Policing the Middle East in Middle America

An Analysis of Counterterror Community Policing in Dearborn, Michigan

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Table of Contents

[Abstract 3](#_Toc38654570)

[Introduction 3](#_Toc38654571)

[Background 5](#_Toc38654572)

[Dearborn and the Detroit Area 5](#_Toc38654573)

[Community Policing in the War on Terror 9](#_Toc38654574)

[BRIDGES 10](#_Toc38654575)

[Literature Review 11](#_Toc38654576)

[Community Policing Theory 11](#_Toc38654577)

[Community Policing and Counterterrorism 14](#_Toc38654578)

[Application of the Community Policing Approach the State’s War on Terror 16](#_Toc38654579)

[Methodology 18](#_Toc38654580)

[Data Analysis 20](#_Toc38654581)

[An Oral History of BRIDGES 20](#_Toc38654582)

[Building BRIDGES 26](#_Toc38654583)

[Stagnation 29](#_Toc38654584)

[Keeping Up Appearances 31](#_Toc38654585)

[The Umbrella Approach 35](#_Toc38654586)

[So Why Do It? 37](#_Toc38654587)

[Policy Recommendations 39](#_Toc38654588)

[Conclusion 43](#_Toc38654589)

# **Abstract**

The events of September 11th, 2001 gave rise to a number of new domestic counterterror initiatives which brought federal agents in closer contact with Arab American communities than ever before. To mitigate tensions arising from these new policies, law enforcement enacted a series of community policing programs intended to establish relationships with members of the Arab American community. This study seeks to critically evaluate one such program, an open forum called BRIDGES, which brings together Arab American community leaders in Dearborn, Michigan with representatives of federal law enforcement. Through qualitative interviews with current and former members of BRIDGES, this study assesses which aspects of BRIDGES members found to be beneficial and what aspects they wished to change. I lay out these criticisms of the program and propose adjustments to be made to the model if it is to be expanded to other communities.

# **Introduction**

A few days after the attacks on September 11th, Omar, an immigration lawyer and community leader, waited nervously in his office in downtown Dearborn, a city just west of Detroit, Michigan. From his window, he anxiously watched black cars with tinted windows line the street outside. He had been in contact with a representative at the Detroit office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation since the attacks. His contact had requested a meeting with his organization; they wanted to discuss how the fallout of September 11th might affect the Arab American population in Dearborn. He had invited other members of the community who worked in immigration or civil rights, and soon representatives from the FBI and the U.S. Attorney’s office filed into the cramped meeting room in which I interviewed Omar for this study eighteen years later. The group had lunch, community members voiced their concerns, and when the meeting concluded, Omar’s contact suggested that the group try to meet regularly. As Omar told me this story, he recalled how surreal it all felt, eating sandwiches with federal agents and talking about how their world was about to change.

That first meeting became the foundation for BRIDGES, an open community forum in the Dearborn area which brings together local representatives of federal law enforcement agencies and community leaders representing the Arab American population. Over the years, the forum has evolved as the law enforcement landscape has continued to change. As post-September 11th national security measures brought agencies like the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) into existence, representatives from these agencies joined the group. On the community side, the challenges faced by the Arab American community lead to the establishment of new civil rights organizations in Dearborn, who also joined BRIDGES. From the invasion of Iraq to the Trump administration’s travel ban, foreign and domestic counterterror policy since September 11th has continued to directly affect the Arab and Muslim American population of Dearborn, and BRIDGES represents one method by which community leaders and law enforcement can come together to share information as well as their concerns.

This study endeavors to assess the impact of BRIDGES on the Arab American community of Dearborn’s perceptions of federal law enforcement. Within BRIDGES, community leaders work primarily with the FBI, the US Attorney’s Office and the Department of Homeland Security, as well as immigration agencies like Customs and Border Protection, Border Patrol, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and this inquiry focuses on their perceptions of these agencies. BRIDGES is well liked among members of law enforcement, and multiple agencies are looking to implement the BRIDGES model in other cities. Thus, the central purpose of this study will be to evaluate whether BRIDGES should be expanded, and if it should, what changes need to be made to provide the maximum benefit to the Arab American community. In this inquiry, I will be assessing what aspects of BRIDGES members from the community and law enforcement find to be most beneficial, what aspects of BRIDGES members of the community feel need to be improved, and what changes members would propose if the model is to be expanded.

These questions will be assessed through qualitative interviews with members of BRIDGES representing both federal law enforcement and major Arab American community groups in the Dearborn area. This interviews demonstrate that the relationships formed in BRIDGES have lent some legitimacy to law enforcement and their initiatives, made law enforcement agents more culturally sensitive, and helped to educate the community on federal policies which affect them. However, community members also found that law enforcement representatives were frequently dismissive of their complaints, often acted apathetic or even hostile in meetings, and occasionally excluded certain groups from the forum. Despite these problems, all respondents believed the forum should continue and expand. Based on the testimonies recorded here, I propose several policy changes that must be made if the proposed expansion is to occur.

# **Background**

## Dearborn and the Detroit Area

As the War on Terror has unfolded and Arab and Muslim Americans have become a prevalent part of political rhetoric, Dearborn, Michigan has become a focal point for the domestic implications of foreign policy.[[1]](#footnote-1) In undertaking this study, it is important to consider why Dearborn has taken such a prominent position. The city, located just west of Detroit, is home to the largest population of Arab Americans in the country, with the 2010 Census reporting that Arab Americans make up nearly 30% of the city’s population.[[2]](#footnote-2) Other cities throughout the Detroit Metropolitan Area, like Detroit and Hamtramck, also have significant Arab American populations.[[3]](#footnote-3) The Detroit Metropolitan Area is likewise home to one of the largest populations of Muslim Americans in the country, as well as the Islamic Center of America, the largest mosque on the continent.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Over the past century, the Arab American population of the Dearborn area was regarded as a cultural novelty of the area, akin to the Greek, Polish, and Mexican enclaves scattered in and around the city. The story of Middle Easterners in Detroit mirrors the narratives of these other communities: the first waves of (mostly Lebanese) immigrants settled in Dearborn to take advantage of the opportunities to work in the auto industry in the early 20th century. Over the course of the century, as more Middle Easterners immigrated to the United States in search of economic opportunities, as refugees fleeing war or persecution, or to join family members who had already immigrated, they settled in Michigan, where they could be surrounded by a population that spoke their language and practiced their religion. These new immigrants helped to build Dearborn throughout the twentieth century. They established successful businesses, helped to shape the University of Michigan Dearborn, and ran for political office. Media attention directed at Arabs and Muslims living in Dearborn throughout the late twentieth century presented the community as a prime example of the American melting pot. The Arab American National Museum displays these early depictions of Dearborn under the title, “Arabs as Americans”. The news stories feature pictures of college students at the University of Michigan wearing hijabs with the school’s iconic “M” emblazoned on the side and a video of high school football players reciting a prayer in Arabic before a game.

Despite this image of the Arab American community as a population that has enriched and assimilated to the Dearborn area, media coverage of the city after the attacks on September 11th tried to draw a connection between the community and the hijackers. After the attacks, Dearborn became a popular site for “man on the street” interviews to ask Arab and Muslim Americans their feelings on September 11th or the policy measures that the US government had passed in response. Right wing media organizations like Fox News have employed Dearborn as a rhetorical device to warn their viewers about the supposed dangers of allowing immigrants from Muslim-majority countries into the United States.[[5]](#footnote-5) In 2015, the Bill O’Reilly show, Fox’s most watched program at the time, sent a “satirical correspondent” to ask passers-by demeaning questions like, “Do you miss the desert?”.[[6]](#footnote-6)

I chose Dearborn as the site of this case study not only because the city is home to the largest population of Arab Americans in the United States, but because of its status at the center of political rhetoric and media coverage. Two months after the September 11th attacks, for example, the FBI released a report to police departments in Michigan stating that, “most of the 28 international terrorist groups recently identified by the State Department… are represented in Michigan. Examples include such well-known terrorist organizations such as Hizballah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Egyptian Brotherhood, Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiyya, and Osama bin Laden’s terrorist organization—Al Qaeda”.[[7]](#footnote-7) To this day, these claims are unsubstantiated.[[8]](#footnote-8) Herein lies the contradiction: though Dearborn is often at the center of domestic counter-terrorism policy, it has not been shown to be a place where a significant number of terrorists are recruited or organized. As one analysis of media portrayals of the Arab American community in Dearborn put it, “The notion of Arab Detroit as a special place in the fight against anti-American militancy is fictive. It came out of purely symbolic interpretations of the place, rather than material realities or actual connections to the attacks of September 11”.[[9]](#footnote-9)

## Community Policing in the War on Terror

Just as news crews descended on the city Dearborn shortly after September 11th, so too did federal law enforcement. In the year following the attacks, the size of the FBI office in Detroit nearly tripled, and new federal organizations like Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Patrol set up offices in the area.[[10]](#footnote-10) Local police officers were instructed to assist federal law enforcement in carrying out domestic policies to fight terrorism, such as interviewing members of the community and identifying those who may be at risk of radicalization.[[11]](#footnote-11)

In carrying out these policies, federal law enforcement made establishing a rapport with the Arab and Muslim community of Dearborn one of their priorities. These methods followed a framework of community policing (sometimes referred to as community-oriented policing), a tactic wherein law enforcement tries to gain the trust of the community by establishing connections with community leaders and organizations. The US Department of Justice defines community policing as “a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions of that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime”.[[12]](#footnote-12) These partnerships are used to build trust in law enforcement among community members, with the hope that community members will be more inclined to reach out to police with information.

## BRIDGES

This study focuses on BRIDGES, a community policing program which acts as an open forum of federal law enforcement representatives and community leaders that meets quarterly to discuss issues relevant to the community. Today, the law enforcement side of BRIDGES is comprised of representatives from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), US Attorney’s Office, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Border Patrol (BP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). The community leaders who comprise BRIDGES’ membership represent civil rights groups, social services organizations, chambers of commerce, and religious congregations. As the most open and accessible mode of community policing in Dearborn, BRIDGES represents a counterterror community policing program with a great deal of available data. Furthermore, BRIDGES members are heavily involved in community-law enforcement partnerships in the Detroit area, and can speak to other aspects of community policing, like educational workshops and one-on-one meetings between federal agencies and community organizations.

BRIDGES is also a particularly relevant case study given its status in the law enforcement community as “the gold standard of community policing,” as two law enforcement agents described it. Several respondents said they had been consulted by law enforcement agencies or community organizations on replicating BRIDGES in cities outside of Michigan. As the War on Terror continues and the policies effecting the Arab American community continue to evolve, forums like BRIDGES could be useful to develop and gather feedback on these policies. It is therefore necessary to examine the successes and struggles of the model, as well as the viability of applying it outside of Dearborn.

# **Literature Review**

## Community Policing Theory

The practice of community policing emerged in the 1960s, as the social movements of the decade called for the abolition of corrupt practices and unchecked policing. Activists for police reform argued that officers had become detached from the communities in which they worked, and issues like police brutality or abuse of power stemmed from this fundamental rift (Eve 2003). In an effort to provide more transparency and repair the trust that had been damaged during this period, law enforcement agents began to rethink the traditional system of policing. Throughout the next few decades, national community policing programs began to take hold. The first major national community policing project was the Neighborhood Watch Program launched by the National Sheriffs’ Association in 1972, a coordinated effort among police departments nationwide which encouraged citizens to patrol their own neighborhoods and report suspicious behavior. The stated goal of the program, which still exists today is to, “unite law enforcement agencies, private organizations, and individual citizens in a nationwide effort to reduce crime and improve local communities” (NNW 2010).

In the 1980s, a new theory of law enforcement emerged which stood in stark contrast to community policing: broken windows. In their 1982 article, Wilson & Kelling argued that by aggressively investigating minor acts of civil disorder and antisocial behavior like vandalism or petit theft, law enforcement could establish an environment of order within a community, thereby preventing more serious crimes. Broken windows initiatives in the 1980s and early 1990s used up significant resources and for the most part did not have the expected effect on crime rates (Sherman et al. 2002). Furthermore, aggressive punishments for minor crimes further damaged the relationship between the police and civilians, and in the 1990s community policing was touted as a solution to this broken trust. In 1994, Congress approved the first federal funding for community policing programs when it signed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act into law, providing resources to federal agencies and police departments to train officers in community oriented policing (Eve et al. 2003). Since then, the Department of Justice has encouraged local law enforcement to take steps to engage with the community through town halls, partnerships, and civilian training programs (COPS 2010). This push for community-oriented policing has thus shaped programs like BRIDGES.

Proponents of community policing argue that the practice serves three key purposes: it helps civilians to view law enforcement as legitimate, it fosters trust in the community, and it allows for more efficient allocation of time and resources. First, scholars argue that by incorporating community members into the process of law enforcement, civilians begin to see policing is as more democratic and transparent (Hinds & Murphy 2007). As representatives of law enforcement share information with the community regarding their activity, the community can offer their advice or concerns, and at that same time better understand the actions taken by police. Meanwhile, the relationships built between civilians and the police fosters a sense of familiarity, making officers appear like a part of the community, rather than outsiders (Skogan 1994). Thus, when agents of law enforcement are guided by the needs of the community, their actions gain legitimacy. Second, the relationships built between law enforcement and the community can foster a sense of trust in law enforcement as the familiarity between officers and civilians allows civilians to feel more comfortable interacting with the police (Cole & Smith 2007; Skogan 1994). Finally, when citizens trust the police and view their actions as legitimate, they become a valuable resource for law enforcement (Ganapathy 2000). For instance, community members may have local knowledge that is inaccessible to law enforcement (Schnebly 2008). Not only are community members more privy to information about criminal behavior, they also know which issues are most pervasive. With their limited resources, law enforcement faces a situation wherein they cannot strictly enforce each and every law. Thus, direction from the community can help to guide law enforcement to use their resources in such a way so as to make the most meaningful difference.

In practice, community policing initiatives have yielded mixed results. In terms of crime rates, meta-analyses of hundreds of studies on community policing demonstrate that these initiatives have no significant effect on crime rates (Gill et al. 2014; Crowl 2017). In terms of how members of the community perceive crime, there is some evidence to suggest that community policing initiatives have a positive effect on civilians’ feelings of safety (Segrave & Collins 2005, Roh & Oliver 2005). In the meta-analysis of Crowl (2017), of eighteen studies on trust in police, two thirds found that community policing projects had a significant positive affect on trust, while the rest found no conclusive result. Similarly, seven out of nine studies demonstrated a significant positive change in perceptions of police legitimacy. These studies cover initiatives on the local and federal level, addressing everything from drug trafficking to homicide, and the variety of results reflects the vast diversity. In studying the BRIDGES forum, I will examine how community policing has been applied specifically to counterterror policies.

## Community Policing and Counterterrorism

September 11th drastically changed the scope and purpose of federal law enforcement. In particular, counterterror policies enacted after the attacks instructed federal agents to work closely with local police departments in areas with large communities of immigrants (largely of Middle Eastern or African origin), bringing federal law enforcement closer to these communities that ever before (Ortiz et al. 2007). Furthermore, the post 9/11 landscape shifted federal law enforcement toward a focus on intelligence gathering on potential terrorists or sympathizers. (Oliver 2006, Ortiz et al. 2007). Law enforcement intended to gather this intelligence from the members of the immigrant communities in which they worked, ensuring even more contact between federal agencies and civilians.

The excessive policing and hyper politicization of Arab Americans in the aftermath of September 11th led to heightened tensions between the community and law enforcement. To begin with, Arab American communities in which law enforcement were looking for terrorist sympathizers had little trust in or familiarity with the police. For one thing, these communities were already stigmatized by their neighbors and the mass media, making many feel like outsiders being policed with impunity (Husband & Alam 2012). Furthermore, many of these communities had large populations of recent immigrants who were mistrustful of law enforcement because of negative experiences during the immigration process (Henderson et al. 2006). Communities with large immigrant populations were particularly fearful that agents gathering intelligence may use immigration violations as leverage (DeGuzman 2002). This lack of trust and familiarity made collaboration with the community unlikely, and as agencies realized that they would need to rely on civilians to act as “eyes and ears” to identify and report suspicious behavior, the necessity of community policing programs to facilitate communication and build trust became clear (Goldberg & Cristopher 2019).

The post September 11th era exacerbated many of the aspects of community policing which opponents of the practice criticize. For one, sceptics of community policing have long pointed out that these initiatives are often deployed in communities that are already over-policed. In places where residents are already highly scrutinized, a more engaged police force can be interpreted as a sign that community members are presumed guilty until proven innocent. This in turn leads to diminished trust in police and a reluctance to work with law enforcement officers (Cuneen 1992). In their study of attitudes among the Muslim community in New York City toward federal agencies and the NYPD, Tyler et al. (2010) supports this critique, finding that counterterror policies that drastically increase the presence of federal agents in an over-policed area drives down trust in law enforcement and willingness to cooperate with law enforcement.

Another obstacle to community policing is the potential of counterterror initiatives to undermine the legitimacy of the local police force. Weisburd (2010) argues that the perception of the local police as working with the federal government to surveil communities, especially stigmatized minority communities, will make the day to day operations of law enforcement more difficult. Essentially, Muslim Americans who distrust the local police as a result of aggressive domestic counterterrorism policies may not report when they are the victims of an unrelated crime, like a robbery. This in turn will serve to deepen the divide between the community and law enforcement, while making it more difficult for the police to identify which issues in the community most need to be addressed.

Finally, the process by which certain members of the community are elevated as representatives may worsen tensions between the community and law enforcement. For one thing, these individuals may not be representative of the community at large. In Australia, Tahiri & Grossman find, through interviews with Muslim Australians concerning a community policing partnership, that the majority of respondents do not feel represented by their elevated representatives. Youmans (2012) finds that individuals who were chosen to represent the community either to the police or the media were often those whose viewpoints aligned most closely with law enforcement. Thus, criticisms of police practices were rarely voiced. By creating partnerships with a select group of citizens, as was the case for the initial model of BRIDGES, members of the community who do not identify with these individuals may feel excluded or silenced, undermining the purpose of the partnership.

## Application of the Community Policing Approach the State’s War on Terror

Given these considerations, I turn now to the literature on the role of existing community policing projects in the in the fields of counter terrorism and national security. The projects discussed here involve federal officers meeting and collaborating with members of the community in a structure similar to BRIDGES. There are relatively few empirical studies of these kinds of community engagement projects in the United States, especially given how recently many of these programs have been implemented. However, many American counterterror programs mirror community policing efforts implemented in countries like the United Kingdom or Australia. Thus, turning to these countries allows for some idea of the relative effectiveness of these programs.

Similar to the aforementioned studies on the efficacy of community policing in general, analyses of counterterror community policing programs have yielded mixed results. Dunn et al. (2016) discusses the use of community liaison officers in a majority Arab Australian community in New South Wales, Australia. These officers were expected to regularly meet with community leaders and hold open town halls to address concerns regarding the increased prescence of federal agents in the area. A survey of community members found that reactions were largely positive: there was high community awareness of the program and respondents who had interacted with the liaisons had a more positive perception of the federal agents than before. Awan & Correia (2016) find that a community forum which brought together federal agents and community leaders to hold counter-radicalization programs in Cardiff, United Kingdom did little to increase trust in the police among community members, but respondents did have a generally favorable view on the partnership. However, PREVENT, a community policing initiative in the United Kingdom which attempted to build partnerships with community leaders and educators to identify young people at risk of radicalization, has been assessed as a policy failure. Awan (2012) found, through a survey of Muslims living in affected areas, that the strategy was correlated with feelings of alienation and distrust in law enforcement.

In the United States, little research has been conducted on community policing in the counterterror arena. There is some evidence to suggest positive benefits from law enforcement using community outreach when operating in immigrant communities, claiming that this outreach can enhance officers’ culture awareness (Henderson et al. 2006) and diminish tension between law enforcement and the community (Briggs 2010; Pickering 2010). In one study of counterterror policing in the United States after September 11th, d’Appollonia (2012) suggests that community policing programs are a necessity when working with immigrant communities, so as to ensure that these communities do not feel as though they are being singled out or profiled.

This study aims to situate itself within the existing research by evaluating the use of community policing to build a trusting relationship between federal law enforcement and a local community in the post 9/11 era. Using interviews from key stakeholders in BRIDGES, I discuss several of the metrics covered here like trust, perceptions of legitimacy and belonging, and cultural sensitivity. I aim to further the research on counterterror community policing by assessing the program ethnographically to discover what aspects of the program are most beneficial to law enforcement and the community, as well as what issues still stand to be resolved. In doing so, this study is able to propose a set of reforms that must be enacted to size up and adapt this model of community policing to other jurisdictions based on the experiences of the current participants.

# **Methodology**

At its most basic level, the ultimate goal of community policing is to build relationships between civilians and law enforcement which law enforcement can in turn use to better allocate their time and resources and keep the community safe. Within the context of counterterrorism, these relationships are used to maintain national security as well as the safety of the local community. Whether or not BRIDGES has had a significant impact on national security or local safety is beyond the scope of this study. Rather, I am interested in the impact of BRIDGES on the intermediate goal of building trusting relationships between federal law enforcement and the community.

To investigate this impact, I reached out to two groups of stakeholders: community leaders and representatives of federal law enforcement agencies. All respondents are current or former members of BRIDGES, individuals who work in law enforcement or community-based organizations and for whom BRIDGES is a part of their professional work. BRIDGES is an open forum, and thus civilians who are not among its membership do attend meetings and are an important part of the forum’s function. However, I chose to focus this study on only current and former members of BRIDGES so as to give this study a solid foundation with regard to the internal dynamics of a working relationship between law enforcement agencies and community leaders.

Over the course of this study, I conducted twenty-one interviews with seventeen respondents. Thirteen of these respondents were community leaders, while four were representatives of federal law enforcement agencies. Of the community members, four were former members while nine are currently involved. Of the law enforcement representatives, two are former members and two are currently involved. There are significantly more community representatives in BRIDGES than law enforcement, so while community leaders have more representation among the respondents, this is not necessarily disproportionate. Community leaders included civil rights lawyers and advocates, social services providers, business leaders, and religious leaders. The majority of interviewees had been involved with the BRIDGES beginning in 2001 when it was first founded, with a minority becoming involved in the organization’s later stages. Current members were contacted based on a roster and official reports of attendance. Former members of BRIDGES were contacted through a snowball sample, wherein respondents were asked to recommend potential interviewees. Several members were interviewed more than once to establish a rapport and allow for deeper conversation on the subjects we discussed in the initial interview.

The questionnaire used to interview participants was designed to gauge their overall perceptions of the BRIDGES forum, including aspects of BRIDGES respondents found beneficial and which aspects they hoped to change. Respondents were interviewed in a conversation format, and interviews ranged from twenty minutes to two and a half hours. These interviews were semi-structured, but I allowed the conversation to flow freely, asking questions for follow up, clarification, or elaboration. The full questionnaire can be found in the appendix. Fifteen respondents were interviewed both over the phone and in person, while two respondents were sent the questionnaire over email and replied with their written responses.

Respondents have been pseudonymized. Community leaders were all of Arab descent, so their pseudonyms were randomly selected from a list of popular Arab names. Because only four members of law enforcement were interviewed, each is simply referred to as “a law enforcement representative.” Though the majority of respondents consented to being named in this inquiry, I have chosen to anonymize all respondents so as to avoid an anonymous respondent being identified through the process of elimination. I have added some context to certain responses so as to properly frame the results without identifying the subject.

# **Data Analysis**

## An Oral History of BRIDGES

In order to understand the structure of BRIDGES and the issues that it faces today, one must explore how the forum began and the changes it has undergone over the years. To understand the foundations of BRIDGES, I interviewed a handful of members who had been participants since the forum’s initial meeting, and spoke with them about the establishment of BRIDGES and their goals for the program at that time. As I have previously discussed, BRIDGES was established through a series of events that took place in the week immediately following September 11th. Only a few days after the attacks, Omar, the leader of a social services organization serving Arab American immigrants, was contacted by the FBI, who requested a meeting with Omar’s organization, the U.S. Attorney’s Office, and several other community leaders. While Omar was meeting with federal agents in his Dearborn office, Rasheed, a civil rights activist, was stuck in Washington DC, where he had flown just a few days before September 11th to meet with representatives at the Department of Justice to discuss the profiling of Arab Americans in airports. As evidenced by this engagement, Rasheed already had some experience making connections with federal law enforcement agencies. So when the national emergency grounded air travel and left Rasheed stranded, he used the time to reach out to his acquaintances who worked in federal law enforcement in Michigan. He called Jeffery Collins and John Bell, the U.S. District Attorney and FBI Special Agent in Charge, respectively, and explained that when he returned to Michigan he wanted to meet with them to discuss the ramifications of September 11th and how they would impact the Arab American community. Though Rasheed had met with federal law enforcement agents before in his work, he and his colleagues were usually wary of this sort of collaboration. He remembered a few times when the FBI had reached out to his office prior to September 11th, but he and his colleagues had rarely accepted their invitations, often suspicious of an ulterior motive. After the attacks, however, it became clear that collaborating with the FBI may be a necessity.

“Before September 11th, if the FBI wanted to meet with us as a community based organization, or as the leader of this community, the vast majority of us would ask why, and most likely will ask a hundred questions before even accepting to meet in person to discuss whatever matter they may have of concern. Most likely we would have had to have it in writing in advance, a lawyer present, etc. Now, this is just a sample of the communication that used to take course with the federal agencies, especially the intelligence portion of it, before September 11th. Now after September 11th, this ballgame changed, and we all found out, from both ends -- the community side as well as the government side -- that direct and open and in-person communication was needed.”

Working with federal law enforcement was uncharted territory, and as such, the early community leaders BRIDGES were unsure what their role in the partnership would be. Rasheed recalled that initially, he believed he would have to use those first meetings with the US Attorney and the Special Agent in Charge to dispute notions that the Arab American community was “guilty by association,” for the attacks on September 11th, telling Jeffery Collins over the phone that his organization wished to demonstrate that the community, “absolutely and unequivocally disavowed the attacks on September 11th and all those connected to them”. He quickly realized that a partnership between his organization, the FBI, and the US Attorney’s office could become something more. On that initial call with John Bell, he told me he was surprised that what seemed to be top of mind for the Special Agent in Charge was the safety of the Arab American community, and the backlash they may face. Rasheed summarized what Bell said to him on the call thusly,

“He said to me, ‘Hey, you know what's going on. You know the situation is escalating, and we want to make sure that we work together. We stand solid against any acts of hate or violence against the community at large. We want to meet you and to meet with the rest of the community leaders and organizations to discuss how we can manage this line of communication and cooperation and move forward.’”

Rasheed explained to me that by expressing a genuine interest in the well-being of the Arab American community, the FBI had made it clear that a partnership between federal law enforcement and community leaders in Dearborn could go beyond simply playing defense against stereotypes of Arab Americans. Instead, he believed that the relationship could be used as a line of communication between community leaders and law enforcement in which the community could share their concerns and the federal agencies could share updates on policies that would impact Arab Americans. Though Rasheed doubted that he and his colleagues would be able to change federal policy directly, he felt that BRIDGES meetings could be used to give law enforcement feedback which they could in turn pass on to higher-ups to influence law enforcement policy and implementation. In reflecting on his vision for BRIDGES in 2001, Rasheed told me,

“[Federal agencies’] job is to implement the law. They don't make the rules. Actually, in many cases they have no say but to follow the national orders or the administration’s orders. But I think they were a good messenger. They were the bridge to communicate with the highest level, conveying the community concerns, and it helped to make the process of implementing many intelligence initiatives in a sensitive fashion, and in a fashion where there was not a wedge in trust between the community and government.”

When Rasheed returned to Michigan, he and Omar worked together build a roster of law enforcement contacts and other community leaders, and over the next few months BRIDGES began to meet regularly. When I spoke to Omar, he also told me that in the beginning, he too was unsure what BRIDGES would become. But over the course of those first few years after September 11th, the meetings gave him hope that he and other community leaders could ensure that their voices were heard as more and more policies targeting the Arab American community were enacted.

Respondents agreed that in the first few years following 2001, the main focus of BRIDGES was the counterterror policies that came about as a result of September 11th. Organizations like Rasheed’s had been advocating for anti-discrimination measures during air travel since before the advent of BRIDGES, and thus issues like profiling in airport security were frequently discussed. An FBI project to gather counter terrorism information from a list of recent immigrants from Middle Eastern countries through in-person interviews came soon after September 11th and, as I will discuss later, provided an opportunity for community members of BRIDGES to influence the implementation of federal policy.

As time went on, the mission of the organization expanded. Representatives from new agencies like Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) joined the forum, and new community organizations were established to address post-9/11 civil rights abuses against the Arab American community. For instance, one respondent’s civil rights group was created to help Arab Americans in Dearborn file a discrimination lawsuit against banks that had closed their accounts on unfounded suspicions of connections to terrorist activity. Another respondent joined BRIDGES after representing a client who had been wrongfully fired a few days after September 11th and later went on to establish his own advocacy group. These two respondents explained that in developing their respective organizations, BRIDGES was an invaluable resource through which to collaborate with other civil rights lawyers and advocates while receiving regular updates on policy developments.

BRIDGES is open to the entire community, and over the years it has served as a venue in which ordinary civilians can speak directly to federal law enforcement. Respondents explained that there are a handful of regular attendees, but most community members will only attend a meeting or two to express a specific concern. Many of the members of BRIDGES who lead social service or advocacy organizations would also bring the concerns of their clients to the meetings. There have been occasions, over the years, when BRIDGES has had to address police misconduct, and the respondents recalled these incidences as important steps in building trust. For instance, a law enforcement officer recalled a racist incident during a police raid which took place shortly after BRIDGES was established,

“Trust has to be earned over a period of time. And as BRIDGES evolved, over time, I think the trust was deepened, you know, and I remember there was one instance where there was a raid of a home and one of the federal officers wrote some language on a calendar, derogatory language on a calendar. And that person was disciplined. So, I think BRIDGES said, it helped to be able to see examples, you know, of when law enforcement would not tolerate, you know, anything that was improper conduct. That helped to build the trust, and over a period of time, like I said, it helped us a lot, from a law enforcement perspective, because it got more cooperators.”

The respondent worked with some of the community leaders in BRIDGES to issue a joint press release, and at the following BRIDGES meeting, they fielded questions from community members about the repercussions for the officer involved. The respondent explained that instances like this ensured that law enforcement was held accountable, and forced members of his agency to work harder to gain the trust of the community.

Today, almost nineteen years after September 11th, BRIDGES still handles many of the issues it was initially designed to address, like airport profiling or discrimination in the workplace. But the forum has also shifted to address new issues facing the Arab American community. For instance, current members of BRIDGES explained that policies like the travel ban passed under the Trump administration are frequently discussed by the group. Additionally, BRIDGES has undergone several leadership changes over the years, and the new leadership has begun to use the partnership developed in BRIDGES to create programs that address problems within the Dearborn community at large, not just the Arab American community. For instance, several members discussed with me a new initiative that BRIDGES is developing to address opioid addiction in the Dearborn area by working with law enforcement to establish resources for treatment and rehabilitation. A law enforcement representative remarked that this was one of the ways in which BRIDGES helped to shape policing to meet the needs of the community. He had not realized that so many community members considered opioid abuse to be one of the most pressing issues in their city, and his work with BRIDGES allowed his agency to direct time and resources to that issue.

BRIDGES was established in the immediate aftermath of September 11th to allow representatives of federal law enforcement and leaders within the Arab American community to share information and concerns. In the beginning, community leaders saw BRIDGES as a way to influence the implementation of the federal policies which emerged in response to the attacks. As the forum has grown over the years, it has helped to develop civil rights groups in Dearborn, given a venue for civilians to voice their grievances and hold law enforcement accountable, and evolved to address new issues affecting not only Arab Americans, but Dearborn in general. These transformations, as well as the initial expectations of the founders of the group, help to contextualize the issues that BRIDGES faces today, and how the forum can be adapted and applied to communities outside of Dearborn.

## Building BRIDGES

         To begin my analysis of the BRIDGES program, I wanted to assess what aspects of the forum were seen as most beneficial to the community and law enforcement. To gauge what parts of BRIDGES members saw as particularly useful, respondents were asked about their proudest accomplishments within the organization. The most common answer had to do with the ability of law enforcement and the community to educate each other; as one community leader remarked, “[Law enforcement] learns about us, we learn about them. It goes both ways.” Where community members were able to educate law enforcement about the community, they were often able to influence the implementation of policies that targeted Arab Americans. The most widely referenced example of this involved an FBI interview project that commenced shortly after 9/11. As a law enforcement agent explained to me, directives were sent out from Washington to FBI Special Agents in Charge all over the country, instructing them to work with local police to interview recent immigrants between the ages of 18-35 from a handful of Middle Eastern countries. When they received these instructions, the representatives from the FBI brought up the project in the next BRIDGES meeting.

Respondents from the community recalled that the interview project was one of the first federal law enforcement policies on which they had been asked to consult, and it offered community leaders a chance to see just how much change they would be able to enact within the forum. In the briefing, law enforcement explained that they had intended to go to the houses and workplaces of interviewees without prior warning. The community leaders advised against this course of action, warning law enforcement that showing up at an interviewee’s house or place of work could embarrass them or possibly open them up to discrimination and hostility from those who saw them being interviewed by police. Arab Americans already faced suspicion and harassment from their neighbors, and obvious interaction with federal agents would no doubt make the situation worse. The community leaders in BRIDGES put together a plan to send out letters to interviewees telling them that they could have the interview in a place where they were comfortable, and could be accompanied by a lawyer, friend, or community leader if need be. They also advised the FBI to provide translators and counselors. One community leader explained that many of the recent immigrants with whom he works have had negative experiences with government representatives in their home countries and with representatives of the US government during the immigration process. Thus, they were highly anxious to be dealing with the police; “It’s almost like PTSD. They are already traumatized by authority.” The respondent acted as legal counsel on a few of the interviews, and recalled being surprised that nearly all of the recommendations made by BRIDGES were incorporated into the process, helping to alleviate some of his clients’ anxiety. That year, several members told me, Detroit had the highest uptake rate of any of the interview programs in the country.

            As the FBI conducted more interviews over the years, community leaders in BRIDGES were able to provide law enforcement with a rudimentary education on cultural differences that may affect the interview process. For instance, when a group of Muslim women brought their concerns to a civil rights advocate about being unfairly targeted and searched because they wore the veil, the representative put together a set of recommendations for law enforcement explaining the cultural and religious significance of the veil, encouraging them to be sparing with searches and implement additional privacy measures to ensure comfort and safety. In another situation, when an interviewee was accused of suspicious behavior because he would not meet a female officer’s eye, BRIDGES members stepped in to inform the agency that in some cultures, averting one’s gaze was considered respectful.

While community leaders were successful in substantially changing the implementation of the FBI interview process, they had less luck with other policies. For instance, as detainments and searches at the airport became more frequent for members of the Arab American community, community leaders were informed that agents were asking questions about their interviewees’ individual religious practices: how often they prayed and what mosque they attended. The community leaders of BRIDGES were able to convince law enforcement that these questions were not informative and would only serve to make interviewees uncomfortable and defensive, but they found that because the representative connected to the TSA in BRIDGES was less responsive to their suggestions than the representatives from the FBI had been, little was done to assuage their concerns. Furthermore, community leaders were given far less access to observe policy implementation. While community members in BRIDGES were often able to sit in on interviews, it proved far more difficult to monitor the treatment of Arab and Muslim individuals during arrests, raids, and stops at the airport or land borders.

Beyond the ability to influence policy, all respondents found one of the most meaningful impacts of BRIDGES to be the ability of law enforcement to educate community members on policies that are likely to affect them. Community and law enforcement representatives alike discussed how BRIDGES had facilitated discussions both inside and outside of the forum on changes to policy, clarified the distinctions between agencies, and connected community members with specific representatives to contact with complaints. One law enforcement agent recalled that the presence of Border Patrol agents in Detroit had made community members nervous, as they confused the agency with other agencies like Customs and Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Border Patrol agents were present in Detroit to man the Canadian border, but could not police residents of the city. After a series of complaints brought up in BRIDGES, law enforcement led presentations on the differences between each agency, and provided a “know your rights” discussion regarding the limitations of each agency’s ability to arrest, detain, or question individuals. The ability to keep the community informed, especially as policies changed rapidly and drastically, was an element of BRIDGES that was praised by community leaders and law enforcement alike.

## Stagnation

While both current and former members of BRIDGES could all identify certain positive aspects of their involvement with the forum, almost all of the community leaders interviewed expressed the view that despite the good that BRIDGES had brought, it was often unable to bring substantive change to policies that negatively affected the Arab American community. For the most part, the policies cited were related to travel, both complications with air travel or land travel across the border to Canada. The most commonly cited policy issue that BRIDGES members felt remained unresolved was the frequent detainment and search of Arab Americans whose names were similar to those on the No Fly list. Several community leaders cited instances of discrimination toward their clients and friends at the airport related to the No Fly list. One respondent recalled an entrepreneur whose business suffered because he frequently missed out of town meetings while held up at the airport. Another recalled a ten-year-old boy who would be taken into holding whenever he travelled with his family. In the latter case, BRIDGES was able to resolve the issue with TSA, but other issues with the No Fly list persisted, especially as law enforcement agencies began to share the list with private entities.

One law enforcement representative who currently works with BRIDGES explained that the No Fly list had become such a persistent problem that they had enacted a policy of tabling the issue unless new developments arose. Today, law enforcement will address the No Fly list in BRIDGES once a year to update the community on policy, but the issue will not be included in the meeting agendas. The same representative expressed a belief that BRIDGES had in fact been able to make inroads, albeit small ones, to change some Department of Homeland Security policies. However, none of the community leaders whom I interviewed were aware of any progress made on the issue of the No Fly list as a result of discussions in BRIDGES. The law enforcement representative also pointed out that through BRIDGES, the community had been able to speak with members of Congress like Representatives Rashida Tlaib and Debbie Dingell and Senator Gary Peters, all of whom had expressed sympathy with the community’s concerns, but explained that they were unable to change much because of the Republican majority in the Senate. While community leaders did reference these meetings, many of the civil rights organizations represented in BRIDGES have had the opportunity to meet with elected officials outside of the forum. They fully understood that the current political climate may make a change in federal policy impossible but had hoped the law enforcement representatives in BRIDGES would be more receptive to their complaints and suggestions to implement the existing policy in a way that was less aggressive and discriminatory.

A few community leaders were of the view that not only had many policies not changed, some had gotten worse. Ibrahim, who joined the organization early on but later left as a result of his frustrations, said,

“The community, particularly after the invasion of Iraq, things got even worse. The No Fly list got even bigger and bigger and that was one of the concerns up until, actually, it’s still a concern today. You see, so those issues were never resolved.”

Another community leader, Amir, who represents a civil rights organization in BRIDGES, told me, “In recent years, especially in regards to immigration, things have been getting worse”. Because so many issues remain unresolved and some appear to be worsening, two members of the organization told me that they feared the community at large had come to believe that “nothing changes” and that BRIDGES had become “irrelevant” as a result. Another member of BRIDGES told me he was particularly concerned that this stagnation might be the end of the BRIDGES forum entirely, and told me that he was working to dispel this notion by encouraging that members produce concrete “deliverables” with each meeting.

## Keeping Up Appearances

Among both community leaders and law enforcement, there are multiple different narratives surrounding the question of why certain issues remain unresolved in BRIDGES. Many community members felt that the stagnation was merely a symptom of working with large, federal bureaucracies whose orders come from officials with no experience in dealing with local issues. Most respondents on the community side said that there were federal law enforcement agents whom they trusted and who seemed genuinely concerned with helping the community, but they were unable to change laws or policies because of their positions as local representatives. Several members were able to travel to D.C. to meet with higher-ups in the agencies represented in BRIDGES, but these meetings often were not fruitful.

Community leaders by and large were sympathetic to law enforcement’s argument that they could not change the law, only some aspects of implementation. But while community leaders were understanding of the difficulties that come with communicating local complaints to a national organization, many of the issues that they raised had to do with the law enforcement representatives in the forum, not their superiors. A common complaint was that, for some law enforcement representatives, BRIDGES appeared to be a vanity project, rather than a forum to build genuine good will with the community. Most of the complaints centered on law enforcement representatives who community leaders saw as attending BRIDGES simply to look as if they were concerned with the needs of the Arab American population without making substantive progress. One current member referred to BRIDGES as simply a “feel good” organization, meaning that it made law enforcement feel as though they were engaging with the community without having to do the work. Another remarked that it was clear that while some agencies seemed genuinely interested in hearing the concerns of the community, others came to the table only “because they had to come.” A former member recounted a time shortly before he left BRIDGES when he met with an agency representative one-on-one and realized that they had never taken notes on any BRIDGES meeting. The respondent saw this as an indication that the representative did not feel a responsibility to take the concerns of the community seriously, and he explained to me that this incident was a significant factor in his decision to leave.

While complaints about BRIDGES as a vanity project were mostly limited to law enforcement, one respondent felt that BRIDGES had also become overrun with community members who were not qualified to contribute to the forum in a meaningful way, and instead used BRIDGES as a stepping stone to network with representatives from law enforcement and the occasional politician. Abed, a former member of BRIDGES, accused community leaders of engaging with BRIDGES to advance their careers or status within the community. Abed felt that, at its inception, the community leaders in BRIDGES had been limited to representatives from religious, civil rights, and social services organizations in the Arab American community. These representatives could speak to community needs because they had clients or congregants that would bring issues to them. As time went on, he saw members bringing in friends who, while well-respected in the community, weren’t attuned to community needs.

“The purpose and objectives of the meetings when we started BRIDGES, it was organizations that were working directly with the community issues. Like, I’ll give you an example: [two organizations Abed worked for] at the time, these organizations have offices, have centers, have contact with people. So how would I know there is a problem in the community if I don’t have a center, if I don’t have a counselor that you, as a community member, will come to and say, hey, I’ve just been raided by such and such organization.”

Abed went on to explain that he felt that the organization had become bloated with individuals who could not contribute in BRIDGES in the same way as the community leaders who had been involved since 2001, and meetings had thus lost much of the substantive discussion and debate that had colored the early years of the forum.

            The idea that certain members on the law enforcement side of BRIDGES were only involved in the forum to keep up the appearance of community engagement was limited to a few agencies. Most community leaders described positive interactions with the US Attorney or the FBI Special Agent in Charge, but brought up negative experiences with other agencies. Muhammad, a community leader who worked with BRIDGES through both the Obama and Trump administrations, remarked that shifts in the executive branch caused many of the agencies they worked with to undergo a change in personnel. Many of their allies stepped down and were replaced by representatives that seemed more sympathetic to views of the current president. In an administration that frequently uses anti-Muslim rhetoric to advance their policy goals, this transition was particularly worrying. As Muhammad put it,

“Now in certain areas we have made progress and in others we could not make progress because the law is being applied by people who are, unfortunately, racist. And we could not even reach out. You know, like CBP and DHS have been run by people who are really, really racist in our state. And we have a problem there but we cannot remove them because they are appointed by, I mean look at the top, and it comes down from Donald Trump and his administration. You know, what can you do? We have to fight back and continue to fight back and build coalitions in order to change things. But it's not easy anymore.”

Agencies that the community perceives as racist reflections of the Trump administration threaten the credibility of the government agencies as a whole. In my discussion with Amir, he explained to me that BRIDGES members understand the distinctions between the federal agencies with whom they work; they know who they can trust and collaborate with, and who they cannot. In short, they can tell the “friendly” agencies from the “unfriendly” ones. However, the average community member does not know the difference between an agency that has earnestly tried to engage with and understand the community, and one who has not. As Amir said,

“When I'm in these meetings I can tell you, on a scale where does FBI stand, where does immigration stand, where does the US Attorney stand, where ICE stands, where the FBI stands, in terms of favoritism, you know? I can tell you CBP, ICE is always at the bottom. People hate them. I can tell you, FBI is doing good, US Attorney, we're doing good. Sometimes it's a danger because like I tell people in these meetings, even though the FBI and US Attorney are doing a great job the problem is when the government comes to people's homes, they don't know the difference between DEA, ATF, US Attorney, FBI, ICE; they just think it's all government. So what happens is, you're literally hurting those individuals that are doing the day to day hard work of presenting and building goodwill with the community and vice versa. They just look at the average individual and say it's all government.”

Amir went on to express frustration that law enforcement agencies are known to defend each other, referencing, “brothers in blue and all that”. The lack of accountability within the law enforcement community, he argued, meant that agencies like ICE or CBP, who were known to subject community members to disrespectful and racist treatment, could undermine the progress that other agencies had made in building community trust.

## The Umbrella Approach

            The final complaint came from two former BRIDGES members, both of whom cited the perceived exclusion of their respective communities from the forum as a reason for leaving. One of the respondents, an original member of BRIDGES who was present at its first meeting in 2001, recalled that when the forum was established it was larger, and included a more diverse group of representatives from the community. The Arab American community of Michigan includes several different nationalities, religions, and ethnic backgrounds. But because the BRIDGES coalition required these diverse groups to organize around one agenda, some individual needs were lost. In the beginning, he felt that this “umbrella” approach to the Arab American community was warranted, as the backlash after September 11th affected the whole community. But recent developments like the travel ban affected only some groups and not others.

“The focus was September 11th. We had a very specific focus. Everyday there are so many issues raised in the communities. People are scared to death. People’s houses are searched. People were taken away from the streets, from their work, so it was crazy. So everyone was interested in that. Now, the only reason you’re going to have an umbrella organization is if you want to save time for the federal agencies.”

The law enforcement community, he felt, had begun to show preference toward community representatives of one background, to the exclusion of other communities. Because BRIDGES meetings are relatively short, the respondent felt that the issues that were specific to his community were rarely, if ever, addressed. The other former member echoed these concerns, saying that if he were to implement any change to the BRIDGES model, it would be to “make it all inclusive and not one-sided”. Current members of BRIDGES also recognized that it was a challenge to accurately represent the diverse needs of the Muslim and Arab American community in Dearborn, with one respondent saying, “The biggest barrier was marshalling the individual needs of different sects of the community into one agenda.”

            Respondents from the law enforcement community were aware of this complaint, and acknowledged that BRIDGES had been larger and perhaps more diverse at its inception. They also acknowledged that representatives of different groups within the Arab American community had different priorities. Because the BRIDGES meetings are time-constrained, they said that it is important to use the time to tackle issues that impact as much of the community as possible. If specific groups have complaints that only pertain to their community, law enforcement agents said they would try to broker meetings with the appropriate agencies outside of the BRIDGES forum. But the most pressing constraint was time and resources. One law enforcement representative made the point that while BRIDGES cannot necessarily address the needs of every group it represents, the forum can be used by community leaders to learn how to contact agencies on a one-on-one basis to address individual issues.

## So Why Do It?

            Despite these pervasive issues, all interviewees, current or former, told me that they thought that BRIDGES should continue, and many believed that it should be replicated elsewhere. BRIDGES can put community members in the uncomfortable position of pushing for changes that seem impossible while legislation targeting the Arab and Muslim community becomes more and more common. But outside of BRIDGES, the community’s options are limited. As one respondent said,

“People are saying, why do you continue to talk to people who are absolutely not interested in changing anything? And the argument for engaging is to continue to engage because things might change. I mean, what is the other alternative? To build fences and to fight each other and to go to the street? Like we have to be realistic. You have to engage and you have to continue to build coalitions in order to change policies.”

Even respondents who expressed concerns about law enforcement representatives who seemed uninterested or even racist felt that the program could be beneficial. These agents, they said, are exposed to the same media as everybody else, media that often portrays Muslims and Arabs unfavorably and inaccurately. By participating in BRIDGES, members of federal law enforcement allow Arab Americans to tell their own story and correct the record. Another respondent said that while law enforcement was not immune to the paranoia that came with the war on terror, he had seen agents who had actively engaged with the community start to shed some of this anxiety. Another community leader told me that certain law enforcement representatives had, as a result of their interactions with BRIDGES, stood up for the community in light of misinformation. One law enforcement officer recalled a time when an official FBI report came out which suggested that Dearborn had become a hotbed for terrorist recruitment. The former US Attorney, Barbara McQuade, joined community leaders in protesting outside of the mayor's office, and later gave a press conference to denounce the contents of the report. Several community members recalled this event, and said that it made them feel that some representatives in BRIDGES were genuinely interested in protecting their community from discrimination. As one respondent said of his relationship with an FBI representative,

“I mean the FBI today are a friendlier organization, our community understands the FBI better, the FBI understands our community better. And because of our engagement. The agents are sitting there, they are human beings that are affected, you know by the media, by the politicians, by the television conversation, by the people who spew propaganda, you know.”

In a city where Arab and Muslim Americans receive unprecedented scrutiny, respondents recognized that even incremental changes served to lessen anxiety and fear within the community. In the process of gathering a history of BRIDGES from local archives, I spoke with a representative from the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn. In the process we discussed some of the cultural sensitivity workshops that the museum has hosted for law enforcement. He recalled a particular presentation for CBP that had sparked some contentious debates within the office, but the staff ultimately agreed to host the event.

“Our position is we are going to educate whoever wants to be educated about Arab Americans. We feel that's our duty, that's our mission. And if you're someone who's really social justice oriented you might see any interaction with police as being a tool of the state or a tool of state oppression. But again, we're not giving cultural competency, to help law enforcement arrest our community better. We're just under the understanding that our community will be interacting with police at some point, as everybody does, whether it's for traffic ticket or domestic violence or a medical emergency. So we feel that the officers that are on the street should have the best information about who the community is and what their history is, and that's how we approach it.”

This perspective is echoed in the sentiment of BRIDGES members: ideally, the Arab and Muslim American community of Dearborn would not receive this unwarranted attention from federal law enforcement, but so long as it does, community leaders must keep channels of communication like BRIDGES open.

# **Policy Recommendations**

BRIDGES has undoubtedly been a useful tool in building and strengthening the relationship between the Arab American community and law enforcement, a relationship which has been damaged over the years by instances of abuse of power and police brutality. But the question that must be asked is not, “what policies will heal a damaged relationship?” but rather, “what policies can be changed or thrown out to prevent the damage?” I would argue that beyond community policing measures, lawmakers must first ask themselves whether counterterror policies that continue to harm the Arab American community are worth maintaining. For instance, the No Fly list continues to be a sticking point among community members that BRIDGES has been largely unable to remedy. But as the American Civil Liberties Union points out in its legal challenge to the No Fly list in *Latif et al. v Holder et al*., the list has played no significant role in apprehending terrorists.[[13]](#footnote-13) In fact, with over a million names, the list has done little more than waste the time and resources of the TSA as they search and detain innocent Arab Americans. BRIDGES will only have long-lasting impact insofar as law enforcement and lawmakers take the frustrations of the community seriously, and I would offer that they can begin to do this by evaluating whether policies like the No Fly list serve any real purpose in countering terrorism. Essentially, BRIDGES should not be used to merely ease tensions while policies that actively harm the Arab American community in the name of national security continue to exist.

However, this is not to say that the BRIDGES program should not be expanded. After examining the benefits and drawbacks of the BRIDGES program in Dearborn, I return to one of the questions I posed at the beginning of this study: how the BRIDGES model be “sized up” in such a way that provides the most benefit to the Arab American community while minimizing the potential harm. As I was conducting interviews, the importance of analyzing the feasibility of a “size up” became clear; every single law enforcement agent with whom I spoke over the course of this study referenced how popular BRIDGES was among their respective agencies, and told me about various initiatives to develop BRIDGES forums in other cities. One referred to it as the “gold standard of community policing.” Several community leaders in BRIDGES told me that they had been asked to consult on these expansions, and many had done so, flying to Florida and Texas to discuss the program with community leaders in those states. One even consulted with senior Department of Justice officials in Washington to discuss how BRIDGES could become a prototype for a nationwide program.

Though I previously established that all the members of BRIDGES interviewed here believe that the program should continue or even expand, the problems identified in this study must be addressed if this expansion is to be beneficial for all parties involved. In fact, I would argue that as BRIDGES moves around the country, these issues would only be exacerbated. Dearborn is home to the largest community of Arab Americans in the country. Every major civil rights organization which represents the Muslim or Arab American community has an office or headquarters in the metro Detroit area. Furthermore, there are dozens of offices dedicated to protecting the legal rights of immigrants of every nationality present in Dearborn. In sum, one Dearborn has a level of collective efficacy that is unmatched by most other Arab American communities nationwide.

This collective efficacy is incredibly important to the structure of BRIDGES. As I discussed, BRIDGES was originally formed through the initiative of Arab civil rights advocates who had established relationships with federal agencies. Because of this, community leaders had a hand in shaping the structure and scope of BRIDGES to fit their needs. Thus, to establish a copy of BRIDGES in another community, there would need to be a robust structure of civil rights and social services organizations like the one which exists in Dearborn to act as architects of the forum. A community that does not have these resources, or does have them but to a lesser extent than Dearborn, likely has less capacity to manage the issues which Dearborn members of BRIDGES faced (apathetic and even hostile law enforcement agents or the exclusion of certain groups). Thus, I would argue that BRIDGES faces not a “size up” problem, but a “size down” one; as the program is adapted for smaller communities with fewer resources, the stakeholders must be all the more careful to ensure that the issues we see in Dearborn are not replicated elsewhere.

This is not to say that the BRIDGES model should not or cannot be adapted. It is not a perfect program, but the community has no doubt benefitted from the information and (albeit limited) transparency that BRIDGES provides. Additionally, the program allows community organizations to build relationships with law enforcement representatives which can in turn make it easier to advocate for the people that they represent. One might also hope that if BRIDGES is established in another community, it will foster the growth of organizations established to protect the interests of Muslim and Arab Americans in that district. Furthermore, lawmakers in Michigan become more involved with the issues facing Muslim and Arab Americans in Dearborn as a result of attending BRIDGES meetings. As the program expands, lawmakers nationwide may be encouraged to meaningfully interact with these communities. However, changes to the structure of BRIDGES must be made to ensure that members reap the most benefit while avoiding the potential drawbacks.

At the core of my recommendations for the expansion of the BRIDGES program is this: the forum must be treated as only one part of a set of law enforcement policies which are structured to build lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with the Arab American community. As far as other programs, law enforcement agencies should make community outreach a full-time job, not just a quarterly forum. In Dearborn, a few respondents discussed their work with organizations like the community outreach officers, a team in the FBI dedicated to facilitating communication with minority populations. Offices like these can help to build working relationships outside of the forum. Furthermore, the existence of a law enforcement representative whose purpose is to be invested in the needs of the community will help to ensure that partnerships like BRIDGES are substantive, not simply used to make an agency look progressive. Finally, a dedicated, well-funded office of community outreach allows for cultural sensitivity training outside of the forum. Thus, members no longer have to use their valuable time educating officers on the finer points of their cultural heritage. This is not to suggest that community outreach should be entirely outsourced to these representatives; it is still important that the local leadership of respective agencies be actively involved. But a dedicated office of community outreach or multicultural affairs is a much needed supplement.

Additionally, respondents from the community valued their one-on-one meetings with law enforcement just as much, if not more, than their time in BRIDGES. While law enforcement agencies do not have unlimited time to dedicate to individual meetings, I would suggest that if an agency is planning to develop a BRIDGES forum in the community in which they work, they must dedicate just as much time and resources to building individual relationships with community organizations. This will help to ensure that certain groups are not excluded, which in the case of BRIDGES caused several members to leave. It will also ensure that law enforcement has an understanding of the diversity of the communities in which they work and tailors the agenda of the BRIDGES forum to meet these diverse needs.

# **Conclusion**

Since its inception, BRIDGES has succeeded in making law enforcement policies in Dearborn, as Ahmad put it, “friendlier.” It has created some lasting relationships between community leaders and law enforcement representatives, and these relationships have allowed the Arab American community to voice their concerns and propose changes to the counterterror policies which affect them. While BRIDGES members expressed frustration that they were unable to make progress on broader national issues like the No Fly list, local accomplishments like the FBI interview project are not to be undervalued. The fact that all respondents, whether current or former members of the forum, want BRIDGES to continue and even expand, suggests that the program is working. There is, however, always the potential for improvement. As these interviews have shown, while some law enforcement actors work to gain the trust of the community, other actors can just as easily undermine this progress. When one community group feels excluded, or community leaders in general have an unfavorable view of a particular agency or representative, the whole forum suffers. These interviews have shown several ways in which these actors can undermine the goals of the partnership: by excluding certain groups, by acting uninterested in substantive change, or by generally appearing hostile.

As models like BRIDGES are replicated in Arab American communities across the country (and in other minority communities), the issues discussed here must be addressed. On a fundamental level, issues like the No Fly list demonstrate that BRIDGES cannot be used simply to manage tensions while discriminatory policies persist. If BRIDGES is to be exported to Arab American communities around the country, it must be done as just one part of a package of reforms that seeks to abolish or change policies that harm the Arab American community while providing no real counterterrorism benefit. Furthermore, precautions must be taken as BRIDGES is expanded to ensure that the problems within the forum are not simply duplicated. This means a strong office of community outreach in major federal agencies as well as expanded access for one-on-one meetings between community organizations and federal law enforcement.

The findings of this study leave room for further research on community policing within counterterrorism. Within this case study alone, further research needs to be done on the perceptions of forums like BRIDGES in the community at large, rather than just among its members. Additionally, the effect of community outreach officers in agencies like the FBI presents another avenue for inquiry. As the War on Terror continues without an end in sight, it is imperative that the policies put forth to counter violent extremism are regularly criticized, evaluated, and adjusted.

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**Appendix**

**Questionnaire**

1. How did you first become involved with BRIDGES?
2. In your opinion, what is the purpose of BRIDGES?
3. What is the role of [respondent’s organization] in BRIDGES?
4. How has this role evolved since BRIDGES’ inception, if at all?
5. How do you and [organization] work with law enforcement/community leaders outside of BRIDGES?
6. What issues do you find the BRIDGES’ discusses the most? How have these discussions evolved in the time you have been a member?
7. In your opinion, when community organizations come to BRIDGES, what are they hoping to get out of it and what do they walk away with?
8. In your opinion, when law enforcement comes to BRIDGES, what are they hoping to get out of it and what do they walk away with?
9. What is your proudest achievement in BRIDGES?
10. What has been the biggest barrier to achieving your goals through BRIDGES?
11. Is BRIDGES a model that you would want to replicate in other parts of the country?

**Additional questions for law enforcement**

1. As a local representative of [agency], how do you communicate the changes and policies discussed in BRIDGES with your agency?
2. Given that BRIDGES has representatives from multiple different organizations which represent different segments of the community, how do you balance the differing priorities of these organizations?

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