

**BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE
MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL PILOT PROGRAM**

February 2015

**Building Community Resilience
Minneapolis-St. Paul Pilot Program
A Community-Led Local Framework**

BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

OVERVIEW

Minnesota is home to the largest number of Somali immigrants in the United States. The largest concentration is located in Hennepin County. This community has overcome many challenges since they began immigrating to Minnesota in the 1990s. Minnesota offered a strong economy and immigration-friendly programs. Today, the Somali community is a peaceful group of entrepreneurs, therapists, religious leaders, educators, law enforcement officers and many others. Despite the many challenges this community has overcome, many remain. This framework addresses some of the community-identified challenges.

Beginning in 2007, al-Shabaab began recruiting Somali Minnesotans to fight overseas on behalf of the terrorist organization. Many young Somali Minnesotans left, including 26-year-old Shirwa Ahmed, a Somali-born American citizen, who on October 29, 2008, became the first documented American suicide bomber. More than 20 young Somalis have been publicly charged in U.S. District Court in Minnesota on terrorism-related charges. Recently, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) began capitalizing on the tactics used by al-Shabaab to recruit Somali Minnesotans to travel overseas to fight. ISIL is using more sophisticated technology, social media and personal outreach to target Somali Minnesotans. Since 2013, a large number of Somali Minnesotans have traveled, attempted to travel, or taken steps in preparation to travel to join ISIL. The Somali Minnesotan community wants this cycle of recruitment to stop and have partnered with the U.S. Attorney's office to build a plan to stop this cycle.

"The peace, safety, and security of Minnesota are of paramount importance to the Muslim-American community, and we oppose any form or shape of violent extremism that threatens peaceful co-existence." -Imam Abdisalam Adam and Imam Sheikh Sa'ad Muse Roble

PILOT PROGRAM BACKGROUND

In August 2011, the White House released [*Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*](#), the first national strategy to prevent violent extremism domestically. The strategy focuses on community-based approaches, believing that the "best defenses against violent extremist ideologies are well-informed and equipped families, local communities, and local institutions." This concept of empowering local partners is not new. The federal government has a long history of successful initiatives that rely on community based partnerships on a range of public safety issues, including gang reduction, drug abuse prevention, youth violence prevention and youth mentoring initiatives.

In December 2011, a corresponding [*Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*](#) was published, outlining the steps the federal government will take to achieve the strategy's central goal of preventing violent extremists and their supporters from radicalizing, recruiting, or inspiring individuals or groups in the United States to commit acts of violence. The plan envisions a comprehensive approach to countering violent extremism (CVE) in the United States – best pursued with communities to drive the solutions. Three cities, Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN; Boston, MA; and Los Angeles, CA, were selected as pilot cities. Led by the U.S. Attorneys in each district, the communities were tasked with developing comprehensive prevention and intervention pilot programs to help counter violent extremism within local communities.

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – 2007-2013

Minneapolis-St. Paul was selected as one of the three cities to develop a pilot program in large part because of the strong relationships that local law enforcement has developed with the Somali community. The FBI, DHS, Hennepin County Sheriff's Office, St. Paul Police Department and Minneapolis Police Department each have long histories of effective community outreach and have built solid foundations of trust on which to build the Pilot Program.

- The Hennepin County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) has strong relationships with local Imams and hosts a Somali Advisory Council designed to promote open dialogue and information exchanges. One result of the Council's work was a new policy in the county jails on religious head coverings. HCSO also hired the first sworn Somali Deputy in Minnesota and its Community Engagement Team includes a member of the Somali community. HCSO has also produced a number of community outreach videos designed to increase comfort and trust with local law enforcement.
- The St. Paul Police Department regularly hosts several community engagement academies and summits including an East African Women's Summit and an East/West African Youth Summit. They have trained over 600 sworn officers in the Somali culture, started after-school study programs, mentored kids, hosted open gyms and supported female swim and fitness classes. Their programs serve hundreds of Somali American children and teens. They have built trust, cooperation and friendships.
- The Minneapolis Police Department increased its number of Somali police officers, which has helped to increase legitimacy in the community. These officers have trained the department on the Somali culture. The police department also has a dedicated community engagement team focused on building trust with the community.
- The federal government, including the FBI, DHS, and the U.S. Attorney's Office also built relationships with the Somali Minnesotan community through regular roundtable discussions and youth advisory boards.

FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

Because of this solid foundation that local law enforcement developed, the Pilot Program was able to quickly meet with hundreds of Somali community members to hear their concerns and ideas about why the community's youth have been susceptible to terrorist recruitment. These members include Imams, elders, community organizations and associations, women, mothers, youth and victims of recruiting. The community also discussed what they believed are the solutions to address the root causes of radicalization. This framework was developed from these community discussions.

The Pilot Program also engaged with local stakeholders who work with the Somali community to understand current programming. Stakeholders include local, state and federal law enforcement partners, local

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non-governmental organizations, social service providers, schools, professors and others. Additionally the Pilot Program reviewed available research and program models that may be applicable.

To increase the framework's legitimacy, the Pilot Program hosted and participated in several community and stakeholder meetings to provide an overview of the framework. These meetings promoted open and transparent dialogues and helped gain community support for the framework. Changes and clarifications were made as a result of these meetings.

IDENTIFIED ROOT CAUSES

This framework was developed after months of listening to the community about its needs as well as reviewing available research and talking with experts. The identified the root causes of radicalization include:

- disaffected youth
- a deepening disconnect between youth and religious leaders
- internal identity crises
- community isolation
- lack of opportunity – including high unemployment, lack of activities for youth, and few mentors.

"We view this pilot program as a unique opportunity to engage our youth in positive programs. Providing more opportunities, more outlets and more connections for our Somali youth will help break the cycle that has drawn too many of our friends and relatives to a life of terror."

-Mohamed Farah, Ka Joog

COMPONENTS

The framework addresses these community-identified root causes, borrowing elements from long-standing successful public safety models including the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Gang Reduction Model. It has three components: engagement, prevention and intervention and is a community-driven approach. Implementation relies on community mobilization.

- **Engagement:** The framework envisions more engagement between law enforcement and the community to continue to build trust and develop relationships. There are several Somali officers in local law enforcement. They are highly successful and well thought of in the community. The framework includes support for additional Somali law enforcement officers, including increasing the number of entry level positions, such as Community Liaison Officers and Parking Enforcement Officers, with the goal of guiding and mentoring candidates into full-time officer positions. In addition to continuing to build up law enforcement engagement, trust and relationships need to be enhanced with other partners and local stakeholders. This includes city, county and state government agencies and corporations working to increase their engagement and connection to Somali Minnesotans. Another component of this framework brings in federal agency partners such as the Transportation Security Administration and U.S. Customs and Border Protection to help educate community members on airport screening processes and provide direct assistance to community members that have expressed airport related concerns.

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- **Prevention:** Similar to other prevention strategies, the framework includes an increase in youth programming such as after-school activities and mentor programs, higher education scholarships and job opportunities. There will also be a social media campaign providing positive messaging to the Somali community. As true in other at-risk populations, providing more opportunities and positive messages for youth increases public safety. Somali Minnesotan youth are an underserved community. The federal government has a successful history working with local communities and providing funding, research and other support for youth programming and mentoring. The Pilot Program Framework envisions expanding these programs to include Somali Minnesota youth. The Pilot Program has already brought together several partner organizations to develop culturally competent programming.
- **Intervention:** There will be two intervention models developed, one working within the school systems and one working within the community. Both will be community-led. The school model will expand a current model within connects youth workers from the community, bridging the gap between youth, their parents and the school system. These workers will spend time in the lunchroom and in non-classroom settings, building relationships and trust at school. They will provide connections and continuity during school and after for both parents and the students. The second intervention model is based on community volunteers, with mothers, community organizations, religious leaders and mental health professionals working directly with families before law enforcement is ever involved.

“One of the things we told the U.S. Attorney is that we need more mentors for our youth. For so long we have talked about the problems. Now is the time to act. And we are proud to be part of this Pilot Program.”

-Mohamed Jama, Cedar Riverside Youth Council

Implementing the components of this framework will be led by the community. Several committees will be established with broad representation from the community to implement various parts of the framework. The program will be successful because it is community-driven and community owned.

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DEVELOPMENT OF THE BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK

MEETINGS WITH COMMUNITY

RELIGIOUS LEADERS	ATTORNEYS
ELDERS	LAW ENFORCEMENT
WOMEN	YOUTH
MOTHERS	SOCIAL WORKERS
BUSINESS LEADERS	VICTIMS OF RECRUITING



COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ROOT CAUSES

COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ROOT CAUSES

DISAFFECTED YOUTH	IDENTITY CRISIS
LACK OF CONNECTION TO RELIGIOUS LEADERS	LACK OF TIES TO BROADER MINNESOTA COMMUNITY
DIFFICULTIES IN SCHOOL	GENERATIONAL DIVIDE
LACK OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY	LACK OF SOCIAL OPPORTUNITY



ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES

BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE ACTION PLAN

YOUTH PROGRAMMING	SCHOOL & COMMUNITY-BASED INTERVENTION MODELS
MENTORING OPPORTUNITIES	YOUTH/IMAM ENGAGEMENT
HIGHER EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIPS	EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES
SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS	ENHANCED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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NEXT STEPS : IMPLEMENTING THE FRAMEWORK

To implement the framework, committees need to be well established and functional. These committees need to have broad representation. Funding for programming is essential. The Pilot Program is engaged in identifying partners and sources of funding to implement the action plan. Terror recruiting in Minnesota is a pressing problem and we must act decisively to break the cycle. The Pilot Program has already received commitments from many stakeholders, including corporate and foundation funders. The Pilot Program will also partner with local organizations to measure its successes. This is a community-led approach. It was developed in partnership with the community and it will be implemented by the community. As the framework transitions into an action stage, the U.S. Attorney's Office will step back into a facilitation and coordination role, supporting the community-led committees upon request as appropriate.

"The lead initiative of this pilot project will be community led and the emphasis will be empowering the community to use internal and external resources to help itself."

-Hodan Hassan, mental health professional