



## Muslims in America: A Year of Learning

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## **200+ Philanthropic and Muslim Leaders Nationwide Open New Chapter during “Year of Learning” Launch**

*Philanthropic community, allies & civic leaders meet Muslim American changemakers and explore contributions, challenges and partnership opportunities*

(CHICAGO - Feb. 19, 2021) -- Hundreds of leaders from across the philanthropic, social and civic sectors joined together virtually yesterday for the launch of [Muslims in America: A Year of Learning for the Philanthropic Community](#). Inspired by an initiative led by Illinois’ indigenous community leaders which served as a turning point in philanthropic understanding and investment, this special launch event is hoped to accelerate the evolution and deepening of mainstream philanthropic support for America’s 3.5 million Muslims.

“Long term success is about building the infrastructure to help community and civic life,” said panelist Daniel Ash of the Chicago Community Trust. “Building collective power means supporting vital civic infrastructure -- including the organizers, conveners and service providers -- so they are strong and we’re not moving from project to project to project. Long term success is about redistributing power from grantmaker to grant recipient so that you balance that out so you can create the *conditions* for long term relationship.”

The *Learning Launch* was designed to create an understanding of who Muslims are today, the issues that drive them, and the challenges they face which require philanthropic investment for long-term impact. A recent report by [The Bridgespan Group](#) provides context to the under-investment in faith-inspired groups by nearly all major foundations: “Among the 15 largest private foundations, faith-inspired human services nonprofits represent only 12 percent of safety net funding, much less than their 40 percent share of the sector.”

“There were so many points of entrance for organizations and philanthropy during The Learning Launch,” says Hilesh Patel of the Field Foundation, and one of the conveners. “This event brought participants closer to the multiplicity of the Muslim American experience while having honest, pointed

conversations about the necessity of financial support and authentic, sustainable relationships and collaborations.”

Participants got a unique opportunity to gain an “insider look” at Muslim Americans via:

- An introduction to 2021 Muslim America and its profound diversity plus their perspectives on racial, political and social issues from recent surveys
- Success stories from philanthropists, Muslim activists, and Muslims in philanthropy
- Breakout sessions which kick-started relationships between Muslim leaders and the philanthropic community
- A really moving and fun opportunity to select from six cultural learning opportunities in the arts, music, comedy, film, healing, Chicago Muslim history, and Black Muslim history

“To benefit mutual well-being, we need to build cross-pollinating partnerships which allow us to leapfrog ahead with creative solutions to mitigate urgent issues. Artists are powerful partners for this purpose to highlight core issues and galvanize us to act,” says Zeyba Rahman of the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, which is also a partner of The Year of Learning.

In the words of participant Joohi Tahir, the Executive Director of MUHSEN: Muslims Understanding and Helping Special Education Needs: “I was honored to be a part of this unique opportunity to have the first-ever gathering of its kind, where our Muslim-led initiatives were amplified. We all address such important and innovative work in our sectors, tackling issues that our diverse community faces every day, and it's an honor to have that work showcased for the philanthropic community. We all strive to learn and grow from this point on and forge ahead and nurture the relationships we started to form today.”

The event was convened in collaboration with the Field Foundation, Waraich Family Fund, Indiana University’s Community Collaboration Initiative, the IL Muslim Civic Coalition and University of Illinois’ Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement. The *Year of Learning* evolved from current relationships with the philanthropic community and Muslim American social, civic, and cultural organizations. In this engagement, Muslim organizations and their allies have recognized the need for improving fact-based knowledge, as well as removing systemic barriers that historically prevent Muslim American nonprofit organizations from acquiring equitable opportunities to build relationships and receive funding and resources. For more information about the program visit [www.ayearoflearning.org](http://www.ayearoflearning.org).

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**Editors’ Note: Interviews are available with conveners, presenters and participants. Interview requests should be directed to Edina Lekovic at 310.560.4898 or [edina.consulting@gmail.com](mailto:edina.consulting@gmail.com).**