be addressed is organizational heterogeneity. Some organizations have more ability, while others have less. Future research could focus on organizational cooperation and proper demarcation of needs and strengths that will maximize collaboration outcomes. Thus, targeted interventions based on each group’s needs may be needed, rather than a generic roadmap that simultaneously applies to all organizations.
References


HILESH PATEL, LEADERSHIP INVESTMENT PROGRAM OFFICER
CCI is both a catalyst and a conduit for Muslim-American nonprofits to collaborate with each other, opening doors and offering pathways where the doors between Muslim organizations were previously closed, or simply unopened. I am excited to watch this initiative grow as leadership capacity, technical assistance, and best practices become tangible outputs for these convenings.

ANNE-MARIE ST. GERMAINE, PRESIDENT, TERRACE STRATEGIES LLC; VICE CHAIR, WOODS FUND CHICAGO
More than ever, collaboration between and among nonprofits is essential. CCI is at the forefront of thinking through how best to engage the sector for sustainable results.

DANIEL O. ASH, PRESIDENT, THE FIELD FOUNDATION OF ILLINOIS
CCI is leading by doing. The collective’s commitment to collaboration and shared learning will not only impact the region’s Muslim-American nonprofits but also the region’s entire social impact sector.

DILNAZ WARAICh, PRESIDENT, WF FUND
The CCI was started to ensure that Muslim-American stories were told by American voices.

CECILIA CONRAD, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, LEVER FOR CHANGE
The impact that we hope to have through CCI is to strengthen an important social sector. I am a strong believer that our society can’t be as strong as it needs to be unless we have everyone involved, everyone included, everyone with opportunities; and if there are missing pieces, we are not going to be complete.

MUHSIN HASSAN, AWARDS DIRECTOR, LEVER FOR CHANGE
A lot of people sometimes think that to be a philanthropist you need to have a lot of money, but we all are philanthropists in our everyday lives, and I would say it is the same thing for organizations. Even if you are not ready to be a funder with some of these organizations, there are some lessons that you have that you own, some resources that you could maybe avail to these organizations to help them, empower them, and allow them to execute effectively their mission.

MARITZA BANDERA, PROGRAM MANAGER, THE CHICAGO COMMUNITY TRUST
The solutions to the most pressing challenges in our communities are fairly simple and straightforward, and there is no shortage of solutions. But the pathway is never easy, and that’s where we always get stuck—it is the process of how we get there.