

## The Civic Engagement Initiative

A recent ABC News/Washington Post poll revealed that 53% of Americans do not personally know a Muslim. In addition, 48% hold an unfavorable opinion of Islam, a higher percentage than what was found in similar polling conducted right after 9/11. However, another important piece of data in this same poll found that those who know a Muslim, or have an understanding of Islam, have much more positive views of the religion and its faith community.

One Nation, a philanthropic initiative that promotes pluralism and inclusion in America, is developing a major civic engagement initiative that is rooted in the belief affirmed by aforementioned polling data and strong anecdotal evidence that the more we know and understand each other, the more inclusive and stronger our communities and America will be.

One Nation is therefore helping Americans become better acquainted with each other on a person-to-person basis to help change misperceptions about American minority groups, with a current focus at this time on changing misperceptions of American Muslims. We are launching this kind of civic engagement initiative because we believe changing misperceptions and creating greater understanding of America's diversity ensures the full participation of all Americans in public life, no matter their background or religion, which helps build stronger and healthier communities across America.

### The Beginning

The concept of One Nation began with Mr. George F. Russell, Jr., the decades-long leader of one of the world's preeminent investment, management and financial advisory firms. After 9/11, Mr. Russell observed how Americans' fears about Muslims were dividing the country and leading to unfair targeting of American Muslims. He wanted to reverse that trend and began reaching out to American Muslim leaders to find out how they could best be supported to help America heal and strengthen its core values of liberty and justice for all.

The result was the formation of One Nation, an organization that promotes America's values of pluralism and inclusion of every American, no matter their background or religious belief. Mr. Russell pledged a great deal to One Nation to help change public misperceptions about American Muslims.

Through best practices and anecdotal experience, One Nation has learned that promoting effective person-to-person relationships coupled with community building is the best way to help accelerate changes in public misperceptions. One Nation has therefore developed and continues to refine its strategy around this simple yet powerful idea.

### What the Initiative Looks Like

Combining President Barack Obama's national call for public service with the simple idea that the more we know each other, the greater understanding we have, One Nation is developing two different civic engagement models to help cultivate strong personal relationships

among people from diverse communities across the country. We are doing this to help build more vibrant and inclusive communities that together will help build a more inclusive and pluralistic America. The core of this strategy involves the engagement of individual Americans, philanthropic institutions and local and national organizations that promote broad-based civic engagement and public service among American Muslims, their neighbors and American society at-large.

The first model is called the Midsize City Franchise model, which will bring together individuals and communities in medium-size cities across the U.S. The other model is the Large City Franchise Model, which will bring together individuals, communities, institutions and organizations in America's largest cities. Both of these models are being developed to be replicable, scalable and locally fundable so that they can be easily implemented in cities across the U.S.

These civic engagement models, which are the central vehicles of our civic engagement strategy, are explained below.

### Midsize City Franchise Model – Tacoma, WA

One Nation has partnered with Tacoma/Pierce County Habitat For Humanity located in Tacoma, WA, to develop and help finance new eco-friendly homes for a community of 12 families. As with all Habitat projects, the homes will be built by volunteers. For the One Nation model, the volunteers will consist of congregations from multi-faith communities representing several groups of Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and Native Americans. Through the process of working on their homes together and breaking bread, these 12 families will become familiar with each other's lives and beliefs and form the nucleus of a well-networked multi-cultural community that will not only have a transformative effect now, but impact generations to come.

This model provides ample opportunity for an integrated community of children to attend the same schools and bring civic-minded parents together to participate in community-building events. It creates opportunities for America's next generation to learn and embrace important values such as diversity, pluralism, cooperation, and mutual respect. The creation of eco-friendly, sustainable housing, with volunteers learning new skills in home building, will lead to job creation, especially in the emerging "green jobs" sector. A national program-related investment (PRI) model is being developed to enable this model of engagement and development to be initiated by qualified housing groups throughout the country.

## **Large City Franchise Model – Chicago, IL**

More than 400,000 American Muslims live in the Chicago region. One Nation has designed a multi-tiered approach to unite and facilitate lasting partnerships between the region's Muslim community and institutions, organizations and communities that make up the Chicagoland area. This model of engagement includes an online film competition, a series of community dialogues, and community investment funding.

### **Online Film Competition**

- In 2007 and 2008, One Nation and Link TV partnered to create a nationwide online film competition to educate filmmakers and online viewers about the American Muslim experience. The competition received national media coverage, which amplified the stories' positive messages and helped multitudes of Americans connect with the diversity of American Muslim life.
- One Nation is taking this nationwide competition and scaling it locally to create a 2009 Chicago film competition that will focus on how all Chicago residents — people of all faiths, traditions and backgrounds — have assisted one another in overcoming difficulties during the current economic crisis and also how Chicagoans are dealing with local issues affecting their neighborhoods.
- Filmmaking workshops will be held in various communities throughout Chicago to help the general public develop effective storytelling techniques.
- Online viewers will have the opportunity to watch the films and be part of on-going online conversations that add to the discussions introduced by the films.
- Screening and voting events will be held throughout the Chicago region to raise the visibility of the initiative.
- Winners selected by the voters at these events will receive cash prizes for their films and have them televised to millions of viewers via Link TV and other media and venues.

### **Community Dialogues**

The focal point of the online film competition is its promotion of community conversation throughout the Chicagoland area, facilitated primarily by American Muslims. One Nation and our partners believe that to overcome misperceptions of Muslims and the Muslim community — neighbors, colleagues, community leaders and ordinary citizens must engage each other on the basis of person-to-person relationships.

#### **To make the Community Dialogues a reality and success:**

- One Nation and its partners will mobilize Muslim and other volunteer facilitators to guide the conversations during the Community Dialogues.
- Facilitators will be given training that includes increased leadership and development capability, storytelling, and other important skills they will use in future community organizational activities.
- One Nation will fund Community Dialogues — focusing on pre-existing organizations and networks such as Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis, business CEOs, government agencies, and educators as well as school administrators of both private and public schools.
- One Nation and its partners will screen selected clips from the online film competition about relevant issues to stimulate

conversation and larger community discussions.

- Dialogue participants will have the opportunity to hear firsthand from an American Muslim about his or her own personal experiences in Chicago and vice versa.
- Community Dialogues will inspire participants to initiate additional conversations and community-service partnerships through service clubs and gatherings, consequently introducing Chicagoans unfamiliar with Muslims to their American Muslim neighbors. One Nation anticipates an easily replicable process that can be presented at any organizational luncheon or meeting. This dialogue process can also become a part of any organizational or corporate diversity training.

### **Community Investment Fund**

Bringing American Muslims together with their neighbors creates an opportunity for partnership in civic engagement and community service, which improves the quality of life for all.

- One Nation is committed to contributing the necessary resources to the Chicago Community Trust, our major philanthropic partner in Chicago. This commitment will fund the online film competition, training sessions, meetings, staffing and additional grant-making opportunities.
- Initial funding by One Nation will allow local philanthropists and the people of Chicago opportunities to participate in fundraising for new and innovative local projects.
- This fund will offer an opportunity to engage the Chicago Muslim population in philanthropy and civic engagement on a broader scale.
- In succeeding years, One Nation's financial investment in the fund will decrease as local funding increases, resulting in a community-based, self-sustaining fund.

As with the Midsize City model, One Nation's objective is to help replicate the Large City model throughout the country over the next five years.

### **How You Can Join Us**

One Nation's social change models are built on the simple concept that individuals strengthen the foundations of their diverse communities when they become familiar with that which is otherwise unfamiliar. Traditional barriers are broken and bridges for dialogue and cooperation develop. It all starts with a conversation — in this case the online film competition. By bringing up important issues for everyone in the community, the film contest will allow conversations to start that will then evolve into broader community dialogues that include neighbors, community groups, service organizations, faith communities and people of all traditions and backgrounds. These opportunities for community members from diverse backgrounds to unite over shared concerns will lead to increased respect and understanding of shared values and interests as well as differences among people of all faiths and backgrounds and allow individuals to see that communities can become healthier and more vibrant when everyone feels welcome to participate, not just a few.

The time for change is now and One Nation is ready to help make it happen. After all, we are "One Nation, with liberty and justice for all!"