



# ANNUAL REPORT 2018

CONVICTION

RESPECT

GENEROSITY

SACRIFICE

ACTION

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Asalamu Alaikum,**

2018 has been a year of ups and downs for the American Muslim community. However, as I reflect on all that has happened, I can't help but feel a sense of hope. In April, Kalia Abiade and I were in Washington, D.C., on the day the Supreme Court was hearing the oral arguments on the travel ban. While the Supreme Court ultimately ruled to uphold the ban, what I remember most about that day is how many of our community members and allies—many of whom Pillars has been supporting for years—were organizing both inside and outside of the courtroom. This presence was the result of years of building community, nurturing trust and cooperating to show up together.

Every year since Pillars launched in 2010 has been rewarding, thrilling, and challenging in its own way. But 2018 stands out as the year we intentionally deepened our work with community organizations to construct a foundation of talent and programming that we can build on. As part of this commitment, Pillars made a significant investment in small gatherings and events with the purpose of creating spaces to have difficult conversations about the most pressing issues facing our community. From conversations on gender-based violence in the Muslim community to ways to help American Muslims launch their political careers, Pillars was at the forefront of some of the most important conversations happening about our community.

We also launched some exciting partnerships, including one with the **Pop Culture Collaborative** that aims to reimagine and recreate the ways American Muslims show up in popular culture. These types of bold ventures are what Pillars has become known for and what we hope to continue in 2019 and beyond.

Pillars is an organization that would not exist without our incredible network of donors and trustees. Your dedication to the cause of amplifying and investing in American Muslim voices is what makes our work a reality. Stewarding your philanthropic dollars is our most important responsibility and the one we take most pride in.

We are excited to share this year's recommended grants along with some important highlights and achievements from 2018. Since our inception, more than 400 organizations have applied for a Pillars grant with the process becoming more competitive each passing year. Our team worked tirelessly to curate a docket of grants that will support some of the most necessary and innovative work in our community.

On behalf of the entire Pillars team, thank you for your continued support and trust. We are truly excited and optimistic about the future of our community.



**Kashif Shaikh**

Co-Founder and Executive Director



Table of Contents

**PILLARS TEAM 2**

**PILLARS OVERVIEW 4**

**2018 YEAR IN REVIEW 10**

**2018 HIGHLIGHTS 12**

**GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT 14**

**SPOTLIGHT 16**

**GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT 18**

**POWER OF PILLARS 20**

**GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT 22**

**ZAKAT ELIGIBILITY 23**

**OUR PARTNERS 24**

# PILLARS TEAM



**KALIA ABIADE**

*Director of Programs*



**RANDA KUZIEZ**

*Manager of Community Relations*





**AMIRAH FAUZI**  
*Program Associate*



**SARAH KOWALCZYK**  
*Manager of Operations*



**KASHIF SHAIKH**  
*Co-Founder and Executive Director*

## PILLARS OVERVIEW

# OVERVIEW



Pillars amplifies the voices, talents and leadership of American Muslims to expand rights and opportunities for all people.

Founded by a small collective of individual philanthropists, Pillars has grown into a community of grassroots leaders, advocates, media makers, educators, and entrepreneurs who believe Muslims have a critical role to play in movements for social change in the United States. Since our start in 2010, Pillars has invested more than \$3 million in organizations and individuals who are creating a deeper understanding of our complex communities, and who are driving people to learn more and take action. Our grants and partnerships support a fierce combination of emerging and established American Muslim leaders who are transforming our society.

Pillars is helping to build a long-term movement infrastructure through three core programs:

### **Grants**

Our grants and sponsorships support programs and projects as well as leadership development and organizational capacity to strengthen the American Muslim civic engagement community as a whole.

### **Collaborative Giving**

Pillars offers a unique opportunity for individual donors to collaborate with philanthropic institutions, learn more about social movements, and work together to address the current needs of American Muslim communities while building for the next generation.

### **Partnerships**

We work collectively with our partner organizations to increase access and representation for American Muslims to influence decisions that impact us, advance inquiry and knowledge, and use arts, culture, and media to build public will.

## Grantmaking Context

When Pillars began, the goal was to come together to support the American Muslim sector and, collectively, go further than any one of us could go alone. We wanted to back organizations and people who were pushing our society to reimagine and better understand American Muslims and who were striving to improve the well-being of people and communities all around us. Pillars wanted and needed to help our people respond to urgent legal and policy needs, while they also worked toward long-term ways to fundamentally reshape the systems that target us and stand in the way of a more just and inclusive society.

This past year has taught us so much about how we work in the community and tested us in ways that remind us how far we still have to go.

### **In 2018,**

- We witnessed the organizations we support rally to raise awareness about the dangers of the president's travel ban and fight to keep it from becoming permanent. We stood with them in the rain, on the steps of the Supreme Court as the Justices heard the case, and we shared in the disappointment when the Court upheld the third iteration of this cruel and unnecessary policy.
- We have witnessed the determination of our communities as they commanded the attention of elected leaders and those seeking to represent us. Throughout the year, we have seen the power of showing up with information—and demands—and in solidarity with other communities, whether as concerned individuals, as voters or even as candidates for public office.

- We are witnessing community members push to eradicate all forms of racism, prejudice, hate violence, and silencing. This includes an emerging effort—led by Muslim women scholars and advocates—to rise together to demand an end to spiritual abuse and sexual violence in our sacred spaces as broader movements reverberate and shake our society into consciousness and action.

Some of the victories have been clear; some of the setbacks clearer. But we know that even a straight path to progress may not always be smooth.

As we look to 2019, we are excited about the possibilities that lie ahead. With this round of grants, we are eager to continue helping our communities build local leadership and organize power. We are thrilled to support creative cultural projects that are transforming our conversations. And we are intent on nurturing safer spaces and creating avenues for deep healing. Pillars is often the first-ever funder for many organizations, and we've seen how a Pillars grant can have a catalytic effect. As our country continues to struggle toward its promise of liberty and equality for all, we reaffirm our commitment to American Muslim visionaries and community leaders.

## GRANTMAKING OVERVIEW

# OVERVIEW

### Process

# 1

#### **We seek out talented leaders and exciting opportunities.**

In 2018, we continued our efforts to identify organizations and individuals to partner with. Throughout the year, we attend events and workshops, follow up on referrals, participate in one-on-one conversations, nurture relationships and conduct ongoing research to learn as much as we can about the organizations and individuals leading the work.

# 2

#### **We encourage organizations and projects from across the U.S. to submit their ideas.**

This year, more than 200 organizations and project teams submitted formal letters of inquiry through our grant portal, underscoring an overwhelming need in our communities not only for funding but for organizational support and networking opportunities that strengthen capacity and increase the potential for long-term impact. While we cannot fund each idea that comes our way, this process helps us better understand the landscape of organizations and entities working in and alongside American Muslim communities, what strengths and challenges exist, and what types of support our nonprofits need most.

# 3

#### **We invite selected applicants to submit a full proposal then conduct a thorough assessment.**

From this pool of submissions, we invited about a third to submit full proposals for a deeper review. The assessment at this stage is a comprehensive consideration process, which includes interviews with organization and project leads, site visits, event attendance, document analysis, feedback from other peers and funders, and a financial review. During this stage, we also begin to better understand how organizations and projects may complement one another or how they may already be in collaboration with each other.





# 4

**We present our recommendations to the Board of Trustees for review and a final vote.**

At its core, Pillars is a network of generous American Muslim donors who believe collective action can transform society and achieve social change. Our annual allocation meeting is a forum for our trustees to learn more about the most pressing issues facing philanthropy and American Muslim nonprofits and hear directly from some of the leaders at the forefront of this work. After learning more about each staff-recommended organization, trustees make the final decision about who receives a Pillars Community Infrastructure Fund grant.

# 5

**We deepen our relationships with grantee partners and provide ongoing support.**

Our relationships with our grantee partners cannot end with the disbursement of a check. Pillars staff is available throughout the year to provide consultation to grantee partners, to make connections with other organizations and potential funders and to act as a thought partner as they shape and implement their work. We also connect our grantee partners to professional development opportunities including board training, media workshops, leadership coaching, digital security training and more.

# 6

**We conduct periodic assessments and collaborate with grantee partners to strengthen their work.**

Pillars staff tracks grantee partner performance throughout the year based on the goals outlined in the final grant proposal and signed agreement. We document media mentions and appearances, attend events, hold one-on-one meetings and site visits, and conduct formal and informal check-ins with our grantee partners. This process allows organization leaders to reflect on the progress of their stated goals and make adjustments as needed. It also allows Pillars to learn more about the work on the frontlines, track trends and challenges in the field, and continuously reassess our own grantmaking aims.

# GRANTMAKING OVERVIEW

# OVERVIEW

## Strategy

### CHANGE AND BUILD

At Pillars, we recognize there are many pathways to a just, vibrant society. We aim to help cultivate an American Muslim community that is more informed, powerful and influential in spaces where decisions about us are being made. To help us get there, we focus on efforts that **change** norms and **build** infrastructure to advance three priorities:



#### Rights

We support social and policy change efforts that allow American Muslims to live and thrive with dignity and that protect and expand the human and civil rights of us all.



#### Wellness

We support the growth and nurturing of whole, healthy American Muslim communities that are equipped to serve those nearest to them and society at large.



#### Understanding

We support a range of approaches to amplify American Muslim voices, create a deeper understanding of American Muslims and American society, and encourage people to learn more and take action.

Because strong leaders and institutions are key to advancing these priorities, we also invest in leadership development and organizational capacity to strengthen the American Muslim civic engagement community as a whole.

### CHANGE POLICY: RIGHTS

We support social and policy change efforts that allow American Muslims to live and thrive with dignity and that protect and expand the human and civil rights of us all. This includes but is not limited to

#### Opportunity and accessibility

- Grassroots organizing and activism rooted in American Muslim community and priorities
- Local, state, and federal policy advocacy and strategic litigation
- Eradicating inequity/injustice

#### Civic participation and engagement

- Nonpartisan outreach and political accountability
- Nonpartisan integrated voter engagement
- Know Your Rights trainings
- Public forums and debate

#### Counteracting bias, discrimination, hate speech and violence

- Tracking and documenting incidents and purveyors of anti-Muslim discrimination
- Awareness and solidarity campaigns to challenge bigotry and discrimination

## **BUILD HEALTHY COMMUNITIES: WELLNESS**

We support the growth and nurturing of whole, healthy American Muslim communities that are equipped to serve those nearest to them and society at-large. This includes but is not limited to:

### **Healthy individuals**

- Spiritual growth
- Mental and behavioral health education and support
- Access to other medical care and basic needs

### **Healthy communities**

- Institution building
- Community development initiatives
- Campaigns to expand food access and protect the environment

### **Intra-community relations**

- Physical and virtual space for difficult but important community conversations
- Educational and learning opportunities
- Campaigns to reduce stigma and other barriers to seeking mental health treatment and support

## **CHANGE CULTURE: UNDERSTANDING**

We support a range of approaches to amplify American Muslim voices, create a deeper understanding of American Muslims and American society, and encourage people to learn more and take action. This includes but is not limited to:

### **Research**

- Inquiry and data cultivation that informs strategy and solutions
- Increased public awareness of major issues and findings

### **Arts, Media, and Culture**

- Visual, literary, performing, and multidisciplinary arts designed to inspire social change
- Scholarship and thought-leadership on critical social issues

- Innovative approaches to news media outreach and engagement

### **Bridge-building**

- Interfaith and inter-community alliance building
- Seminarian/chaplain enrichment

## **BUILD INFRASTRUCTURE: STRONG LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTIONS**

We recognize that leadership development and strong institutions are key to advancing rights, nurturing wellness, and expanding understanding. In addition to investing in those key areas, we invest in individual leaders and institutions to strengthen the American Muslim civic engagement community as a whole. This includes but is not limited to:

### **Leadership development**

- Unique opportunities for American Muslims to expand individual capacity to lead and serve others
- Programs tailored to underserved and/or underrepresented segments of community

### **Convenings**

- Intra-community and inter-community meetings and retreats to set priorities, advance strategy, and strengthen networking around critical social and community issues

### **Skill-building opportunities**

- Media trainings
- Nonprofit 101 courses
- Webinars

### **Capacity building**

- Strategic planning
- Board development
- Evaluation support

## 2018 YEAR IN REVIEW

# 2018 YEAR IN REVIEW

## 2018 Grantees

### American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute

Los Angeles, CA  
**Founded:** 2006  
**Grant Type:** General Support

### Brooklyn Historical Society

Brooklyn, NY  
**Founded:** 1863  
**Grant Type:** Program/Project

### Chicago History Museum

Chicago, IL  
**Founded:** 1856  
**Grant Type:** Program/Project

### Children's Museum of Manhattan

New York, NY  
**Founded:** 1973  
**Grant Type:** Program/Project

### CUNY CLEAR Project

New York, NY  
**Founded:** 2009  
**Grant Type:** General Support

### Hamdard Healthcare

Chicago, IL  
**Founded:** 1992  
**Grant Type:** Community Health Education

### Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN)

Chicago, IL  
**Founded:** 1997  
**Grant Type:** General Support

### Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC)

Chicago, IL  
**Founded:** 2002  
**Grant Type:** General Support

### International Museum of Muslim Cultures

Jackson, MS  
**Founded:** 2001  
**Grant Type:** General Support

### Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU)

Dearborn, MI & Washington, DC  
**Founded:** 2002  
**Grant Type:** General Support

### Jetpac Inc

Cambridge, MA  
**Founded:** 2015  
**Grant Type:** General Support

### MUHCEN

Naperville, IL  
**Founded:** 2014  
**Grant Type:** Capacity Building

### Muslim Advocates

Oakland, CA  
**Founded:** 2005  
**Grant Type:** General Support

### Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative

Southfield, MI & Alta Loma, CA  
**Founded:** 2014  
**Grant Type:** General Support

### Muslim Wellness Foundation

Philadelphia, PA  
**Founded:** 2011  
**Grant Type:** Capacity Building

### MPower Change

New York, NY  
**Founded:** 2016  
**Grant Type:** General Support

### PICO Muslim Community Organizing Project

Washington, DC  
**Founded:** 1972  
**Grant Type:** Program/Project

### Project South

Atlanta, GA  
**Founded:** 1986  
**Grant Type:** General Support

### Ta'leef Collective

Fremont, CA  
**Founded:** 2005  
**Grant Type:** General Support

### Unity Productions

Potomac Falls, VA  
**Founded:** 1999  
**Grant Type:** Program/Project





## 2018 Sponsorships

Sponsorships create opportunities for Pillars to back efforts or organizations at critical stages of their development as they experiment, build, or take action in a moment of urgency. Our sponsorships are typically \$5,000 or less, proving that a small financial contribution can have a big impact. Sometimes, as in the Hurma Project, these are efforts to address a community crisis. At other times, as in the case of the Sapelo Square Strategic Planning Retreat, they are opportunities to support an emerging organization as they map out their strengths and plan for the road ahead. **Pillars sponsorships help develop leadership and skills, fortify organizations, bring leaders together, and deepen partnerships with leading civic organizations.**

Music4Change

Association of Campus Muslim  
Chaplains National Conference

Georgia Muslim Voter Project  
National Civic Engagement  
Convening

Sapelo Square Strategic  
Planning Retreat

Hurma Project Convening to  
Address Spiritual Abuse, Sexual  
Abuse and Gender Based Violence

Black Muslim Psychology  
Conference

Define American Film Festival

We Are All America Convening  
Muslim Philanthropy Initiative

Center on Muslim  
Philanthropy Course

The Feeling of Being Watched  
Chicago Screening and Launch

United States Artists

Engage Civic Engagement  
Video Series

Chicago Public Media WBEZ Dinner

## MOVEMENT VOTER PROJECT (MVP) + PILLARS MIDTERM MINI-GRANTS

In the fall of 2018, the Movement Voter Project and Pillars partnered to distribute \$25,000 in mini-grants to support local, nonpartisan voter engagement work ahead of the Midterm Elections. From Tennessee to South Dakota and Texas to Pennsylvania, these community-driven efforts are part of much larger and longer-term efforts to educate, empower and mobilize American Muslim communities.

### The following 11 organizations received an MVP + Pillars mini-grant:

Poligon Education Fund,  
Washington D.C.

DRIVE Project, Colorado

Georgia Muslim Voter Project,  
Georgia

CAIR Houston, Texas

American Muslim Advisory Council,  
Tennessee

Muslims for Progress, New York

South Dakota Voices for Peace,  
South Dakota

CAIR Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

National Network of Arab American  
Communities, Michigan

Reviving the Islamic Sisterhood  
for Empowerment, Minnesota

Milwaukee Muslim Women's  
Coalition, Wisconsin

2018 HIGHLIGHTS

# 2018 HIGHLIGHTS



## On the Table

In May, Pillars Fund hosted an On The Table Conversation as part of the Chicago Community Trust's initiative to bring people together; our topic was "Generosity to Justice." On the Table is an annual forum that invites Chicagoans to gather and explore ways we can make our communities stronger.

*"Are we listening to what people say about us? Or are we listening to what we say about ourselves?"*

**Imam Tariq I. El-Amin**  
Host of Radio Islam





## The Feeling of Being Watched

In October, Pillars Fund alongside the MacArthur Foundation and Chicago Media Project sponsored a community screening of *The Feeling of Being Watched* for the Chicago Muslim & Arab community. *The Feeling of Being Watched*, is an award-winning documentary film that investigates decades of government surveillance in Bridgeview's Muslim & Arab community. Following the screening, community members held a town hall discussion focused on healing and collective trauma.



*"It's been deeply moving to hear audiences' reflections around the country, and it's clearly only the tip of the deeper conversations that are possible and to come."*

### **Anya Rous**

Co-Producer, *The Feeling of Being Watched* & Head of Partnerships, Multitude Films



## American Hate

In August, Pillars Fund in collaboration with Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP) hosted a lunch and dialogue with Arjun Sethi, author of *American Hate: Survivors Speak Out*. The book is a collection of stories, those of 13 lives impacted by different forms of hate violence during and after the 2016 presidential election.

*"Combating hate is grueling, all-encompassing, and necessary work that requires funding to sustain itself. The least we can do as grantmakers and practitioners in philanthropy is minimize the barriers between these organizations and their funding sources."*

### **Amirah Fauzi**

Pillars Fund Program Associate from her article "Philanthropy's Place in American Hate"

## GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

### Muslim Wellness Foundation

*"I have always felt that for Pillars, providing monetary support for the Muslim Wellness Foundation was not simply a financial investment. It was an investment in an expansive mission and vision for wellness and healing in the American Muslim community and the pivotal role my organization can play in achieving those goals."*

**Kameelah Mu'Min Rashad**

Founder & President, Muslim Wellness Foundation

#### WHY PILLARS SUPPORTS MUSLIM WELLNESS FOUNDATION

The Muslim Wellness Foundation is dedicated to promoting healing and reducing the stigma associated with mental illness, addiction, and trauma through dialogue, education, and training. With programming such as the Deeply Rooted Emerging Leaders (DREL) Fellowship for Black Muslim youth from across the United States to their annual Black Muslim Psychology Conference, their innovative approach to wellness is holistic, intersectional, and justice-oriented. By refocusing their proposed budget on board growth, strategic planning, and brand development, Muslim Wellness Foundation is positioning itself to create a long-lasting impact in our communities.



#### ABOUT MWF

**Founded:** 2011

**Location:** Philadelphia, PA

**Grant Type:** Capacity Building



# MUSLIM WELLNESS FOUNDATION



## SPOTLIGHT

### East of La Brea

# SPOTLIGHT

*"There are so many different versions and my hope would be that everyone gets a shot at telling their version, so it doesn't feel like oh, this is the one Muslim show that needs to make it."*

#### **Sameer Gardezi**

Creator and Executive Producer of *East of La Brea*

Sameer Gardezi, an award winning television writer who has written for *Modern Family*, *Outsourced*, among others, created *East of La Brea* in partnership with Pillars grantee MuslimARC. With grant support from the Pop Culture Collaborative, Sameer and the team at MuslimARC curated a diverse writers room to work together with community leaders to write a digital scripted series. The result: A story about two American Muslim women navigating the challenges that come with being a twenty something in America today. Acclaimed director and producer Paul Feig produced the project through his newly formed digital content company, Powderkeg Media, and Pillars was proud to make a grant to the project.

 Leila Fadel, "Muslims Are Having a Hollywood Moment." *NPR* 30 October 2018







# EAST OF LA BREA

## GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

### Brooklyn Historical Society

*"While we are deeply grateful for the financial support from the Pillars Fund, we are equally honored to receive its endorsement of our work. It is Brooklyn Historical Society's hope that, in addition to creating an online research repository dedicated to Muslim voices, Muslims in Brooklyn will serve as a model for similar projects in other cities across the country."*

**Deborah Schwartz**

President, Brooklyn Historical Society

#### WHY PILLARS SUPPORTS BHS

Brooklyn Historical Society is one of Brooklyn's oldest and most respected cultural organizations. With a world-renowned archive and cutting-edge education center, Brooklyn Historical Society is a hub for community dialogue. Their multifaceted project, "Muslims in Brooklyn," led by Oral Historian Zaheer Ali, captures how Muslims in Brooklyn are Brooklynites, both shaping and being shaped by life in Brooklyn, a quintessential stronghold of American history and identity. Brooklyn Historical Society's approach to collecting and exhibiting oral histories is innovative and deeply rooted in the borough's Muslim communities, and lays out a compelling template for other Muslims communities to collect and share their long and living histories in the U.S.



#### ABOUT BHS

**Founded:** 1863

**Location:** Brooklyn, NY

**Grant Type:** Program/Project



# BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY









## POWER OF PILLARS

*"What attracted me most to Pillars is its focus on making investments with a long-term perspective and its support of bold initiatives and partnerships. Pillars provides critical thought leadership in the American philanthropic sector and has elevated the ambitions and standards of American Muslim philanthropic organizations."*

**Sameer Shamsi**  
Board of Trustees



A woman wearing a maroon hijab and a dark blue long-sleeved top is speaking into a black microphone. She is positioned on the left side of the frame, looking towards the right. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. A diagonal white line cuts across the bottom right corner of the image.

# INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL POLICY AND UNDER- STANDING

## GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

### Institute for Social Policy and Understanding

*"Pillars has been a catalytic and foundational partner to ISPU since its inception, allowing ISPU both to build capacity as an anchor institution within the American Muslim space and conduct groundbreaking research and education projects that have laid the foundation for so many others to do their work smarter and more effectively."*

**Meira Neggaz**

Executive Director, ISPU

#### WHY PILLARS SUPPORTS ISPU

The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) is a research and education organization that believes inclusion in relevant, rigorous research will help Muslims become strong and equal participants in a pluralistic America. The data that drives policy and programming across the nation has historically excluded marginalized populations, including American Muslims. ISPU is unique, in that the questions they answer using their data collection methods actively include the needs and narratives of a diverse American Muslim population



#### ABOUT ISPU

**Founded:** 2002

**Location:** Dearborn, MI &  
Washington, D.C.

**Grant Type:** General Support



# ZAKAT ELIGIBILITY

In 2017, the Pillars Fund was recognized as a zakat-eligible charity by Dr. Mohammad Fadel, Associate Professor & Canada Research Chair for the Law and Economics of Islamic Law at the University of Toronto. The opinion states: "It is appropriate for a Muslim to believe that paying money to Pillars, provided that it is coupled with the proper religious intention, satisfies his/her religious obligation to pay zakat, given the reasonable basis such a donor would have for concluding that money entrusted to Pillars is used exclusively to further goals that serve the American Muslim community, and God knows best."

Pillars provides this opinion and recognizes it is one opinion, and the final decision to accept or reject this opinion is the donor's choice. Pillars also provides a list of our grantees that have their own zakat opinion, if donors choose to make their decision based on the individual grants.

God knows best.

Y

#MY  
MUSLIM  
VOTE

[mymuslimvote.org](http://mymuslimvote.org)

pledge to vote on Tuesday, November 6th



OUR PARTNERS





**For more information contact us at:**

[Info@PillarsFund.org](mailto:Info@PillarsFund.org)

[PillarsFund.org](http://PillarsFund.org)