

Recruiting Members of Arab and Chaldean Descent

Profile of Americans of Arab and Chaldean Descent

- There is evidence of Arab immigration to the U.S. that dates back hundreds of years; however, the first major wave of these immigrants occurred during the Great Migration (1880 – 1924) from the present-day countries of Palestine/Israel, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.
- Today, an estimated 3.5 million Americans of Arab descent live in all 50 states. However, two-thirds reside in 10 states; one third of the total reside in California, New York and Michigan. Lebanese Americans comprise 39% of the Arab American population; however, the descendants represent over 22 countries, such as Egypt, Algeria, Libya and Tunisia.
- The majority (63%) of Arab Americans are Christian, while 24% are Muslim.
- While the Arab American population is diverse, in general, there is a strong commitment to family, economic and educational achievements.
- In 2000, there were approximately 120,000 Chaldeans in the Metropolitan Detroit area and an estimated 35,000 more Chaldeans throughout the United States.
- Examples of words with Arabic roots – algebra, alcohol, alkali and alcove
- Examples of famous Arab Americans – Donna Shalala (former Secretary of the U.S., Health and Human Services and current President of the University of Miami); Helen Thomas (former UPI journalist known as the dean of the White House press corps); Doug Flutie (San Diego Chargers quarterback and winner of the Heisman trophy); John Mack (Board Chairman and CEO of Morgan Stanley); Paula Abdul (singer and *American Idol* judge); F. Murray Abraham (Academy Award winner actor); and Dr. Ahmed H. Zewali (winner of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry).

Strategies to Build Relationships with Arab and Chaldean Communities

1. Attend events and activities hosted by these ethnic groups. Go alone to reduce the temptation of being present in body only. Introduce yourself to as many people as you can. Identify leaders and, later, set up appointments to ask recommendations on how to promote your program.
2. Find ways your AmeriCorps group can partner with these groups. For instance, ACCESS (Dearborn, MI) sponsors a National Arab American Service Day that features service projects across the country (see resources for more information).
3. Check your local colleges and universities for student associations associated with people of Arab and/or Chaldean descent. Ask if you could make a presentation to the group about your AmeriCorps program.

Once you begin to enroll members from these communities, word-of-mouth will become another primary vehicle for finding future potential recruits. However, continuing success

with recruitment in these communities will depend upon whether the first members you recruit have a good experience. If you are unfamiliar with these ethnic groups, be sure not to make the following mistakes that will serve to alienate your members:

1. Don't assume that every person of Arab or Chaldean descent is Muslim. As stated in the profile, the majority are Christians.
2. Not all Muslims are of Arab descent.
3. Just because some of the members of these communities have accents, does not mean they are not American citizens.
4. Depending on the region of the country, some members of these communities would prefer to specifically indicate that they are of Arab or Chaldean heritage, rather than choose "white" as their racial group. This option should be provided on enrollment forms, where appropriate.
5. Enrollment forms should provide a place for members to indicate if they have any dietary restrictions, so – if necessary – members may have the opportunity to specify whether their food must be Halal.
6. Conservative American Muslim women may wear a hijab, but their tastes in popular culture, sports, entertainment, and fashion will tend to be typical of the general population of their age group.
7. Initially, some conservative American Muslims will not want their picture taken. Be sure to respect their preferences and find a tactful way to deal with the matter, when taking group photos.

Glossary

Arab American – An American who is a descendent of Arabic-speaking people, primarily from southwestern Asia and North Africa.

Chaldean American – An American descendant of indigenous people of Iraq, who largely practice Catholicism. Their ancestors spoke a form of Aramaic, but many also spoke Arabic.

Halal – In the U.S., it usual refers to food permissible to be eaten by Muslims under Islamic law.

Hijab – the Arabic term for "cover," which in Western countries primarily refers to a women's head and body covering.

Islam - is a monotheistic Abrahamic religion originating with the teachings of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, a seventh century Arab religious and political figure.

Muslim - an adherent of Islam, meaning "one who submits (to God)."

Qur'an – The central religious text of Islam.

Ramadan – A Muslim religious observance that takes place during the nine month of the Islamic calendar, providing a time for worship and contemplation. Muslims fast during the daylight hours and in the evening eat small meals and visit with friends and family to strengthen family and community ties.

Resources

Arab American Institute - represents the policy and community interests of Arab Americans throughout the United States and strives to promote Arab American participation in the U.S. electoral system. Location: 1600 K Street, NW, Suite 601, Washington, D.D. 20006. <http://www.aaiusa.org/>

Arab American National Museum - the first museum dedicated to the history and culture of Arab Americans. Location: 13624 Michigan Avenue, Dearborn, MI 48126. <http://www.arabamericanmuseum.org/>

Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce - a partnership of Chaldean businesses and professionals. Location: 4550 Dequindre Road, Shelby Township, MI 48317. <http://www.chaldeanchamber.com/joomla/index.php>

“National Arab American Service Day,” National Network of Arab American Communities. <http://www.nnaac.org/programs/serviceday.htm>

Network of Arab-American Professionals (NAAP) - a non-partisan, volunteer-based organization dedicated to strengthening the Arab-American community. <http://www.naaponline.org/>

“NNAAC Members,” National Network of Arab American Communities. <http://www.nnaac.org/members/index.htm>