

## Working Effectively with Somali Residents through the Arts: Collective Wisdom from the Cedar Riverside Neighborhood



A CHANCE Community-based research project  
By Anne Gadwa and Erika Byrd in partnership with  
Cedar Riverside Neighborhood Revitalization Program (CRNRP)

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Cover photography  
Top row: Riverside Plaza,  
detail from *Honor the Spirit*  
- Marilyn Lindstrom/West  
Bank CDC, detail from  
mural on Cedar Cultural  
Center. Bottom row: detail  
from *Harmony* by Richard  
Amos and Aziz Osman,  
Weisman Art Museum,  
Cedar Riverside Pottery  
Cooperative.

Cedar Riverside Pottery  
Cooperative photo  
courtesy of Robert Tom.  
All other photos by Erika  
Byrd

## Research Partners

CRNRP is a nonprofit organization responsible for implementing the Cedar Riverside Neighborhood Action Plan. Operating under the umbrella of the City of Minneapolis's Neighborhood Revitalization Program, CRNRP furthers the mission of the NRP to empower neighborhoods by increasing the involvement of neighborhood residents in policy and planning. CRNRP pursued this research project for three reasons: to convene a wide cross section of neighborhood stakeholders around the previously unexplored topic of intercultural artistic exchange; to strengthen and forge new neighborhood relations for ongoing community building; and because CRNP recognized the synergy between the arts and other neighborhood strategies it is concurrently pursuing.

Bedlam Theatre joined the fabric of the Cedar Riverside/West Bank community upon its founding in 1993. Bedlam Theatre's mission is to produce radical works of theater with a focus on collaboration and a unique blend of professional and community art. In 2006, Bedlam Theater produced the play *West Bank Story*, which told the stories of past and present residents of Minneapolis' West Bank neighborhood. Bedlam continues to work actively with the Cedar Riverside community members, including through its youth drama club in partnership with the Brian Coyle Community Center.

CHANCE seeks to strengthen the relationship between the University of Minnesota West Bank campus and the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood by fostering and promoting community-building and civic engagement among the West Bank students, staff and faculty, business owners, and residents in Cedar-Riverside. The CHANCE affiliated course, Engaging the Public in Policy and Planning, is rooted in the tenets of Community Based Research, which emphasizes collaborative, change-oriented research that engages faculty, students, and community members in projects that address a community-identified need.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>(Strand, et al., 2003, 5-15)

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# Summary

## Introduction

We, Erika Byrd and Anne Gadwa, graduate students at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, undertook this community-based research project in partnership with Cedar Riverside Neighborhood Revitalization Program (CRNRP). Cedar Riverside is both an arts hotbed and immigrant enclave. It hosts university concert halls, edgy theatre venues, bars pulsing with music, and the largest population of immigrants within the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Our objective is to **empower arts providers** (nonprofit performance spaces and arts organizations, academic art departments and exhibition spaces, and commercial music venues) **to work more effectively with Somali residents**, the neighborhood's largest immigrant group, by:

1. Assessing interest and capacity by examining:
  - a) Somali residents' attitudes and practices in relation to the arts; and
  - b) Neighborhood arts providers' interest, motivation and capacity for becoming more responsive to Somali residents; and by
2. Providing arts providers with community-recommended guiding principles and practical advice for working with Somali residents.

## Research Methods

To achieve our objective, we:

- Interviewed a wide-range of people in the community, including Somali leaders and artists, and non-Somali arts community members who have worked with Somalis through the arts;
- Held listening sessions with arts providers, and Somali elders and youth;
- Reviewed relevant literature; and
- Took advantage of informal opportunities to gain familiarity with Somali culture and Islam.

## Findings

### I. Somali residents—strong artistic interests, scarce resources

Through our research we learned of Somalis' interest in a range of art forms. Diverse artistic tastes reflect the fact that the Somali population is not homogenous. However, across different segments of the Somali community, residents voiced preferences for participatory and culturally relevant and sensitive arts activities.

- **Poetry:** Adults and youth, and women and men all expressed enthusiasm for poetry, reinforcing Somalia's heritage as a "nation of poets."
- **Theater:** Many Somali youth are currently involved in theater, and some community members voiced a desire to do more.
- **Music:** Age and degree of religious devoutness influenced attitudes towards music. We learned Somalia's musical heritage emphasizes lyrical verse, but that modern Somali music incorporates many influences including jazz, rock and roll, and hip-hop.
- **Craft:** Many Somali residents work actively in the textile arts and wish to produce other crafts, but are restricted by a lack of traditional materials.
- **Visual Arts:** Somali culture historically did not emphasize non-functional visual arts, because of its nomadic tradition and religious prohibitions in Islam. Within Cedar Riverside, however, we learned of Somali painters, henna artists and youth creating visual art.

Somali community members articulated that they value arts activities for enjoyment and recreational opportunities, and as a means to facilitate communication, preserve cultural traditions, and empower individuals. However, religious and cultural sensitivities, language barriers, restricted mobility and financial constraints prevent Somali residents from taking more advantage of existing arts offerings. Somali residents' ability to initiate more arts activities from within the Somali community is constrained by finite resources.

## II. Arts providers—How deep do commitments run?

Cedar Riverside’s arts providers demonstrated a promising level of interest in working more with Somali residents. Eighty-five percent of survey respondents indicated they were somewhat or very interested in increasing their responsiveness to the Somali population. Arts providers’ motivations for working more with Somali residents are driven by synergies with their mission and organizational priorities and a desire to address neighborhood needs such as youth employment and crime reduction. Arts providers are most interested in offering artistic programming with content of interest to Somali residents. They expressed less, but not insubstantial, enthusiasm for the types of hands-on collaborations that seemed to resonate most with Somalis. Arts providers cited lack of financial and staff capacity and lack of knowledge about the interests and needs of Somali residents as top deterrents for becoming more responsive to the Somali population.

## III. Foundation exists from which to build

The Cedar Riverside arts and Somali communities have forged a promising foundation of arts collaborations from which to build. Bedlam Theatre and the Brian Coyle Community Center work in partnership on the Cedar Riverside Youth Drama Club. The Weisman Museum is planning an exhibition of Somali photographer Abdi Roble’s work in August 2009. The East African Women’s Center’s Textile Cooperative displayed weavings at an Augsburg College gallery. Through conversations with initiators of these and other intercultural artistic collaborations and Somali community members we provide four community-recommended guiding principles for others hoping to build on this work.

### Guiding principles and practical advice

- **Employ empowered collaborations** by fostering open communication and trust, seeking intersecting goals and sharing power
- **Be mindful of cultural sensitivity** especially around mixing genders and religious accommodation
- **Ensure accessibility** by recruiting “link” people, using spaces Somalis feel comfortable accessing, providing compensation, and maintaining flexibility
- **Use relevant artistic forms and content** especially poetry, theater or craft and active arts participation that builds skills or celebrates Somali cultural heritage

## **Conclusion: Cautious optimism surrounding future prospects**

Despite promising momentum, the road ahead is not easy. It requires forging relationships and trust across cultures, deep commitment and perseverance. We can attest to interest and motivation surrounding arts collaboration within both Cedar Riverside's Somali and arts communities, but each community also faces obstacles hindering their ability to gain traction in this area. Despite the challenges, both Cedar Riverside's arts providers and Somali residents have much to gain from working together. Through this report, we offer arts providers tools for working effectively with Somali residents, culled from the collective wisdom from the Cedar Riverside neighborhood. We hope these findings boost success, and we applaud the continued efforts about to begin.

# INTRODUCTION

## Humble origins

In January 2009, we (Erika Byrd and Anne Gadwa, two graduate students at the UMN's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs) met with John Bueche and Maren Ward, the artistic directors of Bedlam Theatre, to brainstorm about possible research topics that might benefit Minneapolis' Cedar Riverside/West Bank Neighborhood. We had keen personal interests in the connections between art and community development and had devoted much of the previous semester to understanding the neighborhood's social and arts ecosystems and current assets and challenges.<sup>2</sup> Bueche proposed a seemingly straight forward question, "What artistic forms and content are of interest to Cedar Riverside's immigrant residents?" Bueche explained that Bedlam's staff frequently fielded questions from other arts venues on how to work with Cedar Riverside's diverse population. Although peer theatres recognized Bedlam as a leader in this area, given the wide community involvement in its 2006 production *West Bank Story* and the youth drama club that Bedlam sponsors in collaboration with the Brian Coyle Community Center, Bedlam staff felt ill equipped to answer these questions.

<sup>2</sup> (Byrd, Gadwa & Flannery, 2008)

## Objectives and Audience

From this starting point and with the sponsorship of the Cedar Riverside Neighborhood Revitalization Program, we decided the goal of our research would be to **empower arts providers** (nonprofit performance spaces and arts organizations, academic art departments and exhibition spaces, and commercial music venues) **to work more effectively with immigrant residents**. Given time limitations, we chose to focus on Cedar Riverside's Somali residents, the area's largest immigrant group, although we hope the findings may inform other cross-cultural artistic efforts.

Through our research we:

1. Assess interest and capacity by examining:
  - a) Somali residents' attitudes and practices in relation to the arts; and
  - b) Neighborhood arts providers' interest, motivation and capacity for becoming more responsive to Somali residents.
2. Provide arts providers with community-recommended guiding principles and practical advice for working with Somali residents.

We have written this report for a core audience of people working in the arts in Cedar Riverside who are interested in becoming more responsive to Somali residents. This group spans artists, curators

of academic galleries, photography and music professors, administrators at nonprofit performing venues, and even owners of for-profit bars with live music, but includes few new immigrants. Community, social service and religious organizations attracted to the arts as a way to transcend cultural barriers, empower Somalis or enrich their lives may also find this report useful. We hope Somali and other new immigrant individuals, especially those living in Cedar Riverside, will read this report and freely critique and challenge our assertions. We recognize that as outsiders, we can not possible fully “translate” cultural and religious differences, but never-the-less we hope this effort respectfully raises base-line awareness of Somali culture and spurs constructive ongoing dialogue.

### **What we did**

To address these research objectives, we interviewed a wide-range of people in the community, including Somali artists, community organizers, and religious leaders, and non-Somali artists, arts administrators, and community organizers who had already worked with members of the Somali community through the arts. We held listening sessions with Somali elders and youth to gauge their specific interests in the arts. Through a roundtable discussion and web-based survey, members of the arts community expressed their interest in working with Somali residents as well as opportunities and challenges related to this work. Literature review revealed relevant theories on the social impact of arts participation, provided background on a range of traditional Somali art forms, and informed our understanding of the relationship between Islam and the arts. We also took advantage of informal opportunities to gain familiarity with Somali culture and Islam.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of our methodology, see Appendix A.

### **What we found**

Overall, we are cautiously optimistic about Cedar Riverside’s future prospects for meaningful arts collaboration between Somali residents and arts providers. Somali residents are interested in the arts, especially participatory, culturally relevant and sensitive activities. Arts providers are also interested in becoming more responsive to Somali residents. A foundation of intercultural art projects exists from which to build. Through conversations with initiators of these projects and Somali community members, we offer arts providers community-recommended guiding principles and practical advice to move forward effectively. Although meaningful arts collaboration demands perseverance and deep commitment and both the Somali and arts communities face barriers, we encourage and applaud future efforts. As one artist put it, “One has to approach this work with humility and pick oneself up off the ground after making stupid mistakes. It takes a lot of listening.”

## BACKGROUND: CEDAR RIVERSIDE—ARTS HOTBED, IMMIGRANT ENCLAVE

Long-time West Bankers and folks unfamiliar with Cedar Riverside alike may not be fully aware of just how distinct the Cedar Riverside neighborhood is in terms of arts assets and immigrant presence. According to the West Bank Business Association, Cedar Riverside has the highest number of entertainment venues per capita nationally, outside of New York and LA, ranging from university concert halls to edgy theatre venues to bars pulsing with everything from rock to blues to world music.<sup>4</sup> Students and faculty at performing and visual art departments at both the University of Minnesota and Augsburg College study and create art in Cedar Riverside daily. Colorful murals and public art projects enliven numerous street corners. We illustrate Cedar Riverside's wide-ranging arts assets in Figure 1.

<sup>4</sup>(West Bank Business Association, 2008)

<sup>5</sup>(City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development, 2009)

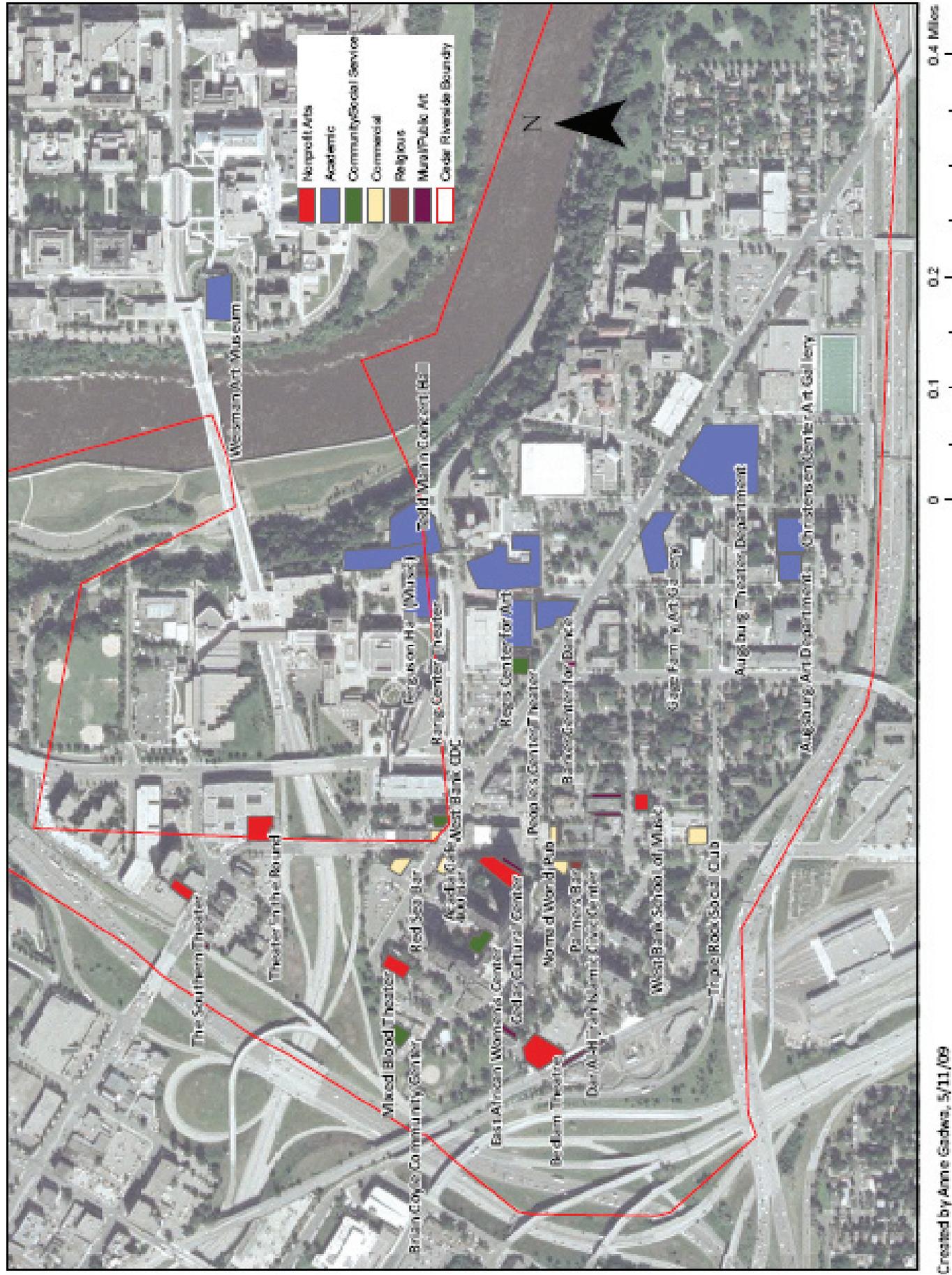
<sup>6</sup>(U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

<sup>7</sup>(The Minneapolis Foundation, 2008)

The neighborhood also boasts the largest percentage of immigrants in the Twin Cities.<sup>5</sup> As of the 2000 US Census, 45% of neighborhood residents were foreign born, compared to 14.5% for the city of Minneapolis. Of 3,400 foreign born residents, 54% were from Africa, 34% were from Asia, and 8.5% were from Latin America.<sup>6</sup>

Minnesota is home to the country's largest population of Somali immigrants, most of whom have arrived since 1990 as refugees from a brutal civil war.<sup>7</sup> Although Somalis have dispersed throughout the metropolitan region and state, Cedar Riverside remains a strong cultural center for the Somali community; it is home to active mosques, numerous immigrant owned shops offering culturally specific foods and goods, and nonprofit organizations providing services ranging from ESL classes to Murabaha compliant financial lending.

Figure 1. Cedar Riverside Arts Assets Map



## SOMALI RESIDENTS—STRONG ARTISTIC INTERESTS, SCARCE RESOURCES

Somalia is one of only a few African nations composed almost entirely of one ethnic group. However, Cedar Riverside's Somali community is not homogenous and artistic preferences reflect this variation. As Abdi Roble and Doug Rutledge, who document the Somali Diaspora in the United States, put it,

*Any question of how Somalis are going to intersect with the American culture must begin with the realization that people from Somalia have brought with them a range of experiences. It is true that they all speak Somali and are Sunni Muslims, but within that cultural framework, they had a variety of economic, educational, and even religious experiences.<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>8</sup> (Roble, Rutledge, 2008, p. 8)

<sup>9</sup> (Moriarty, 2004, p. 16)

Although traditionally nomadic, Somalis in Cedar Riverside come from a variety of backgrounds including farming, nomadic and urban experiences. Many were born in the United States. In addition, Somali individuals' own unique interests and sensibilities form artistic tastes. To help us get a sense of the range of artist interests within Cedar Riverside's Somali population, we drew both on literature about the art and culture of Somalia and interviews with Somali community members. Although we present generalizations, out of necessity, we hope this effort respectfully raises base-line awareness of Somali culture and avoids stereotyping.

### Diverse Artistic Interests

In general, Somalis are a very artistic people. "You will find that every Somali house will have some kind of art," said one Somali community member. Within Cedar Riverside, Somalis participate in the arts through community organizations, in collaboration with neighborhood theaters and galleries, and independently (both individually and in groups).

We found Somali residents are most interested in expanding access to *participatory* arts. As described by researcher Pia Moriarty, "Participatory arts are recognized by many names (community arts, popular arts, informal arts, amateur arts, unincorporated arts), but the definition is consistent: that these arts are more about creating than consuming, and that they make room for many ways of actively engaging in artistic practices."<sup>9</sup> Elder women voiced interest in learning crafts such as knitting and sewing. Youth wanted to write and act in plays, paint murals and direct videos. Youth expressed particular interest in arts that incorporate technology (such as digital photography, and video and audio production).

## Poetry

Poetry has traditionally played a central role in Somali life. In fact, Somalia is often referred to as the “nation of poets.”<sup>10</sup> Somali scholar, B. W. Andrzejewski, described the revered status of the poet in Somali society: “In their hierarchy of values, a talent for poetry can place a person at the very apex of public acclaim, alongside national leaders and heroes; in fact the status of a poet in Somali society would inspire their counterparts in modern Europe and America with envy.”<sup>11</sup>

Some scholars argue that poetry is the dominant art form in Somalia because of the nomadic nature of society.<sup>12</sup> Somali tribes historically moved constantly and traveled with as little equipment as possible, so language arts blossomed over arts that took up physical space. In addition, for thousands of years the Somali language only existed in oral form. The Somali government did not officially adopt a written alphabet until 1972. Poetry grew out this oral linguistic tradition.<sup>13</sup> Somalis used poetry as the principle medium for mass communication. Through poetry, they conveyed the latest news and described historical events.<sup>14</sup>

Within Cedar Riverside, adults and youth, and women and men all expressed interest in poetry. One Somali college student said that she thinks while all Somalis appreciate poetry, youth are particularly interested in performing live poetry. Several Somali community members said they would like more opportunities for young people to perform their poetry. “This neighborhood is missing a place to do open mic on a regular basis,” one resident explained. Somali community members articulated that poetry holds particular appeal as a vehicle for self-expression for youth. Through poetry, Ka Joog,<sup>15</sup> a local Somali-run poetry organization aims to motivate Somali youth to attain a higher education, realize their potential and achieve their dreams. Ka Joog uses poetry to empower young people and is helping to popularize poetry among Somali youth.

## Theater

Somalia’s theater tradition is rich. Prior to the unrest, theater groups toured both urban and rural areas. In small towns with no theater or performance groups, the arrival of a touring theater troupe was an important and exciting event. Somali theater differs from Western theater considerably. “Prose alone is not the stuff of a Somali play,” writes one author.<sup>16</sup> Instead, Somali plays are usually written in poetic verse and include drama, comedy and music.<sup>17</sup> Said Salah Ahmed, a revered poet, playwright and educator, epitomizes this blending of forms through his work (see Profile I).

<sup>10</sup> Nineteenth Century British explorer Richard Burton dubbed Somalia “A nation of bards”, and wrote in his book *First Footsteps in East Africa*, “The country teems with ‘poets, poetasters, poetatoes, poetaccios’: every man has his recognized position in literature as accurately defined as though he had been reviewed in a century of magazines – the fine ear of this people causing them to take the greatest pleasure in harmonious sounds and poetical expressions, whereas a false quantity or a prosaic phrase excite their violent indignation.” (Burton, 1856)

<sup>11</sup>(Andrzejewski, 2001, p. ix)

<sup>12</sup>(Lawrence, 1993, pp. 25-26)

<sup>12</sup>(Hamilton, 2007, p. 50)

<sup>14</sup>(Johnson, 1996); (Samatar, 1987)

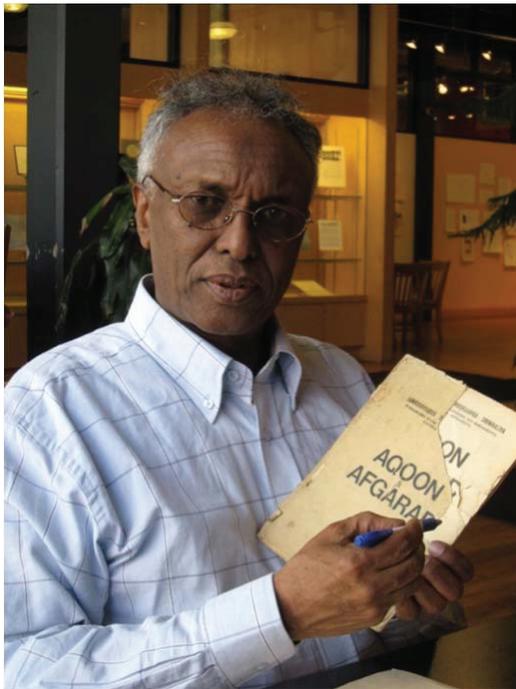
<sup>15</sup>[www.myspace.com/kajoog\\_organization](http://www.myspace.com/kajoog_organization)

<sup>16</sup>(Abdullahi, 2001, p.88)

<sup>17</sup>(Hamilton, 2007, p. 51); (Abdullahi, 2001, p. 88)

## Profile I

### Said Salah Ahmed



Artist Said Salah Ahmed has mastered many forms—composing poems and song lyrics, writing books and plays, directing, acting, filmmaking, and radio and TV broadcasting. He jokes, “more or less anything to do with word art.” But, he is first and foremost an educator. The desire to expand his classroom beyond 30 students sitting in desks in front of him fueled his passion to become an artist and to utilize an ever-growing number of art forms.

In Somalia, Said worked towards educating and mobilizing the population, for instance by composing poems for radio broadcasts that reminded people to get vaccinated, or co-writing, directing and acting in a film that celebrated Somali freedom fighter, Mohammed Abdullah Hassan. Here in Minneapolis, Said is motivated by a passion to preserve, celebrate and share Somali culture. He offers instruction in Somali language for Somali youth in the school where

he teaches science—although these youth may speak Somali at home, many of them had never learned to read or write in their native tongue. Without compensation, Said formed a Somali cultural study group whose members meet every other Friday at the Loft Literary Center/Open Book to discuss Somali literature and collect resources on Somali culture. In addition, Said views art as a way to bridge cultures. He collaborated on *Telling the Story of Somalia*, a show which toured small and medium sized communities throughout the Midwest through Midwest Arts’ Midwest World Festival.

Said began his artistic career at a young age and he has overcome setbacks unthinkable to most Americans. One summer, while still in elementary school his aunt sent Said to join the nomadic branch of his family, and a draught led to a severe food shortage. This experience inspired Said to compose his first poem, complaining about the hardships, in a message to his aunt. His aunt, a respected poet, sent a reply answering in verse, triggering a local buzz about the young poet who showed such promise.

Said grew up to make significant artistic contributions in Somalia. Said’s playwriting efforts with a group of college poet friends and collaborators spurred a complete school of Somali theater. In 1977, at a pan African celebration of art and culture in Nigeria, Festac77, Said represented Somalia with his award winning play, *The Drum*. In 1979, Unicef recognized Said’s composition celebrating midwives as one of the best international submissions for their children-themed song-writing contest. For a time, every 12<sup>th</sup> grader read *Aqoon and Afgarad*, a play Said co-wrote, which made it into the national curriculum.

*Aqoon and Afgarad* was later censored because two of the collaborating authors joined the armed opposition movement and fled Somalia. Said lost his copy of the play, along with all his other possessions, with the exception of the clothes on his back, one watch and one ring, when he fled the atrocities of the civil war. A family member found the tattered copy pictured here, which is missing 12 pages, in a village and sent it to Said. Said is currently working on re-writing the play and reports that a friend was able to find a full version in the U.S. Library of Congress.

Said is well versed in the cycle of building and rebuilding. Even as a refugee in Kenya, Said assembled a cast of fellow-refugee actors to broadcast a radio play on the BBC and wrote over 46 pieces about the Somali predicament. Said again lost those writings when his shelter burned to the ground. In Minnesota, he has published a children's book, *The Lion's Share*, and his plays have been produced at the History Theatre and the Stepping Stone Theatre for Youth Development, although most Twin Cities residents remain ignorant of the revered artist living in Cedar Riverside.

Said's status as an immigrant refugee complicates his relationship to his audience. Said views his artistic work as "a pure Somali art" and as a playwright in Somalia he always incorporated themes of the nomadic life into his work. He jokes, "you always need to talk about the camel." In Somalia younger people responded more positively to his work. Here in the United States, Said finds the opposite is true. He speculates that perhaps this is because he himself has aged, but also notes that Somali youth now hardly understand the language and presentation that Said uses. Elements of Said's work also resonate with non-Somali audiences. Said explains that although translation can be defined as what is lost, there is a human culture that is still understood by all.



Photos:

Said Salah Ahmed, Photo by Anne Gadwa

*Aqoon Afgarad* - play by Said Salah Ahmed, Photo by Anne Gadwa

In Cedar Riverside, many Somali residents are currently involved in theater. A group of students with the Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota wrote a play about HIV and is currently adapting the work for video. Bedlam Theatre and the Brian Coyle Community Center run the Cedar Riverside Youth Drama Club in partnership. Some community members voiced a desire to do more theater. One Somali leader said neighborhood youth would like to mount concerts involving poetry, acting and sometimes music.

## Music

Music is another important aspect of Somali culture. However, prior to the twentieth century, instrumental music was not prominent in Somalia; music consisted mainly of sung poetry, sometimes accompanied by clapping or drumming. In the twentieth century, musicians added stringed instruments, such as the oud.<sup>18, 19</sup> Modern Somali music incorporates many influences including jazz, rock and roll, and hip hop. In general, Somalis appreciate music with lyrical verse; purely instrumental music in Somalia is rare.<sup>20</sup> One should be aware that the appropriateness of music in Somali culture and Islam is somewhat ambiguous. While we heard from Somalis that music is generally accepted if the content is not objectionable, some of the more religiously conservative feel that music is haraam (forbidden).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Hamilton, 2007, pp. 51-52)

<sup>19</sup>



The *oud*, a Middle Eastern stringed instrument prominent in Somali music.

<sup>20</sup>(Abdullahi, 2001, pp. 170-171)

<sup>21</sup>Islamic prohibition of music is based primarily on *hadith* evidence. *Hadith* are reports of the Prophet's words and deeds and serve as important tools for determining the Muslim way of life. There are several relevant hadith on the topic of music; one of the most commonly cited says, "From among my followers there will be some people who will consider illegal sexual intercourse, the wearing of silk, the drinking of alcoholic drinks and the use of musical instruments...Allah will destroy them during the night and will let the mountain fall on them, and He will transform the rest of them into monkeys and pigs and they will remain so till the Day of Resurrection." [Sahih Bukhari Vol.7 Hadith No.5590]

<sup>22</sup>(Samatar, 2006, p. 11)

<sup>23</sup>(Abdullahi, 2001, p. 95)

In Cedar Riverside, music's role in Somali residents' lives is important. Musicians and singers often perform at weddings and other celebrations. However, one Somali community leader noted traditional styles of Somali singing do not appeal to younger Somalis, "You're not going to find a young one singing in the old traditional way." Instead, youth are increasingly drawn to hip-hop. Somali music's content varies widely. "Music is a way for our community to communicate with each other," said one Somali community member. Recent locally produced music videos such as "Cayaalka Xaafada" by EAP and "Wax Barasho" by Mohamed Yare address social issues in the community.

## Craft

Somali scholar Said Shaikh Samatar once said, "Somali genius did not shine in the visual arts because basically we are a nomadic society and you can't carry material objects from camp to camp."<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, physical art plays a significant role in Somali culture. Author Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi wrote, "Far from being rich in only verbal art and poor in material art, the materials of everyday use among Somalis represent high forms of indigenous craft."<sup>23</sup> Many functional items of Somali nomadic life are very ornate, demanding skilled artistry. Carved wooden vessels and spoons, leather saddles and bags, and woven mats and baskets are all traditional Somali crafts that incorporate patterns and designs. One Somali woman elder living in Cedar Riverside described the

utilitarian nature of Somali arts, “We know art as something you make and use.” In traditional Somali society, men undertook woodworking and carving, while women wove.

In Cedar Riverside, Somalis work actively in the textile arts, however a lack of traditional materials restricts their ability to produce other crafts. Somali women elders that we talked with lament that the grasses and dyes that they used back in Somalia to weave baskets and mats are not available here. Female Somali elders also expressed interest in learning new crafts, such as knitting and quilting. The Textile Cooperative, housed in Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota’s East African Women’s Center, helps Somali and other East African women produce textile arts such as weaving, sewing, and quilting (see Profile II).

<sup>24</sup> Some considered that Islam prohibits the depiction of living beings in paintings, drawings and sculpture. Others disagree, arguing that the depiction of living beings is acceptable if the art is not designed to be worshipped and if the artist does not intend to rival God in the creation. For a discussion of the teachings of Islam in relation to visual arts, see (Hussain, n.d.)

<sup>25</sup> Abdullahi, 2000, p. 101

<sup>26</sup>



A detail from the mural *Harmony* by Richard Amos and Aziz Osman.

### Visual arts

Today numerous painters, photographers, filmmakers and other visual artists exist within the Somali Diaspora. For example, the Weisman Art Museum is featuring photographs by Abdi Roble, a Columbus, Ohio based photographer, in an upcoming exhibition (see Profile III). However, historically Somali culture has not emphasized visual arts. Not only is this due to the nomadic tradition of the Somali people, Islamic texts that prohibit the depiction of humans and animals in art are a factor as well.<sup>24</sup> However, in recent time, portraits and pastoral painting have become popular in Somalia.<sup>25</sup>

Within Cedar Riverside, residents, such as painter Aziz Osman<sup>26</sup> and henna artists keeping shop in tje Al Karama Somali Mall, create visual art. Somali youth have actively created works of art through Brian Coyle’s mural project and the Cedar Riverside Pottery Cooperative, initiated by Augsburg Professor, Robert Tom. Through conversations with youth, we learned enthusiasm varies for visual arts activities. Some youth name drawing or painting as their favorite type of art, while just as many say they don’t like those types of activities. Cedar Riverside’s Somali residents hold varying views about the appropriateness of visual arts. One Muslim leader explained that for some, drawing and painting is problematic, but for many others it is completely all right. It depends on how literally individuals interpret religious texts having to do with art. He noted that for the most religiously conservative Somalis, photographs of living beings are problematic.

## Profile II

### The Women's Textile Cooperative

Nestled in the heart of the Riverside Plaza hi-rise apartment complex, East African women of all ages including elders, girls, and mothers with small children gather at the East African Women's Center.



In the cozy, sun-drenched rooms they take advantage of early childhood education programs, connect with the neighboring Cedar Riverside Adult Education Collaborative (CRAEC) to study ESL or work towards entering a GED program, and most intriguingly, they sew and weave.

The Confederation of Somali Community launched the East African Women's Center in 2005 to "fill gaps in service and support families holistically and across generations as they begin their journey into American life." Early on the Women's Center struck upon sewing as an activity to entice women out of isolation. In the summer of 2005 an elder Somali woman saw some yarn through a window of the Women's Center and came in to ask how much it cost. When a staff member asked her what she was going to make, she pulled out a beautiful weaving from her bag. Thus the seeds were sown for the Women's Textile Cooperative.

Staff at the Women's Center learned some Somali elders still knew how to create the twinned weavings of Somalia, despite the fact that weavers were not able to weave during years spent in refugee camps because they did not have materials. Staff began connecting weavers to each other and materials, and helped them find opportunities to display their work. The venture evolved into the Textile Cooperative proper when sewers expressed interest in participating. Participating artists earn supplemental income and learn craft and business skills as they make and market the Cooperative's products.

Since 2006, the Textile Cooperative artists have exhibited their work at the Textile Center of Minnesota, Abbott Northwestern Hospital's Institute of Health and Healing, the Lutheran Church of the Reformation in St. Louis Park, a national healthcare conference held in St. Paul, and in galleries at Augsburg College and the McKnight Foundation.

Doroth Mayer points to McKnight's handling of the exhibition as an exemplary model of a successful partnership. Staff at McKnight truly wanted to have an opening event that was welcoming to the African community. Their efforts, from treating the Textile Cooperative as valued partners throughout the process, to subsidizing the preparation of culturally specific foods paid off—there were at least as many Africans at the opening as European Americans.

Doroth emphasizes that forging personal relationships and being open to doing things a little differently are key to working effectively across cultures. Although Doroth feels there's no one right way, utilizing art forms that are familiar and comfortable to new Americans, such as textiles, provides an effective platform from which to build.

Photo:  
Weavings. Textile Cooperative, East African Women's Center

## Profile III

### Stories of the Somali Diaspora: Photographs by Abdi Roble

(June 20 to September 13, 2009 at the Weisman Art Museum)



*Stories of the Somali Diaspora: Photographs by Abdi Roble* is a photography exhibition opening at the University of Minnesota's Weisman Art Museum in June 2009. Fifty-five photos by Roble tell the stories of Somali immigrants in America. Through the exhibition the audience traces one family's journey from a refugee camp to their new life in the United States. The photographs also portray life in the Somali communities in Minneapolis and Columbus, Ohio.

Abdi Roble, a Columbus-based freelance photographer, founded the Somali Documentary Project in 2003 to use photography and writing to document the Somali Diaspora. The Somali Documentary Project aims to provide Somali people with a record of this important movement in their history, educate hosting cultures throughout the world, and draw attention to the plight of Somalia and the fate of the people forced to leave their homeland.

With this exhibition the Weisman Art Museum hopes to attract a wide audience and broaden and deepen relationships within surrounding neighborhoods. To promote interest and participation in the upcoming exhibition, the Weisman invited Somali community members to join the planning committee. Because of Somali resident's involvement, the Weisman is abandoning their standard wine and cheese blow-out opening event, in favor of a Saturday afternoon "community day" with live soccer presentations and hands-on activities relating to photography. Event planning staff and Somali community members are also coordinating transportation for Somali elders and youth.

The Weisman staff faces difficulties when considering whether or not to include Somali hip-hop artists as part of the opening festivities. Some Somali community members feel hip-hop artists might reinforce a negative perception of Somali youth stemming from media reports of violence. However, Weisman staff sees hip-hop as another part of the community that deserves celebration. They are searching for ways to include hip-hop artists while remaining sensitive to community concerns. One idea is scheduling an evening performance and clearly labeling the event, so that those who wish to leave can do so.

According to Diane Mullin, Associate Curator at the Weisman, this exhibition challenged Weisman staff to think about things they don't normally think about, such as re-imagining the opening event. She notes, "It's very meaningful to really learn something about your community. The Weisman could have mounted this exhibition without community involvement and gotten the necessary press, however this process has been much more rewarding." Despite the strides the Weisman has made actively involving the Somali community, room for improvement always exists. During our listening session with Somali women elders we learned none of the women had heard of the exhibition. When asked if they might be interested in going, they conferred and through a translator offered a non-committal, "if God wills it."

Photo: *Boys in Pool* by Abdi Roble

## Motivations

Through our discussions with community members, we found wide support for increasing arts opportunities for Somali residents. However, we also discovered differing levels of enthusiasm. Some felt the arts are vital to the success of the Somali people, while others agreed that arts can play a positive role but argued more pressing issues should receive attention first. Overall, Somali community members' cited four main motivations for increasing arts activities—enjoyment and increasing recreational opportunities, facilitating communication, preserving culture, and empowering participants.

Almost all Somali community members we talked to expressed appreciation for some form of art—weaving, acting in a play or another art form. But, Somali community members cited reasons beyond sheer enjoyment for increasing arts activities. Interviewees often articulated that arts have a positive effect on community life. For example, Cedar Riverside's Somali community, which is particularly concerned with youth violence, finds positive out-of-school youth programming appealing.<sup>27</sup> Those working with youth in Cedar Riverside noted that kids get excited about programming when it involves arts components. Several people also expressed that adults can benefit from arts as well. In particular, they perceived arts activities to reduce social isolation by providing opportunities to get out of the home and connect with others.

Somalis also expressed concern over the lack of communication between the older and younger generations of Somali residents and saw arts projects as a potential remedy. Interviewees saw the lack of communication between generations contributing to misunderstandings and a loss of cultural heritage. One college student we talked to stressed the need for projects in which parents and youth worked together, saying, "Most of the time the parents and youth don't talk, but they need to talk."

Somali community members also voiced that art can effectively communicate the Somali experience to non-Somalis. Lately, many local Somalis have felt that the media has negatively portrayed them. Some expressed hope that art projects could teach outsiders about the Somali culture and challenge misconceptions. One Somali community leader suggested telling a story through a piece of art or a play could be much more effective as a communication strategy than giving a press conference to "talk at Westerners."

The Somali community also voiced interest in celebrating and preserving their culture through the arts. One community member noted that besides Somali Independence Day, there are few times that the community gets together to celebrate its artistic heritage. Another lamented that Somali children have no way of knowing about their literature and stories because public schools do not use Somali stories in the curriculum and elders do not share them with youth. This person also

<sup>27</sup>Literature confirms the positive benefits of arts participation for at-risk youth, including decreased delinquency and improved school performance (Clawson, Coolbaugh, 2001); (Heath, Soep & Roach, 1998).

noted that local elders have fascinating personal histories and envisioned an art project in which youth document elders' stories.

Lastly, Somalis saw the arts as a means to give people voice and develop skills. Those working with youth saw particular value in using art to help young people to express themselves. One person argued for an "open mic" night for youth, explaining that performing live poetry would help youth get out anxieties and frustrations in a positive setting. Others shared stories about how youth developed technical skills, language abilities, leadership capacity and confidence through past art projects.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Several studies on reinforce the benefits of arts participation that Somali community members predicted—increased cohesion within ethnic groups, connecting to other individuals from other cultures, and increasing individual skills and capacity (Moriarty, 2004); (Kidd, Zahir & Khan, 2008); (Wali, Severson & Longoni, 2002).

## Obstacles

Despite being a neighborhood rich in arts resources and having a resident population interested in artistic opportunities, Cedar Riverside lacks a strong engagement between arts providers and Somali residents. Somali residents seldom attend art performances at neighborhood venues and many collaborations between neighborhood arts providers and residents function as one-offs. Furthermore, while the neighborhood has established arts programs within Somali-led organizations (such as the East African Women's Center's Textile Cooperative), most Somali arts activities operate outside of formal incorporation within arts nonprofit organizations. For instance, a Somali community member describes Somali production of music and music videos as, "it's just kids doing it on their own."

Conversations with Somali community members revealed specific deterrents to Somali resident's participation with neighborhood arts providers. Somali residents' sensibilities regarding artistic content differ from that of many Americans. According to one Somali religious leader, Somalis do not appreciate cursing, overt sexuality or content which is disrespectful of religion. Language serves as another barrier, as many residents of Cedar Riverside do not speak English. Residents, especially older ones, also face mobility challenges. Somali women elders that we talked with expressed concerns about walking on the icy sidewalks during winter. Financial constraints also restrict involvement. High levels of poverty exist within Cedar Riverside and tickets can be prohibitively expensive. Even when performances are free, lack of knowledge about the event or unfamiliarity with the performance space can deter participation. Sales of alcohol at commercial music venues and performance spaces may also prevent Somali residents from greater arts involvement.

Somalis also cited barriers to implementing arts activities initiated from within the Somali community. Finite resources, physical, financial and human, within the Somali community hinder the development Somali arts activities. Several community members said the lack of a dedicated Somali arts and cultural center is a problem. Although residents can rent or use theater space from neighborhood arts venues,

Somali leaders explained the importance of feeling a sense of ownership. Somali organizations working in the neighborhood use their limited funds and human resources to tackle other important issues such as literacy and poverty. More than one community leader stated that arts are not top priority at this time. For some, arts become a priority “when you are comfortable, when your kids are fine.” Literature suggests that many social service organizations working with immigrant populations share these perceptions, although arts activities can effectively address basic needs.

*Understandably, most social service agencies working with immigrant communities concentrate on the practical realities of basic survival: shelter, employment, language acquisition, and education—the tools of self-sufficiency and the foundation for a good life in a new country...attention to the artistic and cultural wellbeing of immigrants can support these goals. Enhanced general and mental health, English language acquisition, professional and economic development, and opportunities for cross-cultural interaction are among the benefits of incorporating the arts into the processes of resettlement and cultural integration.<sup>29</sup>*

<sup>29</sup>(Institute for Cultural Partnerships & Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees, 2006).

<sup>30</sup>(Bye, 2004)

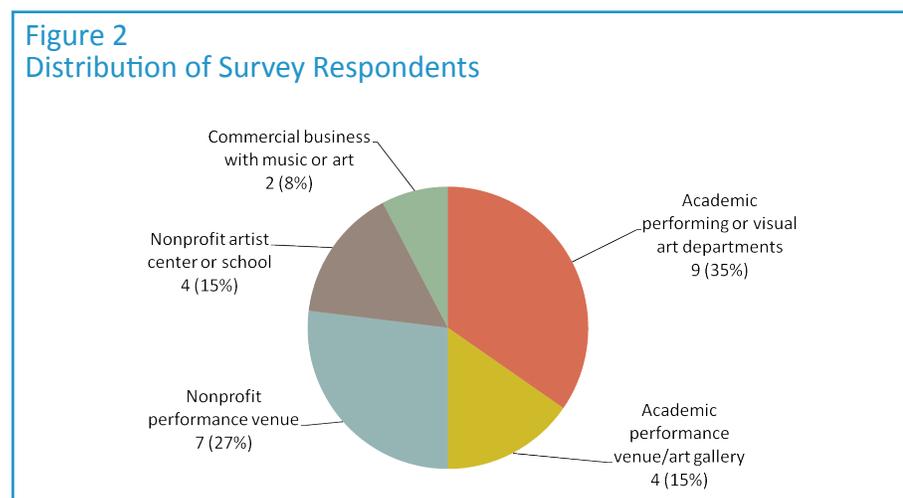
Finding new sources of funding for Somali-directed arts can also be challenging. While Somali residents may be most comfortable participating in art activities through community, social service and religious organizations, the leaders we spoke with perceived that these organizations face longer odds receiving philanthropic funding for arts programming than arts nonprofits. However, an arts community member indicated that she knew of multiple foundations changing their guidelines to only serve new immigrants, so it is unclear whether challenges stem from a lack of resources or a lack of awareness. Additionally, we heard from residents that Somali artists who settled in America often had to give up their craft in order to work long hours and make a living. These individual Somali artists may face hurdles accessing support systems that are open to other artists, for instance, writing strong grant applications when they may not be fluent in English.<sup>30</sup> One individual with close ties to the Somali community suggested arts providers seeking to serve ally themselves with the Somali community might consider offering pro-bono grant-writing services to individual Somali artists through an organization like the Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota.

## ARTS PROVIDERS—HOW DEEP DO COMMITMENTS RUN?

Although we heard anecdotally of Cedar Riverside’s arts organizations interest in working more with the neighborhood’s immigrant population, we felt we would be remiss not to investigate the particularities of that interest—how deep does it run, do arts providers have limited capacity to working with Somalis through the arts, what motivates them? To answer these questions, we surveyed neighborhood arts providers.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> We present the survey questions and response rates in Appendix D.

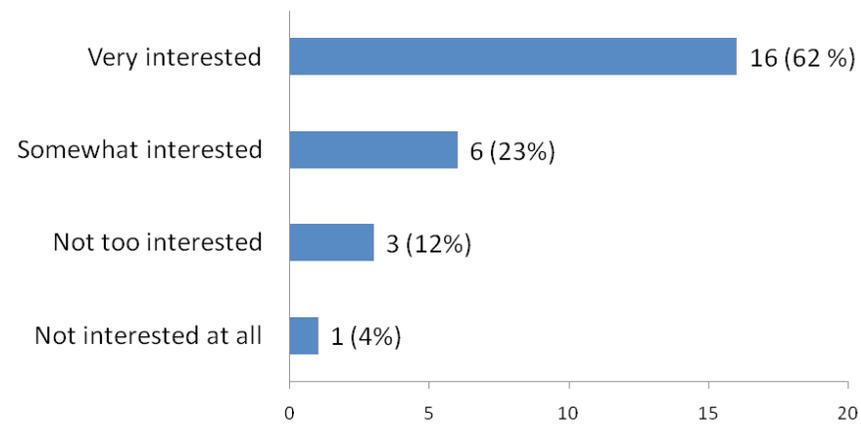
We sent links to the online survey to 45 individuals representing 33 different arts providers. We targeted nonprofits, businesses and academic departments and exhibition spaces in which the arts were central to mission or operation. Consequently, the survey failed to capture neighborhood social service, community and religious organizations that have sponsored arts projects. We highlight these important contributions elsewhere in this report. Twenty-six individuals responded to the survey, representing 16 different arts providers. Although we utilized a sample of convenience, we believe that the survey captured approximately 45% of all neighborhood arts providers. Members of the arts community affiliated with academic institutions made up 50% of the survey responses—35% from performing and visual art departments, and 15% from academic galleries and exhibition spaces (Figure 2). Representatives from arts nonprofit organizations comprised 42% of survey responses—27% from performance venues and 15% from artist centers and schools. The survey results under-represent bars/commercial music venues, which made up only 8% of survey respondents but an estimated 17% in the population of neighborhood arts providers. Not only did we have trouble reaching bars/commercial music venues, whose staff contact information was not consistently available online, we also presume bars are least interested in working more with the Somali population, since Islam prohibits alcohol consumption.



### Survey reveals promising interest

Eighty-five percent of respondents (22 individuals from 11 arts providers) indicated that they were somewhat or very interested in becoming more responsive to Somali residents (Figure 3). Even if one assumed all arts providers the survey failed to capture are not interested in working with the Somali population, a positive response rate of 11 arts providers suggests a minimum of 31% of all neighborhood arts providers are interested in becoming more responsive to Somali residents. In addition, given the relationship-driven nature of intercultural arts activities, 22 individuals' interest in becoming more responsive to the Somali residents is significant in and of itself.

Figure 3  
Art providers' interest in becoming more responsive to Cedar Riverside's Somali population

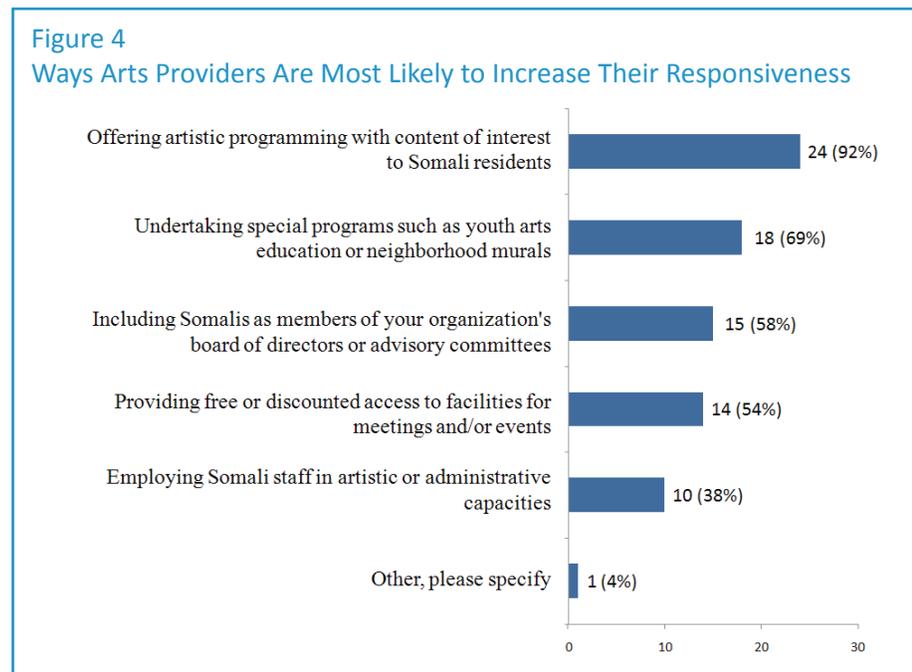


Although arts providers expressed interest in becoming more responsive to Somali residents, they varied as to how. Some respondents wanted to build stronger ties specifically with Somalis, while others supported efforts to be inclusive of all racial and ethnic groups in the region, Somalis included. Survey responses illustrate this range:

*We believe the Somali culture has much to offer our mostly white student population, but we also believe we have much to offer...we would like to pursue culturally sensitive dialogue around mutual visions and goals.—Professor*

*Anything that benefits the neighborhood while strengthening our business at the same time is good for everybody, regardless if they are Somali, other East Africans, South East Asians, Latin, or plain old American. We seek opportunities for all people to thrive together.—Staff, arts nonprofit organization*

Arts providers expressed a range of ways in which they might work with Cedar Riverside’s Somali community (Figure 4). When asked in what ways they would be most likely to increase their responsiveness, 92% of survey respondents selected “offering artistic programming with content of interest to Somali residents.” Respondents also selected “undertaking special projects such as murals or youth arts education programs” and “including Somalis in your organization’s board of directors of advisory committees” at high rates (69% and 58%, respectively), suggesting members of the arts community are open to working actively with Somali residents and offering them positions of power, albeit less enthusiastically.



Arts providers also conveyed nuanced and thoughtful ideas about how they might like to work with Somali residents. A professor at performing art department emphasized:

*It is important that we not look at academic institutions as service providers, or at the arts as a servant to economic and social goals. Rather, these things must be integrated and synthesized—education, engagement, experience, policy development, etc. We must listen to one another first, prior to “taking” any programming into the Somali community. —Professor*

## Motivations

When asked to identify motivations for increasing responsiveness to Somali residents, neighborhood arts providers overwhelmingly named organizational mission/priorities and community need (Table 1), suggesting that such initiatives meet both internal and external objectives.

Table 1  
Motivating Factors for Increasing Responsiveness to Somali Population

Factor	Percent*
My organization's mission supports work in this area	96
Greater attention in this area is in keeping with organizational priorities	80
Our work in this area could address neighborhood needs such as youth employment, crime reduction, etc.	80
Our work in this area could improve Cedar Riverside's reputation	70
We know of grant opportunities to fund relevant activities	60

\* Percent of respondents answering that the factor was somewhat of a motivation to a strong motivation

Art providers also voiced their commitment to serving community through personal interviews and open response survey questions:

*People can engage in the whole process of re-imagining what or who your community is. They can establish identification with the larger community, beyond one's individual ethnic group, and it can enable them to identify place as something they can own. It allows them to stake a claim or plant a flag...Community public art can help any group interested in weaving together a community that is inclusive of its residents. —Artist*

*Artists have a responsibility to share their tools and resources with the larger community to help them achieve creative expression. —Staff, arts nonprofit organization*

*The more we establish safe spaces in which to connect Cedar-Riverside individuals, across cultural lines, across age lines, across economic lines, to collaborate in creating and viewing stories about our lives, the stronger and safer our community will be. —Artist*

However not all art providers share these priorities:

*I am honest to admit that our motivations are about our mission which doesn't directly consider improving the livability of surrounding communities as a goal. —Staff, academic exhibition space*

### Deterrents

Although art providers' expressed interest in working more with the Somalis they also cited impediments. Respondents ranked limited organizational capacity (financial and staff) and lack of knowledge about the interests and needs of Somali residents as top deterrents (Table 2). One staff member at a nonprofit arts organization stated, "It's hard to carve out focus on new connections while keeping up with the day to day." Another respondent notes that their organization perceives some cultural hurdles to Somali participation in their performances but writes, "I'm not really that well versed in why." Through this report, we hope to make inroads in reducing art providers' lack of knowledge about the interests and needs of Somali residents.

Table 2  
Deterrents to Increasing Responsiveness to Somali Population

Factor	Percent*
My organization's staff capacity is too limited	83
My organization lacks knowledge about the interests and needs of Somali residents	81
My organization's financial capacity is too limited	80
My organization perceives that our programming/other activities may not be compatible with Somali cultural norms	68
Somalis may not perceive my organization's physical space to be inviting/welcoming	64
Other organizational priorities are more pressing	62
Other groups comprise my organization's primary constituency	60
My organization's mission directs our attention elsewhere	48
My organization perceives Cedar Riverside's Somali residents to have limited financial means and we need to focus on customers with deeper pockets	23

\*Percent of respondents answering that the factor was somewhat of a deterrent to a strong deterrent.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL ADVICE

Through conversations with members of the Somali and arts communities and a review of literature, we identified four guiding principles for working effectively with Somali residents through the arts. Each community-recommended principle is paired with practical, concrete advice offered by both Somalis and members of the arts community with track records of working with Somalis.

- **Employ empowered collaborations** by fostering open communication and trust, seeking intersecting goals and sharing power
- **Be sensitive of cultural differences** especially around gender and religion
- **Ensure accessibility** by recruiting “link” people, providing compensation, using spaces Somalis feel comfortable accessing, and maintaining flexibility
- **Use relevant artistic forms and content** especially poetry, theater or craft and active arts participation that builds skills or celebrates Somali cultural heritage

### Guiding Principle One: **Employ Empowered Collaboration**

Members of both the Somali and arts communities emphasized the importance of working in true partnership—Somali residents are much more disposed to participate in an event when they have been actively involved from the planning stages on. One artist/arts administrator experienced in working with immigrant communities summed up this sentiment with, “Work in and with the community. Don’t expect to do “outreach” to the Somali community but rather work in collaboration and partnership.”

We also heard arts providers testify that working collaboratively requires perseverance and deep commitment. An artist experienced in leading community art projects stated, “Every step of the way is more challenging that you can know or anticipate and that this is par for the course for both community organizing and community art making.” Her sponsor for a neighborhood public art project jokes, “Don’t try this at home warning labels should be applied.” Although working collaboratively can challenge both arts providers and Somali community members, artistic activities that truly enrich both communities demand working in partnership. As a Somali community member put it, “Consistency and ongoing collaboration is important to building good relationships and creating sustainability.”

### Foster open communication and trust

Members of the Somali and arts communities offered practical advice on how to achieve empowered collaboration, emphasizing the importance of good communication and building trust. A leader within the Somali community stressed, “Good partnerships involve sitting together, planning together, and agreeing on content and how to do it.” An employee at a community-organization offered, “First, earn people’s respect. If they don’t know you, then they’re not going to be comfortable working with you. Without love and respect, you get nothing.” A Somali young adult eloquently stated, “Your motivation needs to be genuine and come from the heart. If it comes from the heart, it will go to the heart. People can tell if the reasons for wanting to work come from a place of love and respect.”

### Seek intersecting goals

Collaborations meet objectives relevant to both partners. Arts providers voiced that grounding arts work in a goal or issue that matters to the Somali community is critical. One sponsor of community-public art projects stressed, “Art should be a means to approaching a core issue to the Somali community. There must be an underlying motivation beyond art.” Additionally, we heard from Somali community members, that to get broad support, the elders must approve of the project. One community leader explained how to get the elders’ support, saying, “It has to be something that is seen as having positive effect on the community. If it is something positive then our community does not see [it as] a problem.”

Members of the arts community varied in their opinions as to whether an artist’s or organization’s self-interest should be subjugated to that of the Somali community. One artist said,

*As a person working with a different community, you need to ask yourself why. There are good and bad reasons. A good reason would be because you really want to know these people, but trying to advance your personal vision of social change is not... Another bad motivation for embarking in this work is to try and strengthen your organization.*

But a person working at an academic exhibition space offered,

*The Somali community has a strong sense of how it wants to be seen because of how it has been negatively portrayed in the press and artists and arts organizations interested in working with Somalis need to be sensitive to that. At the same time, you should know what goals you have and don’t be afraid to argue with them, talk with them, and negotiate.*

### Share power

To identify intersecting goals, arts providers must be willing to make decisions jointly with members of the Somali community or to serve as allies helping to support projects initiated within the Somali community. An artist offered, “For a project to be of use, the target community has to be actively involved in the design and planning stages of the project.” And a leader within the Somali community provided an astute observation of non-Somali “do-gooders,”

*Minnesotans are liberal and nice, and that is a good thing because it makes them open to new people and cultures. However, people in Minnesota have a tendency to want to step in and help. The best way to help is to listen to what the Somalis need and want. If they want you to step in, then it is okay, but often they don't want outsiders coming in do the work for them. Often the best thing to do is let the Somali community do their own work and support them in doing so.*

In Profile IV, we share the challenges and victories artist Susan Armington and the West Bank Community Development Corporation faced when trying to put empowered collaboration into practice through the Talking Suitcases™ project.

### Guiding Principle Two: **Be Sensitive of Cultural Differences**

Somali and arts community members also emphasized the importance of being sensitive to cultural differences, especially regarding gender and religion.

#### Respect different social & gender norms

American and Somali culture differs around appropriate gender interactions, including mixing genders together, touching and modesty. One Somali individual explained, “The appropriateness of having the different sexes together depends on the situation. If it is a respectful situation, then generally it is fine.” Another said, “It is not always comfortable to have both genders together. It is OK to have them work together, but it's better to have them in different groups for other things like dancing or playing.” For an example of how teaching artist Crystal Spring handles these issues with youth in the Cedar Riverside Youth Drama Club, see Profile V. A Somali community outreach worker stated that even when it is appropriate to have the different sexes working together, it is sometimes helpful to break into single sex groups. He oversees a project in which every other meeting the males and females meet separately. “This helps create a supportive environment. It helps

## Profile IV

### Talking Suitcases™ — Susan Armington and West Bank Community Development Corporation

In early 2008, the West Bank Community Development Corporation engaged artist Susan Armington to share Talking Suitcases, in which participants make simple objects and use them to share stories, with the CDC's housing residents. CDC staff saw Talking Suitcases as a way to create connections between and among residents of the CDC-owned housing (who speak Vietnamese, Somali, Oromo and English), and the CDC board and staff, to empower neighbors to talk neighbors, identify priorities and figure out how to work together to address common concerns.



Debbie Wolking, housing development project manager for the CDC, recalls:

*Talking Suitcases was the hardest, most rewarding outreach I have ever done. The intimacy created among people as they shared their stories was way beyond anything I have seen before. It was very clear at the meetings that people wanted to hear what other ethnicities had to say. They insisted that everyone speak, and were very respectful of each other's words. Every participant got to know their neighbors and said they would greet them on the street when they saw them again.*

The connections that occurred through the Talking Suitcases process didn't just happen. CDC staffers worked dedicatedly to ensure accessibility. They recruited paid outreach workers in all languages, particularly people with respected roles in their individual communities, to draw in participants. Susan and the CDC structured the project around safety, a relevant issue for residents. They provided food and childcare at each session, ensuring mothers could participate. Debbie recalls 15-25 children at each session.

Susan passionately feels artists and arts organizations should never exploit minority populations; participation must provide immediate benefits. Susan says, "What I like about art is that it gives me a ticket, but I'm careful with that ticket." She bears witness to people's stories and learns who they are. She offers her heart. She reflects carefully on the questions she asks, and invites everyone to answer them in their own way. She teaches people how to use a glue gun. Through Talking Suitcases she provides a platform for others to voice their stories, concerns and agendas.

Both Susan and Debbie emphasize that making friendships within a community is the way to make meaningful contact. Susan offers, "One has to approach this work with humility and pick oneself up off the ground after making stupid mistakes. It takes a lot of listening."

Photo:

Talking Suitcases™ - Susan Armington/West Bank Community Development Corporation. Photo by Debbie Wolking

## Profile V

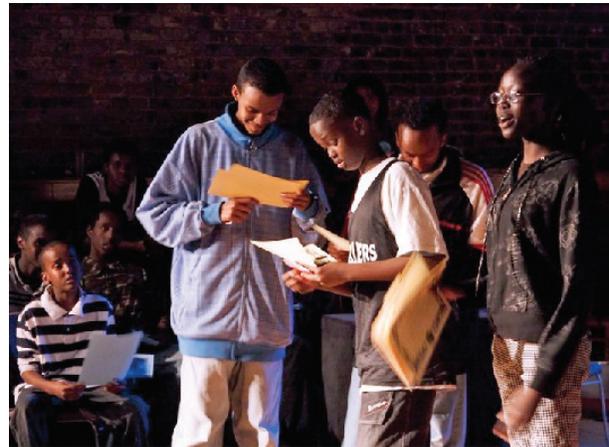
### Cedar Riverside Drama Club for Youth



In 2007, Bedlam Theatre began a youth theater program in partnership with the Brian Coyle Community Center, the Cedar Riverside Drama Club for Youth. Children as young as five create and perform informal plays, as a fun, creative outlet. By developing original material, middle-school aged youth give voice to their experiences and concerns. High-school aged youth often mentor younger participants. Through showings, audience members bear witness and validate the young performers' perceptions.

Bedlam initiated the youth drama club out of a desire to connect more with the immigrant population in Cedar Riverside. Through community meetings and conversations with staff at Brian Coyle and leaders at a neighborhood mosque, Bedlam heard the best way to reach immigrants was through youth and that there was a need for youth enrichment programs. Maren Ward, Bedlam's artistic director described hearing things like, "you won't get the adults" and "we want you to work with our youth because our youth need you."

Crystal Spring, youth drama club instructor, has learned to incorporate cultural sensitivity into her teaching practice. The youth have different comfort levels around touching and gender mixing. She notes that "asking the youth to stand in a circle and all hold hands, or partner off and stare into each other's eyes doesn't always fly." Crystal always tries to establish ways for kids to take care of their needs. She let's them know it's okay for them to adapt or abstain from anything they are uncomfortable with and she never forces a youth to participate in anything they don't want to do. Crystal's flexibility extends all the way up through final showings—on occasion parents have take their children out of the production right before the show starts, but Crystal seemed unphased by this reality.



Bedlam and Coyle work hard to maintain good communication, since staff in both organizations are responsible for numerous programs. Despite the challenges inherent in working collaboratively, momentum around Cedar Riverside Youth Drama Club is building—plans are in the works to increase class offering in Summer 2009, including new writing classes, Bedlam is exploring regularly opening up their theater space to youth performers on dark nights, and the Carolyn Foundation recently awarded Bedlam a \$15,000 grant in support of the Drama Club.

Top: Cedar Riverside Youth Drama Club. Photo by Maren Ward  
Bottom: Cedar Riverside Youth Drama Club. Photo by Brad Dahlgaard

<sup>32</sup> “Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them; and Allah is well acquainted with all that they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; and that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands...” (Qur’an 24:30-31)

the girls express their opinions better,” he explains. Some Somali individuals, particularly the religiously devote, refrain from making physical contact with members of the opposite sex. Non-Somalis should take their cue from Somalis as to whether or not a handshake with a member of the opposite sex is appropriate. Many Somali women and girls also wear heads carves, or *hijabs*, as a form of religious devotion.<sup>32</sup> Not only should art providers accommodate this religious practice, non-Somalis may want to consider donning modest clothing when working with Somalis. A director of a Somali-centered community organization expressed that she would turn away a volunteer if they showed up wearing jeans with holes in the butt.

### Accommodate religion

Arts providers seeking to work with Somalis should also accommodate Muslims’ religious beliefs and practices. With regards to representational art, Somalis, being predominantly Sunni Muslim, do not permit the depiction of Allah or the Prophet Muhammad and many, though not all Muslims, believe that the depiction of animals and people in art is prohibited. Arts providers should also work with the Somali community members to ensure arts involvement does not prevent participants from religious observance, for example observing noon, afternoon and evening calls to prayer or fasting during the day during the month of Ramadan. An organizer of a successful arts project with the Somali community took the following measures:

*For one opening reception we set aside separate male and female prayers rooms and organized our schedule around prayer so that we made sure the need to worship would not exclude anyone for participation. We also took into consideration Ramadan for a few of our events and made sure if the event was after sundown, that we had plenty of food available.*

### Guiding Principle Three: Ensure Accessibility

To sponsor arts offerings that truly welcome Somali residents, arts providers need to take extra steps to ensure accessibility. Arts providers sharing the following sentiment voiced by a staff person at a nonprofit performance venue most likely do not see many Somali residents passing through their doors.

*We try to appeal to everyone in the Twin Cities community, including the Somalis in Cedar Riverside. But we don’t do anything specific to attract other ethnic/cultural groups; we just try to get word out broadly to everyone, by any means we can. —Staff, arts nonprofit organization*

An artist described the measures needed to create a welcoming arts offering as, “It took extra effort to make people feel welcome...it worked out, but took a lot of effort—talking to elders, building relationships with link people first.” Below, members of the arts community who are experienced working with the Somali community suggest concrete steps arts providers can take to ensure accessibility.

### Recruit link people

A number of artists shared their successes in reaching out to individuals with respected roles within the Somali community as a way to bring in participants. An artist coined the term, “link people” to describe these individuals able to bridge an artist or organization and Somali community members. Link people not only connected artists to community members they often provided translation services during arts activities, lessening language barriers.

However, arts providers should recognize that the Somali community is not homogenous and think strategically about what members they hope to work with, for instance youth, women, elders, less-or-more acculturated immigrants. An artist advises, “Tap people with respected roles within their communities, but in the Somali community there is not just one leader and different folks will be needed to access different parts of the Somali community.”

### Provide compensation

Compensation ties in directly to the above discussion of link people. An artist stressed, “Outreach people should be paid, and paid well, whenever we are asking for help with “our” purpose, such as receiving a grant to work with the community. We pay what we value and if you don’t pay or value that is a big statement.” Not only does compensation signify that you value a Somali partner’s efforts, it helps to counter critical barriers restricting involvement.

*Somalis often are asked to get involved in projects and be on committees without pay. Many are struggling with finances and multiple family members to support, so pay the contacts you have and/or feed them for their engagement time. It may also “validate” the project in a way that meetings cannot. It may bring people different people to the table.—Artistic Staff, Community Organization*

Art providers who offered non-monetary compensation to Somali participants, including child-care and food, attested that these efforts made a tremendous difference in boosting turnout: “For each meeting we had food and child care. The need for childcare was huge.

The mothers would not have been able to participate without the childcare. 'The turn-out was great!'"

### Start on neutral turf

Artists who have experience working with immigrants shared that bringing arts offerings to spaces the community feels comfortable accessing is a successful way to attract participants. Two different artists had success working outside. One said, "If you have something out of doors in the neighborhood, kids will join in just because they're around." Another offered, "People would just stop in, since the workshop was set up right in an empty garage and the door was wide open with tables outside of the workshop space. People would stop and inquire what we were doing. There was a lot of organic interaction."

In terms of indoor spaces in Cedar Riverside, Somali residents are very comfortable accessing the Brian Coyle Community Center and Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Civic Center (a neighborhood mosque). A staff member at Brian Coyle suggested arts providers interested in working with youth offer activities at Brian Coyle, since parents may not be comfortable letting their children visit spaces unfamiliar to them. A non-Somali artist thought it critical to work through the mosque, noting, "The mosque is the center of life for the Somali community." However, a Somali artist we spoke with thought arts providers would connect with Somalis more open to arts activities if they accessed channels outside of mosques.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of how immigrant arts participation frequently occurs outside of formal arts spaces, see (Bye, 2004); (Moriarty, 2004).

Once relationships have been established, Somali participants may benefit from working in new spaces. One arts nonprofit staff person initially launched youth programming at the Brian Coyle Center, but found youth focused more on the project after they transitioned programming over to the arts space. He noted that the Brian Coyle Center is heavily utilized and youth may be distracted by all the activities. On a more abstract level, increasing the sense of ownership Somalis feel over neighborhood institutions is another route to empowering the Somali community. An arts professor echoes this sentiment:

*Ownership is the vital factor in a harmonious relationship. Do whatever it takes to give ownership of the institutions to the Cedar Riverside community. If it's yours you will take better care of it.*

### Maintain flexibility

Finally, arts providers can increase accessibility by remaining flexible, although this can be difficult to achieve. We relay the challenges facilitators of the mural at the Cedar Cultural Center faced in working with a constantly shifting group of people in Profile VI. Artists well versed in working with the Somali community suggested structuring arts activities to allow participants to scale their involvement according to

## Profile VI

### Mural at the Cedar Cultural Center

Lead partners: Brian Coyle Community Center, HOPE Community Inc.

Contributing partners: Cedar Cultural Center, West Bank Community Coalition Safety Committee, Bedlam Theater

In June 2008, artists Chaka Mkali, Jordan Hamilton and Andres Guzman (Hope Community) began working with community members on the mural now prominently displayed at the Cedar Cultural Center. Funding for the project came from the City of Minneapolis (graffiti prevention) and the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council. The mural facilitators, participants, and collaborating organizations' staff all came out of the process much wiser. When they undertake their next mural they'll know mistakes to avoid and successes to replicate.



At the outset, collaborators hadn't determined whether the mural should beautify the neighborhood, educate youth about the differences between graffiti and community-sanctioned art, honor neighborhood history, provide an opportunity for the community to come together, or all of the above. Despite ambiguity, positive outcomes abounded. During a final evaluation, the core group of participants, most of whom were Somali youth, expressed, "It was fun because we got to spend time with each other!" and, "It put something good up for people to walk by and see." They also learned painting skills and how to deal with contentious community feedback.



Negative reactions challenged facilitators and participants alike. Some people assumed the mural was illegal vandalism. Flags also sparked strong community reaction, both positive and negative. A man diligently kept coming back to work on the Eritrean flag. A Vietnamese refugee felt so strongly that the mural should include the South Vietnamese flag, instead of the flag of the government he fled, he donated \$50. Even though the group had already independently decided to include South Vietnam's flag, Chaka was unable to return the gift. After 15 minutes of trying to put the bill back in the man's hand, he decided to use it to buy lunch that day for participants.

Facilitators also struggled to meaningfully involve participants ranging in age from adults to little kids. Tally Washington, Brian Coyle Community Center’s teen/youth coordinator recalls,

*It brought tons of people. We had to turn people away from actual painting because of a lack of funds, but we never turned ideas away. The hardest aspect was keeping people consistently coming on a regular basis. The project always attracted 25 people, but it was always different mixes.*

Logistical challenges complicated matters even further. Participants’ interest fell off when delays in securing a wall space put the project on hold. A group of girls lost interest and all but one stopped coming after that. No one wanted to paint high up on the scaffolding. Facilitators felt pressed for time, since they were working outside through October. Towards the end of the process only the core group of youth braved the cold weather. Sometimes they ended up watching more than painting, since the facilitators painted more to push the project forward.

Overall, participants felt proud to make a bold, visible, positive mark on their community, especially in the wake of neighborhood violence. Some youth resorted to sneaking out to participate in the mural, because of parents’ concerns surrounding violence. Others addressed parental fears head on and said that their parents’ trust in them grew because their children approached them.

Funds are available for more murals and Chaka anticipates even stronger community involvement, since evidence of their follow through is visible for all to see. The core youth participants felt, “Next time, we need an even more diverse group. We have people in the neighborhood from all over.”



Photos:  
Mural at the Cedar Cultural Center. Photos by Sean Flannery and Erika Byrd

their interests and availability. Somali residents may only devote limited time given employment and family responsibilities. One artist described a community-public art project that used this approach successfully:

*Participants didn't have to start out with high level skills. They didn't have to stay all day, devoting an hour or two was just fine. They just had to get some training to start. However, the flexibility does put great demands on workshop leadership, because workshops were open ended and it functioned on a drop-in basis.*

Art providers may also need to be flexible about adjusting their own expectations. Two different arts organizations that tried to mount performances with Somali youth talked about Somali parents sometimes withdrawing their children from the activity, even late in the process. Consequently, formal recitals may not be possible, but informal showings or creating DVDs or CDs may be very successful.

#### **Guiding Principle Four: Use Relevant Artistic Forms and Content**

Somalis are interested in a range of art forms, but we found poetry, theatre and craft appeal to large segments of the Somali community. Overall, Somalis expressed a preference for participatory arts. While we did talk with people, particularly youth, who had positive experiences attending area museums and theaters, Somali residents prefer arts activities that are active, such as writing a play, painting a mural, or knitting. This held true across age and gender.<sup>34</sup>

In terms of subject matter, we heard support for content that celebrates Somali cultural heritage and/or addresses timely issues for the community. Non-Somali artists experienced in working with the Somali population affirmed the value of artistic content that celebrate Somali cultural heritage:

*Incorporating the Somali flag was such a powerful experience. It was the first time the Somali flag was put up publicly outside of the Somali community. It had a huge effect on the community. It made them feel welcome. —Artist*

*Involving Somali cultural content, like folktales and the Somali national anthem, was a big hit with participants and cultivated pride in Somali heritage. —Staff, nonprofit arts organization*

However, not all adaptations using Somali heritage are shoe-ins. One Somali community leader described a proposal from a neighborhood theater to adapt a famous Somali love story into a play. While reading

<sup>34</sup>Several studies affirm the importance of participatory arts within various immigrant populations, including: (Moriarty, 2004); (Alvarez, 2005); (Stern, Seifert & Vitiello, 2008); and (Kidd, Zahir & Khan, 2008).

the love story is appropriate, community members objected to enacting the tale in a public setting.

The best advice we can offer to arts providers wondering how to choose artistic content that appeals to Somali residents, is once again to return to our first guiding principle, employ empowered collaborations. The Somali individuals we spoke with felt the key to developing content that works is involving Somali community members in planning.

## CONCLUSION: CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM SURROUNDING FUTURE PROSPECTS

Through our research we learned of Somalis' interest in a range of art forms, especially poetry, theater and craft. Diverse artistic tastes reflect the fact that although Somalis share a common ancestry and religion, the population is not homogenous—factors such as age, gender, nomadic vs. urban background, and degrees of religious devoutness and acculturation to mainstream U.S. culture influence personal sensibilities. However, across different segments of the Somali community, residents voiced strong interest in participatory and culturally relevant and sensitive arts activities.

Cedar Riverside's arts providers also demonstrated an encouraging level of interest in working more with Somali residents. Eighty-five percent of survey respondents indicated they were somewhat or very interested in increasing their responsiveness to the Somali population. Fifteen people showed up for lively listening session to ask questions and share their successes and missteps in working with Somalis.

Both Somali residents and arts providers have push and pull factors influencing their ability to gain traction in this area. Somalis value arts activities for enjoyment and recreational opportunities, especially for youth and elders. Somali residents also see the arts as a means to bring the Somali community together, preserve, celebrate and share culture and to empower individuals through creative expression. However, religious and cultural sensitivities, language barriers, restricted mobility, and financial constraints prevent Somali residents from taking more advantage of the arts offerings already offered in their backyard. Although Somalis voiced interest in launching a Somali center for arts and culture, the community's finite resources (both human and monetary) are stretched thin addressing other pressing needs within the community.

Arts providers' motivations for working more with Somali residents are driven by synergies with their mission and organizational priorities and a desire to address neighborhood needs such as youth employment and crime reduction. When probed for the specific ways in which arts providers would be most likely to increase their responsiveness to Somali residents 92% of respondents selected by offering artistic programming with content of interest to Somali residents. They expressed less, but not insubstantial, enthusiasm for the types of hands-on collaborations that seemed to resonate most with Somalis. Arts providers cited lack of financial and staff capacity and lack of knowledge about the interests and needs of Somali residents as top deterrents for becoming more responsive to the Somali population.

The Cedar Riverside arts and Somali communities have already forged a promising foundation of arts collaborations from which to build. Bedlam Theatre and the Brian Coyle Community Center work in partnership on the Cedar Riverside Youth Drama Club. The Weisman Museum is featuring an exhibition of Somali photographer Abdi Roble's work in August 2009. Augsburg College has presented weavings from the East African Women's Center's Textile Cooperative in their gallery spaces. Through conversations with initiators of these and other intercultural artistic collaborations and Somali community members we provided four community-recommended guiding principles for others hoping to build on this work.

- **Employ empowered collaborations** by fostering open communication and trust, seeking intersecting goals and sharing power
- **Be mindful of cultural sensitivity** especially around gender and religion
- **Ensure accessibility** by recruiting "link" people, using spaces Somalis feel comfortable accessing, providing compensation, and maintaining flexibility
- **Use relevant artistic forms and content** especially poetry, theater or craft and active arts participation that builds skills or celebrates Somali cultural heritage

Despite promising momentum from which to build, the road ahead is not easy. It requires forging relationships and trust across cultures, deep commitment and perseverance. We can attest to interest, motivation and rewards surrounding arts collaboration within both Cedar Riverside's Somali and arts communities. We applaud the continued efforts about to begin.

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## APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

To address our research objectives we interviewed 22 key community informants, surveyed 26 arts providers, held three listening sessions, conducted a literature review and took advantage of informal opportunities to familiarize ourselves with Islam and Somali culture.

### Interviews

Seven Somali community members including: directors of local mosques, community organizers, college students and artists, shared their views on Somali residents' attitudes and practices in relation to the arts through interviews. These interviewees and 15 non-Somali artists and staff members of arts and community organizations experienced in working with Somalis through the arts, also provided guiding principles and practical advice for working effectively with Somali residents. We present the interview question templates in Appendix B. We informed interviewees that participation was completely voluntary and that they could decide not to answer any question or stop the interview at any time. Many interviewees exercised this freedom, so interview template questions functioned as a rough guide in many interviews. We did not include any information that made it possible to identify a subject, unless we asked and received that subject's permission.

### Listening Sessions

To research attitudes of and practices by Cedar Riverside's Somali residents in relation to the arts we interviewed and held listening sessions with eight Somali women elders and 14 Somali youth of mixed gender. A translator assisted in the listening session with Somali women elders. To provide a platform for dialogue for arts providers around becoming more responsive to Somali residents we held a listening session with 15 members of the arts community. We present the listening session question templates in Appendix C.

### Arts Provider Survey

To investigate neighborhood arts providers' interest, motivation and capacity for becoming more responsive to Somali residents, we solicited responses from neighborhood arts providers via a web-based survey. We sent links to the online survey to 45 individuals representing 33 different arts providers. We targeted nonprofits, businesses and academic departments and exhibition spaces in which the arts were central to mission or operation. Twenty-six individuals responded to the survey, representing 16 different arts providers. Although we utilized a sample of convenience, we feel confident that the survey captured approximately 45% of all neighborhood arts providers. Members of the arts community affiliated with academic institutions made up 50% of survey responses—35% from performing and visual art departments, and 15% from academic galleries and exhibition spaces. Representatives from arts nonprofit organizations comprised 42% of survey responses—27% from performance venues and 15% from artist centers and schools. The survey results under-represent bars/commercial music venues. Bars made up only 8% of survey respondents vs. an estimated 17% in the population of arts providers. We present the survey questions and response rates in Appendix D.

### **Literature Review**

Through a literature review we researched relevant theories on the social impact of arts participation, formal documentation on a range of traditional Somali art forms, and the relationship between Islam and the arts.

### **Informal Field Work**

We took advantage of informal opportunities to gain familiarity with Somali culture and Islam, including open houses at the Dar Al-Hijrah Cultural Center, lectures and performances during the University of Minnesota's Muslim Student Association's Islamic Awareness Week, and a series of workshops and visits to neighborhood organizations serving Somali residents through CHANCE's Our East African Neighbors Series.

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Somali Community Member Questions:

1. What is your role in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood? How long have you lived or worked here?
2. We are investigating opportunities for and barriers to intercultural exchange between arts providers and Somali residents in Cedar Riverside; but art often means different things to different individuals and in different cultures, so we are curious to know what art means to you?
3. Are there any specific arts or craft activities you are aware of – either that you or your family and friends are personally involved in or that are going on in the local Somali community?
4. Do you think there are enough opportunities for arts appreciation or creative expression for Somalis in Cedar Riverside? If not, is this a priority? Are there specific support structures that are missing?
5. Do you have any advice for an artist or arts organization that is interested in working with Somalis in Cedar Riverside?
  - a. Are there specific ways in which they could be more successful in gaining the support or interest of the local Somali community? Are there any barriers to participation that they should be aware of?
6. We are interested in learning what kinds of artistic form and content would appeal to the local Somali community. What are your thoughts on this? How might it vary by gender, age, religion, time in the U.S. or other factors?
7. Can you think of any particular artistic forms or types of content that might be inappropriate or offensive?
8. Thank you! Are there any questions I should have asked but didn't?

### Somali Artist Questions:

1. How would you describe your art form?
2. How did you come to be an artist? (First inklings, encouragement, spaces, role models, where, when...)
3. What kind of training did you have in your art form? (In school, informally, individually; who have you learned most from? and in what spaces did you encounter them? Were there opportunities for training closed to you or that you would have liked to have had?)

4. What would you like to achieve with your art?
5. What groups, people, or places have been most open and welcoming to you, and why?
6. What groups, people, or places have been most closed to you/difficult to work with, and why?
7. How has being Somali shaped your art?
8. Where does your art fit within Somali culture or tradition? Is there a tradition of [type of art] within Somali culture?
9. Do you find that Somali people respond differently to your art than non-Somalis? How about different generations? Do older people respond differently than younger people?
10. Do you have any advice for an artist or arts organization that would like to work with Somalis?
11. Thank you! Are there any questions I should have asked but didn't?

**Non-Somali Arts Provider Questions:**

1. Tell me about your role with [name of organization and/or project that involved Somalis].
2. Is [name of project] the main way in which [organization] works with Somalis through the arts or are there other projects I should know about? How does this work fit in to [organization's] overall mission?
3. When/where did [project] take place? Is it ongoing?
4. How did [project] come about and what were the goals for the project?
5. How were Somalis involved—offering input, direct participation in creation, audience/spectators?
6. What would you say worked about the process and outcome and conversely what was challenging/didn't work?
7. What were the funding sources for [project]? Were you missing any resources?
8. We're trying to understand what kinds of artistic forms and content is most appealing to Somalis? Can you offer any insights from your experiences?
9. Do you have any advice for other artists or arts organizations interested in working with Somalis?
10. Thank you! Are there any questions I should have asked but didn't?

## APPENDIX C: LISTENING SESSION QUESTIONS

### Women Elders Session:

1. Could each person introduce herself and tell me what is the first thing you think of when I say the word “art”?
2. I am interested in learning about what types of arts or craft activities you, your family and friends are each currently involved in, by that, I mean things like: painting, poetry, story telling, weaving, sewing, wood carving, leather work, dance, singing, playing musical instruments and theater. Could you tell me how you, your friends, or family is currently involved in any artistic activities?
3. Think back to a piece of art that you admired or that moved you. This could be a work of art that you created yourself or one that you saw or heard. What did this art communicate or express?
4. Now think about a work of art that you did not like or that offended you. Why didn't you like that piece of art? What about it bothered you?
5. Have you ever been involved with any arts venues in the neighborhood? If yes, how? What was that experience like? For those of you who have not been to such places, why is that?
6. Would you like to be more involved with local arts venues? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
7. Thanks. Are there any additional comments that you would like to share?

### Youth Session:

1. What's your name and age?
2. What pops into your head when I say the word “art”?
3. What kinds of arts or craft activities are you, your family and friends currently involved in, for example, poetry, music, painting, drawing, photography, theater, dance, story telling, weaving, sewing, wood carving, leather work, or henna painting?
4. What's your favorite kind of art to see or do and why?
5. What kinds of art do you not like to see or do and why?
6. Do you and your families like the same kinds of art?
7. Have you ever been involved with any theaters or arts projects in the neighborhood? Can you tell me about it?
8. Are there enough opportunities for young people to do or see art? If not, how could we do a better job?

### **Arts Provider Session:**

1. If you've already launched artistic community partnerships with the Somali community...
  - What would you say worked about the process and outcome and conversely what was challenging/didn't work?
  - Do you have any advice for other artists or arts organizations interested in working with Somalis?
  
2. For folks that haven't yet specifically worked with the Somali community...
  - What are your motivations?
  - What's an obstacle?
  - What questions do you have?

## APPENDIX D: CEDAR RIVERSIDE ARTS PROVIDERS SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Survey dates: March 1, 2009 – April 9, 2009

Mode: Internet survey delivered online via Zoomerang

Respondents: 24 completes, 2 partials

Introduction: Please answer each question to the best of your ability. We are interested in your perceptions of your organization. If you are truly uncertain, you may skip the question.

Q1: In what ways, if any, has your organization recently (within the last 2 years) been responsive to Cedar Riverside’s Somali population? (Check all that apply)

Offering artistic programming with content of interest to Somali residents	12	57%
Employing Somali staff in artistic or administrative capacities	1	5%
Including Somali individuals as members of your organization’s board of directors or advisory committees	5	24%
Undertaking special programs (independently or in partnership with community organizations)	10	48%
Providing free or discounted access to facilities for meetings and/or events of interest to Somali residents	9	43%
Other, please specify	7	33%

Q2. What are existing ways Somali residents could, if interested, participate in your organization’s programming? (Check all that apply)

As audience members/patrons/customers	25	96%
Volunteering	18	69%
Participating in classes/workshops	16	62%
Submitting unsolicited scripts or performance proposals	7	27%
Being curated/presented as an artist	19	73%
Renting our space	17	65%
Other, please specify	3	12%

Q3. Does your organization currently offer existing programming that targets/serves a specific demographic/identity/subculture? If so, please describe.

Q4. How interested is your organization is in becoming more responsive to Cedar Riverside’s Somali population?

Very interested	16	62%
Somewhat interested	6	23%
Not too interested	3	12%
Not interested at all	1	4%

Q5. Please rate the following factors as to their importance as possible deterrents to your organization becoming more responsive to Cedar Riverside’s Somali community, with 1 being not a factor at all and 5 being a strong deterrent.

My organization’s mission directs our attention elsewhere

1.( Not a factor at all)	8	32%
2.	5	20%
3. (Somewhat of a factor)	6	24%
4.	3	12%
5. (A strong factor)	3	12%

Other organizational priorities are more pressing

1. Not a factor at all	3	12%
2.	7	27%
3. Somewhat of a factor	6	23%
4.	7	27%
5. A strong factor	3	12%

Other groups comprise my organization’s primary constituency

1. Not a factor at all	7	28%
2.	3	12%
3. Somewhat of a factor	6	24%
4.	7	28%
5. A strong factor	2	8%

My organization’s financial capacity is too limited.

1. Not a factor at all	1	4%
2.	4	16%
3. Somewhat of a factor	9	36%
4.	6	24%
5. A strong factor	5	20%

My organization's staff capacity is too limited.

1. Not a factor at all	1	4%
2.	3	12%
3. Somewhat of a factor	4	17%
4.	11	46%
5. A strong factor	5	21%

My organization lacks knowledge about the interests and needs of Somali residents.

1. Not a factor at all	2	8%
2.	3	12%
3. Somewhat of a factor	4	15%
4.	12	46%
5. A strong factor	5	19%

My organization perceives that our programming/other activities may not be compatible with Somali cultural norms.

1. Not a factor at all	5	20%
2.	3	12%
3. Somewhat of a factor	5	20%
4.	8	32%
5. A strong factor	4	16%

Somalis may not perceive my organization's physical space to be inviting/welcoming.

1. Not a factor at all	5	20%
2.	4	16%
3. Somewhat of a factor	4	16%
4.	9	36%
5. A strong factor	3	12%

My organization perceives Cedar Riverside's Somali residents to have limited financial means and we need to focus on patrons/customers with deeper pockets.

1. Not a factor at all	14	54%
2.	6	23%
3. Somewhat of a factor	4	15%
4.	2	8%
5. A strong factor	0	0%

Q6. If you would like to provide any additional comments on the above factors, please do so.

Q7. Please describe any other possible deterring factors to your organization becoming more responsive to Cedar Riverside's Somali residents that were not covered above.

Q8. Please rate the following factors as to their importance as possible motivations for your organization becoming more responsive to Cedar Riverside’s Somali community, with 1 being not a factor at all and 5 being a strong motivating factor.

My organization’s mission supports work in this area

1.( Not a factor at all)	0	0%
2.	1	3%
3. (Somewhat of a factor)	7	27%
4.	7	27%
5. (A strong factor)	11	42%

Greater attention in this area is in keeping with organizational priorities

1.( Not a factor at all)	2	8%
2.	3	12%
3. (Somewhat of a factor)	11	42%
4.	5	19%
5. (A strong factor)	5	19%

We know of grant opportunities to fund relevant activities

1.( Not a factor at all)	4	16%
2.	6	24%
3. (Somewhat of a factor)	9	36%
4.	5	20%
5. (A strong factor)	1	4%

Our work in this area could improve Cedar Riverside’s reputation

1.( Not a factor at all)	5	21%
2.	2	8%
3. (Somewhat of a factor)	8	33%
4.	7	29%
5. (A strong factor)	2	8%

Our work in this area could address neighborhood needs such as youth employment, crime reduction, etc

1.( Not a factor at all)	4	16%
2.	1	4%
3. (Somewhat of a factor)	9	36%
4.	7	28%
5. (A strong factor)	4	16%

Q9. If you would like to provide any additional comments on the above factors, please do so.

Q10. Please describe any other possible motivating factors to your organization becoming more responsive to Cedar Riverside’s Somali residents that were not covered above.

Q11. In what specific ways would your organization be most likely to increase their responsiveness to Cedar Riverside’s Somali population? (Check all that apply)

Offering artistic programming with content of interest to Somali residents	24	92%
Employing Somali staff in artistic or administrative capacities	10	38%
Including Somali individuals as members of your organization’s board of directors or advisory committees	15	58%
Undertaking special programs (independently or in partnership with community organizations), for instance youth arts education or neighborhood murals	18	69%
Providing free or discounted access to facilities for meetings and/or events of interest to Somali residents	14	54%
Other, please specify	1	4%

Q12. Please use this space to share any thoughts you have on how Cedar Riverside’s arts providers and Somali residents might best work together. We are interested in specific and creative ideas!

Q13. With which area arts organization are you primarily affiliated?

Q14. May we share your specific responses with Cedar Riverside Neighborhood Revitalization Program or other community members (for instance, linking organization with complementary interests) or do you prefer we keep your responses anonymous?

Q15. Please specify with which academic performing/visual art department you are affiliated.

Q16. Please specify with which academic performing/exhibition space you are affiliated.

Q17. Please specify with which commercial music venue or cafe/bar you are affiliated.

Q18. Are you interested in having a dialogue with other Cedar Riverside Arts providers around these issues in a round table discussion setting?

Q19. Please let us know your contact information.