



**CMEAA**  
COMMISSION ON MIDDLE EASTERN  
AMERICAN AFFAIRS  
M I C H I G A N

## **Meeting Minutes**

June 7, 2023 | Noon EST

2651 Saulino Court, Dearborn, MI 48120

### **ATTENDANCE:**

#### Commissioners Present:

Suzanne Sukkar, Chair  
Nadine Kalasho Khalil, First Vice Chair  
Adel Mozip, Second Vice Chair  
Lina Hourani-Harajli, Treasurer  
Haley Jonna  
Alexandra Nassar  
Nabeleh Ghareeb

Jaleelah Ahmed  
Dave Abdallah  
John Daoud  
Dr. Adhid Miri  
Dr. Najib Hourani  
Zane Hatahet

Officials and Staff: Assistant AG, Civil Rights Office, Tonya Jeter; Executive Director, Office of Global Michigan, Poppy Sias-Hernandez; Civil Rights Specialist, Michigan Department of Civil Rights, Charles Schoder

### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Sukkar at 12:14 PM ET, roll call was taken, and a quorum was declared.

Chair Sukkar then requested that there be a motion for Nabeleh to be an Interim Secretary. Treasurer Hourani-Harajli so moved, seconded by Commissioner Nassar.

**On Motion made by Treasurer Lina Hourani-Harajli and seconded by Commissioner Alexandra Nassar, the Commission approved Commissioner Ghareeb Serving as interim-Secretary for the purpose of the June 2023 CMEAA meeting. *Motion carries unanimously***

Chair Sukkar then requested that as Roll Call be taken, that after stating their names, the Commissioners should each spend 30 seconds introducing themselves to CMEAA's new Commissioner Wafa Haddad.

Chair Sukkar declared a quorum was reached and requested a motion to approve the Meeting Agenda.

## **II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

**On Motion made by Commissioner Alexandra Nassar and seconded by Commissioner John Daoud, the Commission approved the meeting agenda of June, 7<sup>th</sup> 2023 as presented.**

*Motion carries unanimously*

Chair Sukkar recognized interim-Secretary Ghareeb to introduce the March meeting minutes for approval:

## **III. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES**

Interim-Secretary gave time to the Commissioners to review the minutes and then requested a motion to approve the December 7<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes as presented.

**On Motion made by Commissioner Nabeleh Ghareeb, and seconded by Commissioner Dave Abdallah the Commission approved the March 1<sup>st</sup> meeting minutes as presented.**

*Motion carries unanimously.*

Chair Sukkar recognized Treasurer Hourani-Harajli to introduce the Treasurers report:

## **IV. TREASURER'S REPORT**

Treasurer Hourani-Harajli reported to the commission that everything was in line except the grant line because we didn't have a large banquet style celebration for Arab American and Chaldean American Heritage Month and that it is too late for the Full Time Employee funding we set aside to be fully spent. She reported that this all meant that CMEAA had about \$87,000 to spend.

Commissioner Abdallah asked if we have allocated any of the remaining budget to any specific project to which the Treasurer responded no.

Commissioner Hatahet asked when the funds had to be spent by and if the funds rolled over to the next fiscal year. Treasurer Hourani-Harajli noted that we had until the fiscal year ends, September 30<sup>th</sup> 2023 to spend the funds and that they did not roll over.

Commissioner Hatahet followed up asking if not spending the money would mean CMEAA losing money in next years budget, Executive Director Hernandez answered that no, the budget would be the same.

Vice Chair Mozip asked if the next meeting would be before September, with Chair Sukkar answering that CMEAA's next meeting would be in September.

Treasurer Hourani-Harajli invited a motion to accept the FY23 April Budget to Actual as presented.

**On Motion made by Commissioner Nabeleh Ghareeb and Commissioner Dave Abdallah the Commission approved the Treasurer's report presented as the FY23 January Budget to Actual. Motion carries unanimously.**

Chair Sukkar recognized Executive Director for the Office of Global Michigan Poppy Hernandez for the OGM update:

## **V. OGM UPDATE**

Attached is a copy of the OGM Update.

Executive Director Hernandez began by thanking Dr. Miri and Chair Sukkar for their participation in the State of Michigan's DEI Panel for Arab American and Chaldean American Heritage Month and notifying the commissioners that the State of Michigan is moving forward with creating its own MENA demographics category.

Commissioner Hatahet asked regarding the comment about circling back to CMEAA to solicit community feedback on the State of Michigan MENA demographics category, how the feedback would be collected. Would it be done by surveys/questionnaires and who would be soliciting this feedback? He noted that he asks this in the spirit of wanting to abolish colonial language. Executive Director Hernandez answered that there wouldn't be any forms but there would be community conversations. She also noted that creating/conflating racial and ethnic groups is a problematic endeavor and that its best to create nimble operations that way we can revisit these categories in the future.

Commissioner Haddad asked what happened to the Caucasian category and why wasn't it fair for Middle Eastern People to be included in that.

Executive Director Hernandez continued by sharing that for the federal and state demographics collections, that they are going to be conflating race and ethnicity, that individuals will be asked, what is your race/ethnicity, and that MENA is included as one of the options. After that the secondary question would be more about specific origins/nationalities.

Commissioner Ghareeb asked when these changes would be implemented by the state and if we would have to wait for the Federal Government. Executive Director Hernandez answered that the State of Michigan would not wait for the Federal Government.

Commissioner Hatahet chimed in on the Caucasian question that his father and his Polish Mother didn't like the term Caucasian because neither were from the Caucus region and that conflation of race and ethnicity is very dated and problematic.

Commissioner Dave Abdallah then added that he wanted to give ACCESS kudos on speaking to the Dearborn Heights City Council on adding a MENA category for city.

Dr. Hourani then brought up a study that was distributed at the Mackinac Policy Conference on technology and population growth that mentions Dearborn but doesn't say anything about the

Arab American Population. He asked how CMEAA could help so that our communities can be studied more. Treasurer Harajli answered that it is because MENA aren't counted in demographic data that they don't include MENA populations in studies. Executive Director Hernandez added that the LEO Director is a voting member on the new population growth council and that herself is a non-voting member.

Commissioner Haddad asked how we would convince people to fill out the forms and to self-identify as MENA especially given language barriers. Executive Director Hernandez answered that language access has been a problem once the forms are finalized that there would be a plan.

## **VI. ADMINISTRATORS REPORT**

Chair Sukkar read out Alexander's Administrative Report.

Attached below is the Administrator's Report.

Commissioner Ghareeb thanked Alexander for his work and thanked Executive Director Hernandez for her leadership. She also added that the reason why the Legislative Day was so exciting is because of all the young activists it attracted to civic engagement.

Chair Sukkar announced that the Chaldean Community Foundation Proposal would be revised and presented at the September meeting and then recognized Lucine Jarrah to present a proposal from the Arab American Heritage Council

## **VII. Arab American Heritage Council Proposal**

Attached is the proposal from the Arab American Heritage Council (AAHC).

Commissioner Nassar recuses herself from the discussion as she is on the board of the AAHC.

Commissioner Ghareeb asked if this would impact the whole Flint Area community or just MENA community with Ms. Jarrah answering that it would impact the whole Flint Area community and go as far as Saginaw also.

Commissioner Abdallah asked for clarification on AAHC, asking if the work is similar to ACCESS. Ms. Jarrah answered that ACCESS is more focused on the human services side where as AAHC is more focused on immigration, arts and culture.

Commissioner Ahmed asked about the target audience for the podcast and if there is any data to share about the previous podcast. Ms. Jarrah explained that the previous podcast was the oral history project done in collaboration with the Arab American National Museum. The new podcast would be trying to bring in young people to tell their stories. Ms. Jarrah noted that after their artist showcase, they saw that there were stories that aren't being a platform to be heard and AAHC wanted to provide that space.

Chair Sukkar asked how the podcast is broadcasted, with Ms. Jarrah explaining that the podcast is hosted on Spotify and Apple Podcasts. Chair Sukkar then asked how many listeners/subscribers and Ms. Jarrah explained that she didn't yet have that information.

Chair Sukkar then recognized the representatives from Arab American Orchestra

### **VIII. National Arab Orchestra Proposal**

Attached is the proposal and presentation materials for the National Arab Orchestra.

Commissioner Abdallah commended the work done by NAO and recalled how he was touched by seeing White and African American Students singing traditional Arabic songs.

Commissioner Ghareeb asked if the NAO and all the performances are non-profit and that the NAO shows are all sold out performances. It was explained that yes, NAO is a non-profit and that typically ticket sales don't cover the costs of the performances. Commissioner Ghareeb then asked how schools would be chosen for the program. It was explained that teachers would be the ones to initiate the relationship with NAO; NAO has also cultivated a relationship with the Music Teachers Association.

Commissioner Ghareeb asked if there is a specific grade level that NAO is targeting, it was explained that in the past they have worked with middle and high school classes.

Dr. Hourani asked what other funding sources the NAO has. It was explained that they funded by donations and ticket sales with hundreds of small donors as well as large donors such as Comerica and Ford.

Chair Sukkar then opened the floor for discussion on funding both the AAHC and NAO proposals:

Commissioner Abdallah asked if it was premature to decide on the funding until the September meeting that way we would know for sure what we have to spend in September.

Executive Director Hernandez recommended that there should be a committee that would pre-deliberate on the funding proposals before the September meeting to make the decision making process.

Commissioner Ghareeb asked if it was made aware to the commissioners that there was funding available and Chair Sukkar answered that it was. Commissioner Ghareeb wished to apologize on the record to Alma College because otherwise she would have like to see them make another proposal to continue the incredible work CMEAA had sponsored last year.

Chair Sukkar then noted that since our budget is limited, we cant have too many organizations seeking sponsorship from us.

Commissioner Abdallah agreed with Poppy as he wasn't that familiar with AAHC.

Dr. Hourani suggested that CMEAA vote on the AAHC proposal and that we ask NAO to come back in September. Chair Sukkar added that CMEAA could have stipulations for the NAO to meet for funding.

Commissioners Daoud and Ahmed noted that the AAHC's proposal aligns with our priorities of cultural promotion; with Commissioner Ahmad adding that there should be a statement prepared how each proposal aligns with CMEAA's priorities.

**On motion made by Treasurer Lina Hourani-Harajli and seconded by Commissioner Jaleelah Ahmed, CMEAA approved funding the Arab American Heritage Council proposal as presented for \$10,000. With Commissioner Alexandra Nassar Abstaining, the motion carried unanimously**

#### **IX. Mackinac Policy Conference Report/Old Business/New Business**

Treasurer Hourani-Harajli Attended the conference and connected with Executive Director Hernandez there.

#### **X. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Asma Jamil of the Chaldean Cultural Center introduced herself. She spoke about how her experience at the Legislative Day was impressive and she introduced the Executive Director of the Chaldean Cultural Center, Weam Namou. She then asked how someone is appointed to the commission.

#### **XI. ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Sukkar requested a motion to adjourn:

**On Motion made by Commissioner Dave Abdallah and seconded by Commissioner John Daoud, the Commission Adjourned. Motion carries unanimously**

Meeting adjourned at 2:10

X

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Amal M. Berry  
Secretary

X

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Suzanne K. Sukkar  
Chair



## Administrator's Report

**Alexander Sahouri**

*CMEAA Administrator*

[SahouriA1@michigan.gov](mailto:SahouriA1@michigan.gov)

Good afternoon,

This past quarter has likely been one of CMEAA's most exciting and ambitious in its history. My only regret is that I am not present at today's meeting to celebrate with you all the accomplishments you made possible by your service to State of Michigan.

Our first cause for celebration is the Ethnic Commission and Advisory Convention. In March, CMEAA participated in this first of its kind convention to make connections with the other Ethnic Commissions, the Immigrant and Refugee Advisory Council and the Black Leadership Advisory Council. This convention gave CMEAA the opportunity to hear from legislative leadership, their staff, administrative leadership such as LEO Director Susan Corbin, the Lieutenant Governor Garlin Gilchrist, and Governor Gretchen Whitmer.

That wasn't the only audience we had with Governor Whitmer. CMEAA was presented with the Arab American Heritage Month (AAHM) and Chaldean American Month (CAM) Proclamations by Governor Whitmer during the Middle Eastern American Heritage Celebration we hosted at the Governor's Residence. The celebration featured live music, Qahwah House, food, and gift boxes for our guests filled with specialty dates. Word from the Residence staff is that this was one of the best events they have had in Governor Whitmer's two terms. The attendance was about 70 people, and the total cost of the event was \$3,268.88.

Our April programming did not stop there, as we also celebrated AAHM and CAM by organizing a virtual tour of the Arab American National Museum for State of Michigan employees (about 500 in attendance), as well as hosted the CMEAA Legislative Advocacy Day in Lansing. Not counting myself, Commissioner Ghareeb, and Dr. Hourani, we had 16 volunteer advocates come and take meetings with 16 legislators or their staff. Senators Camilleri and Singh, and Representatives Martus and Farhat, all indicated they would like to work with CMEAA and introduce bills reflecting CMEAA's priorities of getting our commission protected via statute and introducing a MENA demographic designation to all State of Michigan forms. The total cost of our April programming was \$3,801.34.

Following up on the MENA Campaign, NNAAC blew past their goal of 10,000 public comments to the OMB. We contributed by workshopping comments with OGM staff to give the OMB a unique perspective on how the lack of a MENA category inhibits civil service staff from doing the best they can do to serve our communities.

Lastly, I represented CMEAA at the ACCESS MOVE Summit and the MSHDA Building Michigan Communities Conference. Also a special thank you to Treasurer Hourani-Harajli for offering CMEAA a table at the ACCESS 51<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Dinner.

Once again, thank you all for your continued service.

Sincerely,

Alexander



# **Celebrating Identity, Empowering Community:**

Developing and Growing  
Cultural Programming at the  
Arab American Heritage Council

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Presentation for Commission on Middle  
Eastern American Affairs







# About the AAHC

The Arab American Heritage Council strives to preserve and celebrate Arab heritage as well as support and unite all Arab Americans in the Greater Flint area. The AAHC works diligently to broaden understanding and appreciation of Arab culture as well as encourage Arab American involvement in civic, economic, and humanitarian efforts.

## Objectives

- To preserve and celebrate Arab heritage and culture and promote understanding within the Greater Flint community
- To unite Arab Americans in the Greater Flint area
- To support the needs of the Arab community at large with coordinated services
- To encourage Arab American involvement in community service and civic participation





# AAHC Programming

## **Celebrating Culture**

- Film Screenings & Festivals
- Musical Performances
- Artist Showcase

## **Educational Awareness**

- Book events
- University Presentation on Arab Identity
- Tabling at Community Events

## **Storytelling**

- Oral History
- Our Pioneers from Al Watan
- Community Video Series

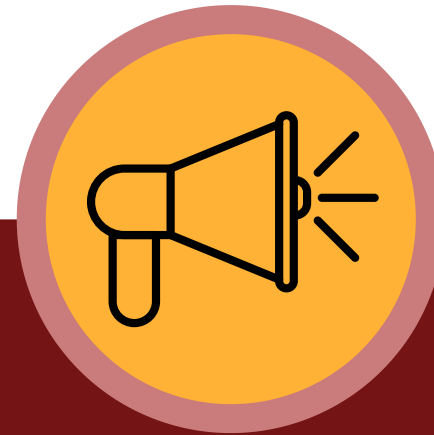
## **School/ Community Workshops**

- Arab identity
- Youth Groups
- English as a Second Language

# **Sustaining Arts and Culture Initiatives**



**Reframe  
Investment in  
the Arts**



**Intersecting  
Advocacy &  
Arts**



**Strengthening  
Relationships  
with Local  
Organizations**



# Current Projects

## WUJUD PODCAST



## ARTIST SHOWCASE



## Notable Partners

Community Foundation of Greater Flint



Arab American National Museum



Flint Institute of Art



Flint Institute of Music

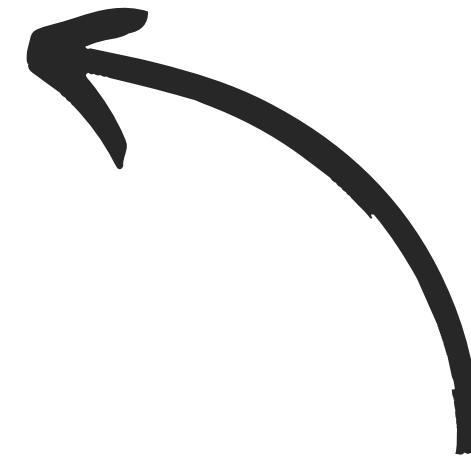
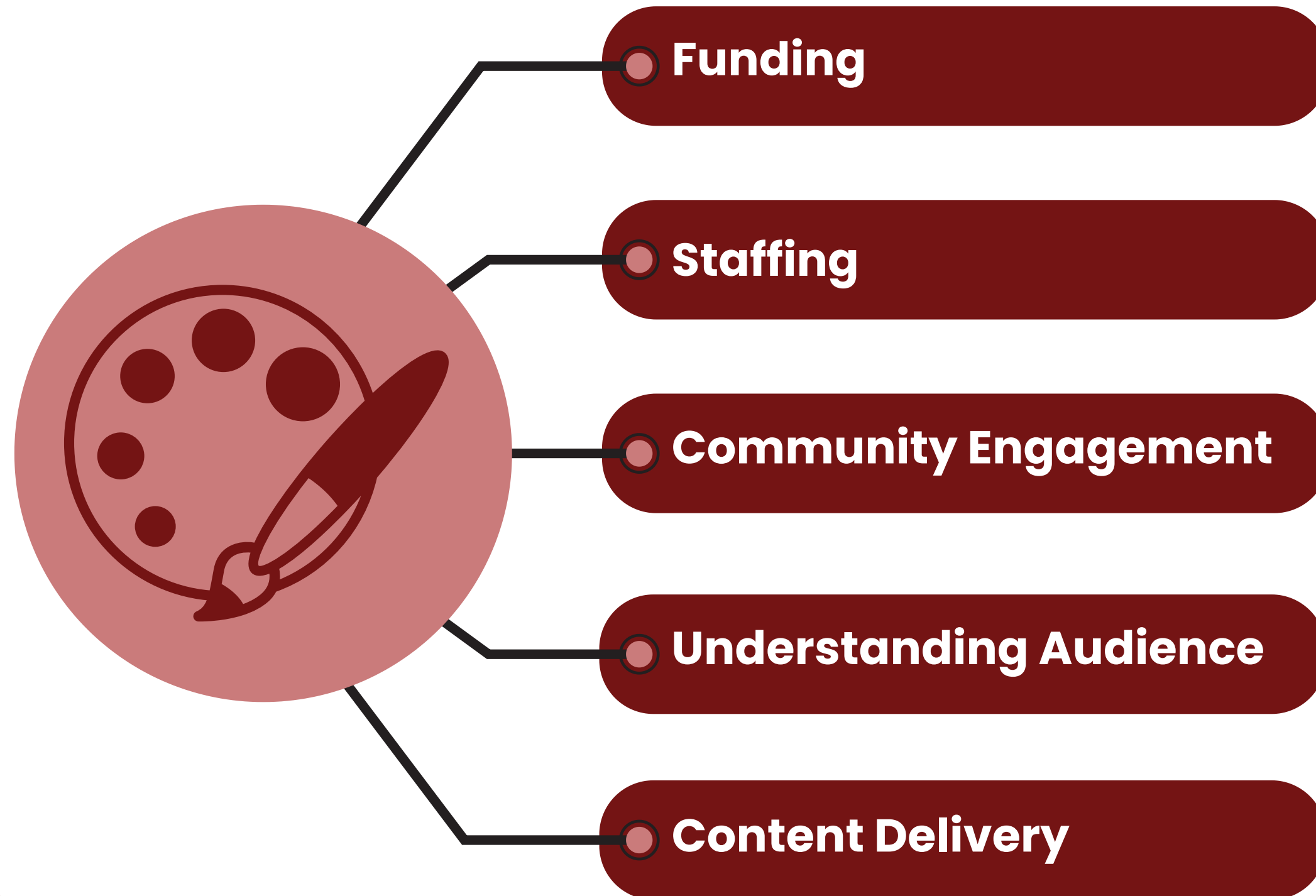


University of Michigan Flint





# Identifying Challenges & Proposing Solutions



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# Thank You

For Your Attention



Visit Our Website  
**aaahcflint.org**





# National ARAB ORCHESTRA

MICHAEL IBRAHIM, *Music Director*

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May 24 2023

CMEAA Commission on Middle East American Affairs

Dear Alexander Sahouri,

I trust this letter finds you well. On behalf of the National Arab Orchestra (NAO), I am writing to request your support in the form of a grant of \$50,000.

The NAO is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and integrating Arab culture by creating memorable musical experiences through education and performance with an emphasis on the musical traditions of the Arab World. This is a very exciting year for us as we enter our 15<sup>th</sup> season.

The NAO has made significant progress in achieving our mission since our last grant was awarded by CMEAA in 2018. Additional funding from CMEAA will enable us to expand our programs and reach more communities in Michigan.

Over the past year, the NAO has accomplished the following:

- Successfully rebounded from the restrictions of COVID
- Reignited our outreach programs to schools and community organizations, reaching more than 100 students and thousands of community members in Michigan. We will continue to build this outreach across all music classes in the state of Michigan, connecting with thousands of students organically bringing diverse groups of students to work together, thus building bridges through music. .
- We performed to sold-out performances featuring Arab music and culture, including collaborations with the University Musical Society, the Detroit Institute of Art, the Flint Institute of Music, The Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and the Kennedy Center.

Despite these successes, we recognize that there is still much work to be done in building bridges to create a greater understanding and appreciation of Arab culture in Michigan. With your continued support, we can expand our programs and reach more communities through education across the state.

- We will use the grant of \$50,000 to fund our educational programs, community outreach initiatives, and student performances. See the attached budget for details of how the funds will be used.

We are grateful for your past support and hope you will consider our request for additional funding. Your support will have a lasting impact on the lives of students and community members across Michigan. Thank you for considering our request, and please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,  
Sherri Richards,  
Executive Director

*-The National Arab Orchestra, Building Bridges Through Music-*



# BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH MUSIC

Brought  
to you by



National ARAB  
ORCHESTRA

MICHAEL IBRAHIM, *Music Director*

## *Art With A Purpose*

The Building Bridges Through Music (“BBTM”) program teaches students about the beauty and richness of the Arab culture while providing opportunities for cultural understanding and enrichment. With an initial grant from the Knight Foundation, the National Arab Orchestra (NAO) started Building Bridges Through Music (BBTM) in 2013 with several goals. One was to impact thousands of students by working with music teachers in their weekly music classes. More than 25 performances, with 2,000 students performing with the NAO, have been strategically developed and carried out. The program has been shared in 4 states, including Michigan, Florida, Texas, Massachusetts, and Ohio.



*Students from the Fordson High School and Edsel Ford High School choirs in Dearborn, Michigan perform with the National Arab Orchestra at a concert on March 4, 2023.*

We went from 12 students to educating thousands, and the NAO is sharing our successes to inspire you to donate to this educational cause and get involved in our inclusive program. BBTM is building heritage pride, connecting generations within the Arab community, and organically creating learning opportunities from other cultures through music. Here’s a **LINK** that showcases our diverse students in action.

**“I feel blessed to say that we have started to see the fruits of this program. I feel even more blessed to say that a continued collaboration will bring even more amazing results.”**

**– Matt Laura  
Fordson High School**

Here are a few additional videos that detail the BBTM program and highlight concerts with the students performing.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INj4QjGUNvA&t=3s>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWvi5zyhCks>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLBgkQZcvn0>

# *Building Bridges Through Music Impact:*

Because music is our universal language, we unite diverse students to foster awareness, love, and inclusion through music's united messaging.

- ◆ We highlight Arab heritage and culture as a learning and collaborative tool for community connection and understanding.
- ◆ We amplify collaborations and partnerships with both business and performing arts communities.
- ◆ We elevate culture while uniting 22 Arab countries for peace and love through music.
- ◆ We shape Arab identity from our ancestors' messages of unity by building self-esteem, confidence, and care for one another.
- ◆ We foster an inspired and engaged volunteer community.
- ◆ We provide education, transforming our students and filling a need for donors who care about education, music, and our children.

The BBTM infrastructure is expanding. Our Building Bridges through Music Program is building cultural bridges for thousands of middle and high school students in communities nationwide where the NAO has a presence. The youth participate in our six-week curriculum to empower and impact Arab and Non-Arab students. Arab students deepen their connection to their heritage, bridging generational differences by embracing the music their parents already know and love. Non-Arabic students are exposed to Arab culture, most often for the first time. They receive the opportunity to explore, understand and value the beauty of its rich culture and music. Collaborating with music departments in public schools, which culminates by performing on stage with the NAO, provides an often-transformative experience that enables students from diverse school districts at the same time to see music as a shared language, regardless of cultural background.



*A group of students recently attended and volunteered at an NAO concert in Houston in March of 2023.*

**"Listening to Arab music opened up yet another genre of music I never thought I would enjoy. It was a really cool and exciting new experience that took me outside of my comfort zone."**

**– Nathan W.  
Edsel Ford High School**

As we progress, BBTM is one of the NAO's significant initiatives for deepening and connecting communities. Right now, funds are needed for: teachers from the NAO to go into the classrooms, travel for students to events, and community outreach. We're excited for you to join BBTM. We have teachers in the schools standing by to get involved. The National Arab Orchestra (NAO) has been electrifying global audiences since 2009. Our innovative and engaging approach to performances reaches millions in organic social media while bridging cultural differences globally, creating opportunities for dialogue and cultural introspection. The NAO reaches nearly 35 million people annually in its social/digital footprint. <https://araborchestra.org/>

**To find out, get involved, donate, and get more information about this extraordinary program, contact our Executive Director, Sherri Richards: [Sherri@ArabOrchestra.org](mailto:Sherri@ArabOrchestra.org), (440) 289-8321.**

**Building Bridges Through Music**

**1870 High Schools in Michigan - 1701 public - 169 Private - Not all schools have a music program**

**This includes Community Events & Outreach. At least 200 students would perform with the NAO this next year.**

**Goal is to connect with 80% of the schools within 3 years Community Outreach ongoing**

Action/Activity	Budget	Comments
Create Database of Schools & Music Teachers	\$2,000	start with Schools DataBase software - merge with list provided by music teachers
Create Marketing Handout to describe program and tell the BBTM story	\$1,000	design the collateral
Print 2000 Brochures	\$1,500	print costs
Create mailing to teachers - Email & USPS	\$2,000	time & postage
Converting the curriculum in Michael's head/notes into a repeatable curriculum	\$4,000	
Contribution to Operating expenses to fully develop and implement the program	\$36,000	12 months @3K for impletentation, implementation and execution
Transporation costs to/from schools, and for students to come to concerts and community events	\$3,500	
	\$50,000	