

# **DUTCH IMMIGRATION and INTEGRATION:**

**AN EVALUATION OF THE NETHERLANDS MUSLIM/MINORITY YOUTH PROJECT**

**A REPORT TO THE INSTITUTE OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

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**INSTITUTE FOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT:  
NETHERLANDS MUSLIM/MINORITY YOUTH PROJECT  
EVALUATION REPORT**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

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Funded by the US Department of State Bureau of Cultural Affairs, the Netherlands Muslim/Minority Youth (NEMY) Project was carried out by the Institute for Training and Development (ITD). NEMY was designed to expand and facilitate the work of Dutch professionals to support the successful integration of Muslim and other immigrant youth in the Netherlands. According to the project proposal, its specific goals were: (1) to foster ongoing communication among professionals in the Netherlands and the US who are in a position to influence outcomes for Muslim and other immigrant youth; and (2) to increase the quantity and quality of services extended to these youth and their communities.

To that end, fourteen delegates from the Netherlands spent three weeks in the United States in October of 2007. During their time in the US, they attended lectures on a variety of topics related to immigration, the integration of minority communities, and the reality of Muslims in the US. They heard from college professors, imams, rabbis, immigration attorneys, and Muslim immigrants to the United States; they visited with immigration policy experts, educators of minority and immigrant children, community organizers, and youth workers in minority and immigrant communities. They visited Western Massachusetts, Boston, New York City, Chicago, and the District of Columbia. At the end of their trip, the Dutch delegates selected some of the individuals they had met in the course of the program to visit the Netherlands as part of a US delegation.

In May of 2008, six US delegates traveled to the Netherlands for a two-week period. Accompanied by NEMY's Project Director – the ITD administrator who oversaw the NEMY initiative, they visited the worksites of their Dutch colleagues and met with youth workers, Muslim religious community leaders, and representatives from the US Embassy. Over the course of their visit, they traveled to Utrecht, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Maastricht, and The Hague.

### **PURPOSE OF EVALUATION**

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ITD contracted The Community Consulting Initiative to design and carry out a qualitative evaluation to examine the outcomes of the NEMY Project. The evaluation was not meant to prove the causality of the project's interventions; rather, its goal was to produce summative findings that describe progress made toward specific objectives identified by the US Department of State and ITD as priority outcomes. These findings focus on: (1) the value of the exchange as articulated by project participants; (2) outcomes attributed by delegates to their participation in NEMY, including the implementation of their associated Action Plans; and (3) suggestions for program improvement.

This report aims to summarize and analyze the evaluative findings and, consequently, to make actionable recommendations based on this analysis to inform future programming. The primary intended audiences of this report include ITD and the US Department of State.

## **METHODOLOGY**

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Evaluative data were collected via standardized open-ended interviews as well as through written surveys. These interviews included questions intended to elicit the respondents' analyses of experiences and opinions related to the areas of inquiry delineated above. Data sources included delegates from the Netherlands, some of the US delegates, and the NEMY Project Director.

The Community Consulting Initiative traveled to the Netherlands to interview participants from the Dutch delegation; Dutch delegates participated in individual or paired interviews ranging in duration from 1.5 to two hours. Three delegates took part in 1.5-hour telephone interviews; all others were interviewed in person. These formal interviews were supplemented by site visits to the participants' work sites, informal conversations, and unstructured observation. The Community Consulting Initiative requested evaluative feedback from US delegates in the form of written questionnaires. The NEMY Project Director took part in a 1.5 hour interview.

The evaluation was initiated during the final phase of the NEMY Project, which precluded the assessment of pre-activity and post-activity attitudes and behaviors. As a result, the evaluation did not measure changes or outcomes according to an objective scale; rather, the evaluative process was dependent upon data sources to report their own perceptions in this regard.

This evaluation was exclusively qualitative in nature. Given the small number of data sources, it was determined to be neither advisable nor meaningful to represent qualitative data in statistical terms. Instead, the responses, ideas, and concepts highlighted in the body of this report represent the result of a systematic coding process, in which words, phrases, and ideas repeated across the collected data were organized into themes and categories. In addition, some "outlier" opinions are included. The findings outlined herein should be considered systematic, objective, and actionable.

## **OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS**

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### **☉ *COMMON THREADS***

The primary areas of commonality among feedback gleaned from the Dutch delegates included: (1) their gratitude for the opportunity to participate in NEMY; (2) changes in their views of the United States; (3) the perceived and lived differences between Muslims in the Netherlands and Muslims in the United States; and (4) the structural differences between the social sectors in the United States and the Netherlands.

### ☉ *ACTION PLANNING PROCESS*

The fourteen delegates from the Netherlands collaborated on a total of eight action plans, including: a collaboration across representatives of the local government, police, and a youth organization in one Dutch city; a national campaign to promote tolerance in the Netherlands; a collaborative, interactive lecture series at an urban Muslim high school; discussion groups for Muslim fathers and sons, as well as another for Muslim girls; an effort to bridge the cultural communication gap between city officials and Muslim youth in one city; the formation of a volunteer Muslim employment network; and a local conference on the topic of Muslim communities in civic society.

### ☉ *ADDITIONAL OUTCOMES CORRELATED TO NEMY PARTICIPATION*

When asked to identify other outcomes associated with their participation in NEMY, Dutch delegates described:

- A new perspective on being Muslim in a non-Muslim society;
- The recognition that socio-economic status, rather than religion, was a primary factor in the situation of Muslims in the Netherlands;
- Examples of applying the new knowledge and ideas they had acquired to their work;
- Inspiration from their US colleagues working in community-based organizations; *and*
- Newly-formed bonds of friendship and collegiality.

### ☉ *PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT*

Notwithstanding their praise for the NEMY Project, participants offered recommendations for program improvement in the following areas: (1) the depth versus breadth of the program; (2) group dynamics within the delegation; (3) action plan development, implementation, and follow-up; (4) articulated project objectives; and (5) sustainability of the initiative.

### ☉ *ITD'S ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE*

The evaluative interview with NEMY's Project Director focused on: (1) ITD's perceived progress toward the project's objectives; (2) the agency's perspective on the action planning process; and (3) valuable lessons learned from the administration and facilitation of the NEMY Project.

Overall, ITD was pleased with some of the very concrete, sustained outcomes reported by the Dutch participants – both in terms of programming and collaboration. Notwithstanding these positive outcomes, ITD noted the ongoing and challenging interpersonal dynamics within the Dutch delegation – primarily though not exclusively between the ethnic Dutch participants (some of whom self-identified as Muslims) and the Muslim participants of Turkish and Moroccan origin.

These challenges precipitated an important learning process for the organization and delegates alike about how social and cultural patterns can permeate the behavior and attitudes of well-intentioned and open-minded individuals. Although the difficulties encountered during the project – like the social dilemmas NEMY aimed to address – were not easily rectified, these group dynamics have obliged ITD to consider to what extent the organization can effectively address such issues in the course of its programs.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

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Based on the data collected through this evaluative process, The Community Consulting Initiative respectfully offers the following recommendations and conclusions regarding the NEMY Project:

### **☉ *PROGRAM DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS***

In accordance with abundant feedback received from Dutch delegates, ITD may want to consider restructuring the schedule of some of its delegations with the objective of creating fewer but more meaningful interactions for visiting groups.

### **☉ *INCREASED LATINO REPRESENTATION IN PROGRAM***

Given the important parallels identified by participants between the situation of Muslims in the Netherlands and Latinos in the US, it may be worth considering if a greater number and variety of Latino presenters and site visits would advance the objectives of the next delegation of European Muslims.

### **☉ *EXPLORING ADJUSTMENTS TO THE ACTION PLANNING PROCESS***

Although ITD has extensive experience in this area, it may be useful to explore changes or additions to its existing model, such as a consideration of a chronology that more easily facilitates the development of realistic plans based on thoughtful and critical thinking.

### **☉ *DELEGATION DIVERSITY AND DYNAMICS***

The configuration of NEMY's Dutch delegation brought to the fore some of the challenges facing Dutch society and Muslims living within that society. This dynamic provided the group with an important learning opportunity, in conjunction with considerable strife. It would behoove ITD to consider what its role might be vis-à-vis a proactive approach to these issues in future delegations.

## **LINGUISTIC NOTES**

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It is a linguistic challenge to adequately represent the cultural diversity of the NEMY delegations. Those who traveled from the Netherlands to the US included ethnic Dutch delegates – two of whom are married to Muslims from non-Dutch backgrounds and identify as Muslims –

as well as Muslim immigrants or Muslims whose parents had immigrated from Morocco, Turkey, and Iraq. In the context of this report, these participants are referred to as "delegates from the Netherlands" or "Dutch delegates." Those who were chosen to travel from the US to the Netherlands included an Egyptian-born Muslim as well as other Muslim delegates from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds; their group is identified as "delegates from the US" or "US delegates."

Although these terms are inaccurate as well as imprecise, they were chosen for the sake of simplicity and clarity.

## **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

Funded by the US Department of State Bureau of Cultural Affairs, the Netherlands Muslim/Minority Youth (NEMY) Project was carried out by the Institute for Training and Development (ITD). ITD has 23 years of experience in the design and implementation of international training programs. NEMY was designed to expand and facilitate the work of Dutch professionals to support the successful integration of Muslim and other immigrant youth in the Netherlands. According to the project proposal, its specific goals were: (1) to foster ongoing communication among professionals in the Netherlands and the US who are in a position to influence outcomes for Muslim and other immigrant youth; and (2) to increase the quantity and quality of services extended to these youth and their communities.

To that end, fourteen delegates from the Netherlands spent three weeks in the United States in October of 2007. During their time in the US, they attended lectures on a variety of topics related to immigration, the integration of minority communities, and the reality of Muslims in the US. They heard from college professors, imams, rabbis, immigration attorneys, and Muslim immigrants to the United States; they visited with immigration policy experts, educators of minority and immigrant children, community organizers, and youth workers in minority and immigrant communities. They visited Western Massachusetts, Boston, New York City, Chicago, and the District of Columbia. At the end of their trip, the Dutch delegates selected some of the individuals they had met in the course of the program to visit the Netherlands as part of a US delegation.

In May of 2008, six US delegates traveled to the Netherlands for a two-week period. Accompanied by NEMY's Project Director – the ITD administrator who oversaw the NEMY initiative, they visited the worksites of their Dutch colleagues and met with youth workers, Muslim religious community leaders, and representatives from the US Embassy. Over the course of their visit, they traveled to Utrecht, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Maastricht, and The Hague.

ITD was the principal institutional organizer of the NEMY Project. ITD's in-country partner, the Netherlands Youth Institute (known by its Dutch initials, NJi ) is considered the premier research, training, and policy body on issues of youth across the Netherlands; NJi played an important role in

the recruitment of the Dutch participants and was charged with planning the program and itinerary in the Netherlands for the US delegates.

## GOALS OF EVALUATION

At the completion of the project, ITD contracted The Community Consulting Initiative to design and carry out a qualitative evaluation to examine the outcomes of the NEMY Project. The goal of this evaluation was to produce summative findings that describe progress made toward specific objectives identified by the US Department of State and ITD as priority outcomes.

It is essential to note that the evaluation was not intended to prove causal relationships between the project interventions designed by ITD and the outcomes described by program participants; such analysis is outside the parameters of the present evaluation design.

This evaluation was predicated on the supposition that its principal objective was to produce information useful to the program's stakeholders. As such, this report aims to summarize and analyze the evaluative findings and, consequently, to make actionable recommendations based on this analysis to inform future programming.

## FOCUS OF EVALUATIVE INQUIRY

Within the parameters of the methodological limitations described below [*please see page 5*], ITD and The Community Consulting Initiative collaborated on the development of a qualitative evaluation formulated to explore, in a systematic fashion, progress made toward the project's original goals. The resulting evaluation design is described in this section and is attached as *Appendix A*.

The evaluative inquiry focused primarily on the following areas:

- **Value of the project for Dutch and US delegates;**
- **Outcomes correlating to participation in the exchange;**
- **Processes and outcomes related to the implementation of the Dutch participants' action plans; and**
- **Suggestions for program improvement.**

## DATA SOURCES

This report consists primarily of findings based on the evaluative feedback from the project's participants and NEMY's Project Director, as well as some secondary sources. These data sources are described below.

## **DUTCH PARTICIPANTS**

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ITD and NJi chose fourteen applicants from the Netherlands to participate in the NEMY initiative. Among these delegates were six men and eight women; of these, eleven are Muslim immigrants or from immigrant families originating in Morocco, Turkey, and Iraq; the remaining three are ethnic Dutch who work in Muslim communities – two of whom are married to Muslims of Moroccan or Turkish origin. The participants work in a wide array of organizations that serve Muslim communities, including schools, social work agencies, city or municipal government, law enforcement, and local media.

## **US PARTICIPANTS**

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Six individuals from the US traveled to the Netherlands as part of the NEMY Project. The three women and three men are all Muslims; they currently hail from Massachusetts, New York, and Chicago. The group includes a university student active in Muslim affairs, a Muslim university chaplain, a senior administrator at a private Muslim school, an auditor who is an active volunteer with the Islamic Society of North America, an interfaith youth worker, and an outreach worker in urban Muslim communities.

## **INSTITUTE FOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

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ITD's NEMY Project Director – who participated as the seventh member of the US delegation – was also interviewed, with the specific intention of exploring the evaluative inquiry from the perspective of program planning, design, and expectations.

In addition to these interview subjects, The Community Consulting Initiative also conducted a comprehensive review of archival documents related to the project, including:

- ITD's Project Proposal to US Department of State
- Dutch Delegates' Action Plans
- Satisfaction Surveys Completed by Dutch Delegates
- Impact Reports Prepared by US Delegates
- Interim Reports to the US Department of State
- Media Coverage Related to NEMY

## **DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOL**

In November of 2008, an evaluator from The Community Consulting Initiative (TCCI) traveled to the Netherlands, where fourteen evaluative interviews were conducted over seven days. In addition to the Dutch delegates, the program coordinator from NJi was also interviewed. All interviews were conducted in English. Each respondent was interviewed individually, with the exception of two

colleagues who met with the evaluator as a pair due to one's perceived limited English proficiency. Three of the interviews were conducted in-country by telephone. All interviews ranged in duration from ninety minutes to two hours. Interviews were held, variously, in Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam, and Maastricht.

The evaluative data gleaned from the Dutch delegates were collected via standardized open-ended interviews. The template for this interview is attached as *Appendix B*; it includes questions designed to elicit respondents' analyses of experiences and opinions related to the proposed areas of inquiry.

These formal interviews were supplemented by informal conversations, unstructured observation in the context of a luncheon attended by many of the delegates, and by site visits to some of the delegates' places of work.

One of the delegates was out of the country and could not participate in a personal interview; this participant agreed to respond to the inquiry in writing but ultimately did not do so, despite multiple communications from TCCI.

The evaluative data collected from the US delegates to the Netherlands were gathered via a written questionnaire. The Community Consulting Initiative distributed this questionnaire [*attached as Appendix C*] in October 2008 by post and electronic mail. Two of six delegates returned the questionnaire, notwithstanding various requests from the evaluator.

The Community Consulting Initiative interviewed NEMY's Project Director in December 2008. The template for this interview is attached as *Appendix D*.

These templates were developed in cooperation with ITD and were designed to address the overarching areas of evaluative inquiry, including: (1) the value of the project; (2) the outcomes correlating to participation in NEMY; (3) the efficacy of the action planning process; (4) recommendations for program improvement; and (5) lessons learned from ITD's organizational vantage point.

The Dutch delegates were asked:

- How has your participation in this project changed your perspective – on immigration, on integration, *and/or* on the United States?
- What was the idea behind your Action Plan? What was your experience with the Action Planning process? To what extent has your Action Plan been implemented? What difference will your Action Plan [once completed] make in the lives of the people and the communities with whom you work?
- Apart from your Action Plan, what changes did your participation in this project bring about in your professional – or perhaps personal – life?

- What did you gain or learn from this exchange that you would be unlikely to learn in any other context?
- Please describe any contact you've had with project participants in the US or the Netherlands since the end of the project.
- If ITD were to carry out another exchange like the one in which you participated, what could the organization do differently in order to help create a more significant impact on the work being carried out in the Netherlands?

The US delegates to the Netherlands were presented with a similar series of questions:

- What aspects of your participation in the delegation to the Netherlands were most positive?
- What did you learn through your participation in this project that you would be unlikely to learn in any other context?
- How has this experience changed your professional practices? Can you give examples of these changes?
- How has this experience affected you on a personal level?
- Have you developed an Action Plan related to this Project? If so, please describe your plan and any progress you have made toward its objectives.
- Please describe any contact you've had with your colleagues from the Netherlands or from the US delegation since your trip.
- What suggestions can you offer to improve upon this experience for future delegations?

The evaluative interview with ITD's NEMY Project Director was designed to explore organizational considerations and program design decisions. This line of inquiry included questions about progress toward agency-specific objectives, the action planning process, and valuable lessons learned over the course of the NEMY Project:

- What were the principal objectives ITD intended to accomplish through NEMY?
- Of these, which have you achieved? What progress have you made toward others?
- What are some of the unexpected outcomes that arose from this project?
- What is your own assessment of the action planning process as it was carried out with the Dutch delegation? Specifically, what were its greatest strengths? Its principal challenges?
- What lessons did you learn from your agency's experience with NEMY?
- How might these lessons inform your future programs?

## **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND LIMITATIONS**

Evaluations are shaped by the methodological approaches employed as well as by the circumstances surrounding their execution. It is generally useful to examine the extent to which these may inform the content of the evaluation itself:

The present evaluation was carried out by The Community Consulting Initiative, which provides third-party, independent evaluation services. The results of a third-party evaluation are typically considered to be free of subjectivity or bias.

All data collection processes and analyses were conducted by a single evaluator. The constancy of perception and behavior of one evaluator provides consistency across such elements as interview execution, language, coding of qualitative data, and data analysis.

The evaluator does not speak Dutch. Therefore, all evaluative interviews were conducted in English. The level of English proficiency among delegates was very high; in fact, most participants are fluent English speakers. For some respondents, however, it proved a challenge at times to convey a particular thought or idea in English. In these cases, the evaluator asked respondents to write down the Dutch word that best fit the context; subsequently, the evaluator researched the English translation of the concept in question.

The evaluation was initiated during the final phase of the NEMY Project. This circumstance precluded the use of measurement tools that assess pre-activity and post-activity attitudes or behaviors. As a result, the evaluation did not measure changes or outcomes in accordance with an objective scale; it was not feasible, for example, to employ quantitative measurements such as Likert Scales or Semantic Differentials, which are most effective when comparing pre- and post-program results. Rather, the evaluation process was dependent upon the project participants to report their own perceptions in this regard.

This evaluation was exclusively qualitative in nature. Given the small number of data sources, it was determined to be neither advisable nor meaningful to represent qualitative data in statistical terms [for example, "50% of US participants shared this opinion"]. Instead, the responses, ideas, and concepts highlighted in the body of this report represent the result of a systematic coding process, in which words, phrases, and ideas repeated across the collected data are organized into themes and categories. In addition, some "outlier" opinions are represented in the report, especially when they give voice to concerns that are actionable vis-à-vis future programming.

## **EVALUATION FINDINGS**

As is noted previously, thirteen of fourteen Dutch delegates participated in the evaluation process and two of six participants from the US did so. Therefore, where US respondents offered input that corroborates or strongly contrasts the feedback from their Dutch counterparts, it is noted. Otherwise, the conclusions drawn here – except where noted – are based chiefly on the data generated by the Dutch delegates. In addition, this section includes reporting on the development and implementation of participants' action plans, as well as their recommendations for program improvement.

A separate section outlines the evaluative input received from ITD's NEMY Project Director.

## **COMMON THREADS**

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The primary areas of commonality among participants' feedback included: (1) their gratitude for the opportunity to participate in NEMY; (2) changes in their views of the United States; (3) the perceived and lived differences between Muslims in the Netherlands and Muslims in the United States; and (4) the structural differences between the social sectors in the United States and the Netherlands.

### **☉ *APPRECIATION FOR NEMY EXPERIENCE AND ITD***

There were no interview questions that explicitly asked the delegates' opinion of their overall experience or the role of ITD; nevertheless, such input was forthcoming and very positive:

- "We had a wonderful time – my compliments to ITD."
- "A very positive experience"
- "I really liked the trip."
- "I see myself as a global citizen now"– this experience "enlarged my view and provided the impetus to learn more about the world."
- The ITD program allowed us to "hear the theory [and] then see the practice."
- "Lectures gave us the background we needed to understand the site visits."
- The trip was "very well organized – the organizations were very well selected."
- The experience "changed me so much."
- It's hard to put into words – "I'm so glad to have [had] the chance to be there."
- I am "happy and grateful"; I got a lot out of it and wish I could do even more with the experience.
- "ITD did a good job."
- "Love the people at ITD!"
- ITD has been wonderful; they did everything for us."
- ITD was "very amazing."
- I would do "anything for Julie Hooks Davis."
- An appreciation of commonalities across cultures: "We tend to fear others because we want to protect ourselves against what we don't know."
- An appreciation of the depth and variety of experiences, from student groups to the Department of State to NGOs, in a small village to Chicago to Boston to DC
- I am very grateful for the experience and "will take this with me as I go forward."

## ◎ *CHANGE IN VIEW OF UNITED STATES*

**Delegates commented that prior to their participation in NEMY, their almost universally negative views of the United States were fostered by the media.** Some participants described those views using the terms "war," "foreign policy," and "superiority"; others had considered the US primarily through the lens of movies, music, and McDonald's.

In the words of one participant: "Before our trip, we didn't see the *people* of the US; we only saw Hollywood and politics." Another delegate remarked that it is "hard to have a positive view of a country you don't know."

One interviewee spoke more plainly, saying "America was not a country I wanted to visit"; in fact, he described crumpling up the announcement about NEMY that he had been given.

Once the Dutch delegates arrived in the US, they found – in the words of one participant – that "people in the US are like me." They felt welcomed. One interviewee had imagined that the US was propelled by capitalism and that, as a result, Americans would not have time for family or visitors; instead, he found that people were very open and took time for the delegation. A colleague echoed the impression that Americans were very open-minded – a characteristic that surprised her. Another delegated remarked that, since his travels, he had developed a new filter and new context for understanding media information about the US. One respondent said that her participation had "totally changed" her ideas about the US.

**Many participants were heartened to discover that equating US foreign policy with the US citizenry was a mistake.** They were stunned and pleased to find that there were so many Americans against the war in Iraq. One commented that "[US] foreign policy is not so good, but the people are not so bad!" In the same vein, another interviewee said that before his trip, he had believed "America is a terrorist nation"; after his travels, he altered his opinion somewhat: "[Then-President] Bush is a terrorist – the [American] citizens are not guilty." Another described common thinking in Western Europe about the US in similar terms: "The President is bad; therefore, the people are bad."

Armed with new knowledge, NEMY participants attempt to counter these views: "Now, I correct negative comments [made by others in the Netherlands] about the United States...especially their [mis]perceptions about Muslims in the US." In the words of a delegate who works with Muslim youth, "Since my trip I have concrete evidence – examples and experience – to share with the youth" about the United States; in fact, this educator draws a parallel in his discussions with youth between the way in which Muslims are depicted in the Dutch media and the portrayal of Americans in European media.

Many respondents appreciated their ability to speak to anyone they wished – on the street, in a store, at the bus station. One noted that this contact with "normal American people" had ultimately changed his previously negative outlook about the country and its people.

Some delegates were unpleasantly surprised by the great disparity in socio-economic status they observed in the US, as well as by the levels of racist violence and violence in minority communities recounted to them by US colleagues. As one interviewee said, "We aren't naïve; we know that the US is not utopia. We saw and heard about some of its challenges. But – [the situation for Muslims in the US] is still better than the situation in the Netherlands."

**A number of delegates mentioned that their travels not only changed their opinion of the US, but also obliged them to look with "US eyes" on Dutch society** – that is, to view the Netherlands and its problems with greater objectivity. One remarked that her participation in NEMY had allowed her to think more critically about the situation of Muslims in the Netherlands, using the US as a point of reference. One respondent said she had come to realize that Dutch society does not welcome minority views – which, she pointed out, is not a positive context for integration.

Another interviewee commented on her observation that people she met in the US display a positive way of thinking about the situation of Muslim immigrants – a sort of "look on the bright side" attitude; in contrast, she felt that the Dutch tend to look at immigration from a negative perspective.

Some participants spoke of their desire to return to the United States for a subsequent visit. As one interviewee said, "I would love to go back again. That says it all."

### ☉ *INTEGRATION OF MUSLIMS IN NETHERLANDS VERSUS MUSLIMS IN UNITED STATES*

Every Dutch delegate spoke at length about the differences they observed between Muslims in the United States and Muslims in their country. There were two distinctions that seemed especially significant to them: (1) **the recognition that Muslims in the US are seen as and consider themselves to be American**; and (2) **the realization that the situation of Muslims in the Netherlands is based primarily on socio-economic factors, rather than religious ones.**

Regarding the first point, one Muslim interviewee noted that people in the US appear to feel very American, regardless of their race or religion; she noted that this is quite different from the Netherlands, "where even those who are born here don't feel we belong." As one participant said: "[The Muslims we met in the US] were so American; they love America!" This is in stark contrast to the Netherlands, where immigrants and their descendents are "always seen as 'other.'"

One participant remarked that integration in the US allows for the maintenance of one's culture and background, while in the Netherlands "integration means you must abandon your identity." He interpreted the Emma Lazarus poem inscribed on the Statue of Liberty as: "Come with your culture

and your baggage – stay yourself." **Another delegate described how his exposure to this paradigm of integration has changed the message he communicates to the Muslim youth with whom he works: "It's fine to feel Moroccan, but you were born and live here. You are Dutch."**

Throughout their interviews, delegates repeated that Dutch Muslims do not feel welcome or accepted in the Netherlands. As a result, **many were shocked to witness a level of acceptance of Muslims in America that they had not expected.** One participant shared a story told to her by an imam in the US about a neighbor who came to his door in the days after 9/11 to express his sympathy and show his support. She found this level of acceptance "amazing."

In fact, a number of interviewees spoke of 9/11 as a touchstone in Dutch society. They noted that the **US has moved on from 9/11 in many ways – "even in New York City" – but the event still carries a great stigma for the Muslim community in the Netherlands.**

In the context of this and other discussions, a few respondents used the Dutch term *slachtoffer* – a reference to a tendency for Muslims in the Netherlands to see themselves as victims. Another delegate reported that he now tells the Muslim youth with whom he works: "You are not a victim. You are a citizen."

In fact, **Dutch delegates came to believe that comparisons between Muslims in the Netherlands and in the US were not as useful as they had thought might be the case; rather, most commented on the similarities between Muslims in the Netherlands and Latinos in the US.** One of the US delegates to the Netherlands commented on this as well, mentioning that she would have been unlikely to make this connection had she not visited the Netherlands.

A few delegates spoke to this issue at length, noting that the areas of similarity and comparison between these two groups include: the continued utilization of their native language; ghetto living; low levels of formal education; limited employment opportunities; a harsh socio-economic reality; and a struggle of identity embodied in quandaries over home and country. One delegate noted that the use of Spanglish in the US is a barrier to literacy and communication – and went on to say that he had recognized that a certain linguistic mix of Moroccan and Dutch spoken in his community had created a similar obstacle.

**The recognition that there were so many similarities between Muslims in the Netherlands and minority groups in the US who share a mainstream religion forced the Dutch delegates to revisit some of their deep-seated assumptions about the role of religion as a precipitating factor in social disadvantage.** One respondent articulated this as follows: "There are problems with immigrants in the US – but not with [the immigrants'] religion. In the US, problems are caused by socio-economic factors." If there is problem with a Muslim youth in the Netherlands, one

delegate explained, the Dutch associate this with Islam. In the US, delegates saw that such problems are not related to religion – but rather to a community's socio-economic situation.

**The importance of this recognition – described by all the delegates – cannot be overstated.**

According to participants, religion is a very important part of many people's lives in the US, but they are not defined by it; whereas in the Netherlands, one's religion is seen as the cause of many difficulties. Having observed the situation in the United States, some of the Dutch participants came to believe that they must discount religion as a primary factor in understanding the status of Muslim immigrants in their country. As one interviewee stated, "In the US, we saw that the problems like housing, poverty, and education are beyond religious identity."

One of the participants went so far as to propose that "the problem is not integration, per se; the problem is education and socio-economic position."

However, this view was not unanimous. One interviewee saw this distinction as culturally-bound, stating: "Problems in the US are not based on religion, but they are in the Netherlands."

The delegates were surprised, too, that so many Muslims in the US have access to good education and good jobs – and that they enjoyed "so much freedom." One interviewee noted that the parents of the students at a Muslim school in the US were highly educated; this was in such stark contrast to the situation in the Netherlands, where most Muslim immigrants are poorly educated. Another observed that Muslim parents in the US have high aspirations for their children, while their counterparts in the Netherlands, on the whole, do not. As one delegate said, "We [had] thought US Muslims did not have a fair chance."

Finally, the delegates' visit to a mosque that provided a religious home to Muslims of various nationalities and ethnic backgrounds offered them a new model of multiculturalism. Some were excited by this, although one interviewee commented that the language divide among Muslim communities in Netherlands precluded such a possibility.

☉ ***DIFFERENCES BETWEEN US AND DUTCH SOCIAL SECTORS***

All of the delegates were impressed by the dedication of those who work in community-based organizations in the US. They commented extensively on the long-term commitment to social change exhibited by the people – Muslims and non-Muslims alike - whom they had met. In particular, the Dutch recognized that – unlike the Netherlands, where the government provides funds and leadership for social service endeavors – the United States is home to activists who create and administer organizations without government support. They described a "heightened sense of responsibility" among people in the US and compared that to their own sense that the Dutch government would take care of communities. In the representative words of one: "Here we wait for the government to respond; now I know I can act without the government."

NEMY participants appreciated the model of grassroots organizing to which they were introduced. One delegate reported that his long-held belief that local communities should be given the responsibility and resources to solve their own problems gained strength and resolve on account of his visit in the US. He is convinced that the *gemeente* – the municipal or local government – must engage with a community in order to effectively solve the problems facing that community. After his experience with NEMY, he resolved to bring this message to his work and reported that he hoped to make small steps in that direction: "We must listen to communities – not think for them!"

In the words of another respondent: "To see people who [really] want to make change – wow!" He commented that this exposure had changed the way he works with Muslim youth in the Netherlands; "**I tell them, 'If you want to change, you must make the change yourself. We must not only wait for the government to act.'**" He gave a vivid example: "I tell [the Muslim youth] that it's not just about what [Geert] Wilders wants or how he wants to make this society – it about what we want, too!"

## **ACTION PLANS**

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As a requirement of their participation in NEMY, each member of the Dutch delegation developed an Action Plan. These plans were designed to respond to an identified need or opportunity in the realm of Muslim immigration and integration in the Netherlands. These plans were conceived during travel in the US and were to be implemented upon participants' return home. In all, fourteen delegates collaborated on a total of eight Action Plans. (*There are only seven Action Plans described below, since one Dutch participant did not participate in the evaluation process.*) In addition, the US delegates were also expected to develop Action Plans.

In the course of the evaluative interviews, Dutch participants described the content of their Action Plans as well as the steps taken toward their implementation.

### ☉ **CONTENT AND IMPLEMENTATION**

With only one exception among the interviewees, the Dutch participants had begun to carry out their Action Plans at the time of the evaluation. In most cases, the Action Plans implemented varied – sometimes slightly and sometimes significantly – from the Action Plans the delegates had developed while in the United States. Some delegates described concrete outcomes resulting from their Action Plans; others did not have clear outcomes to report.

- Three delegates who reside in the same city collaborated on the implementation of a plan that brought together three branches of the public sector: local government, police, and a youth organization. They gave a joint presentation to some forty people about their experience in the US and the differences between the status of Muslims in the Netherlands and that of Muslims in the US. They also arranged for a representative from the US Department of State to attend a

presentation in their city on social and youth programs designed to serve the local Moroccan community. Perhaps most importantly, their own newly-formed network of three has proved very valuable to each of them: this Muslim man, ethnic Dutch woman, and Muslim woman have established a close relationship of consultation and cooperation. In the words of one of them, "We are a small network bringing other networks together."

- Another group of three participants collaborated on a series of presentations to approximately forty-five students in an urban Muslim high school with the objective of sharing information about the presenters' experiences in the United States, especially vis-à-vis issues of Muslim integration. (*A fourth delegate had originally agreed to be part of this working group but reported that illness prohibited him from doing so.*) In all, seven lectures at two hours each were prepared and delivered over a three-week period.

These presentations encouraged students to think rationally about difficult and sensitive subjects like prejudice and integration. Through these sessions, students were taught to use facts in discussion and debate; the guest lecturers challenged them to argue with data, rather than with emotion. Students were given the opportunity to argue diverse points of view – even ones with which they disagreed. For example, they were asked to debate in favor of as well as in opposition to such statements as "Geert Wilders has the right to make a film such as *Fitna*" and "Muslim women must wear the burqa."

Students' learning outcomes were assessed via quizzes administered before and after the lecture series; students participated in pre- and post-activity brainstorming sessions, as well. According to the Action Plan team, the pre-tests showed that students harbored many presumptions about the US – presumption that were akin, in fact, to prejudices against Muslims.

The post-tests showed that students had learned to look at prejudice from a broader perspective. In addition, the Action Plan team reported that the class discussions were very interactive – in fact, some students skipped their lunchtime in order to continue the conversations. The team was pleasantly surprised by the impact brought about by the implementation of its Action Plan.

The team had also intended to establish a "pen pal" network between the students at this Islamic high school and a Muslim school in the US, but this component of the original Action Plan was not implemented.

- One delegate developed what he called "an ambitious plan born out of necessity": A community campaign entitled "Holland is Tolerant," whose members act as mediators or community spokespeople in response to incidents of discrimination or harassment against Muslim youth. He reported that an associated website is also in development.

This participant commented that although this work likely would have been brought to bear regardless of his participation in NEMY, his involvement in the exchange gave the plan "a kick start." His participation allowed him the time to process his thinking about this initiative and to put it into a new perspective.

- One participant developed and implemented *three* distinct projects focused on issues of radicalization in the Muslim community:
  - (1) The delivery of a training to the local police department about radicalization;
  - (2) The development and implementation of a training for Muslim fathers and sons; *and*
  - (3) A series of meetings for Muslim girls to discuss radicalization.

These projects were influenced by the delegate's participation in NEMY; she noted that the explicit concepts of radicalization and integration as discussed within the context of the project helped her to see that Muslim youth in the Netherlands struggle with serious issues of identity.

The fathers and sons project was multi-faceted: The fathers met to discuss (*in Arabic*) how to talk constructively with their sons about important or difficult issues; meanwhile, the sons met to talk (*in Dutch*) about the kinds of questions they would like to ask their fathers. Eventually, fathers and sons met together for these bilingual conversations. These discussion groups were carried out with the objective of stemming radicalization among youth, following the logic that the more involved fathers are in the lives of their sons, the less likely the sons will feel they must look elsewhere for answers to tough questions.

The girls' group was developed to address the reality that girls are often ignored as potential targets of radicalization. The group's facilitator offered a range of perspectives on a variety of topics – perspectives, in her opinion, that Muslim girls do not often hear. However, the series was discontinued after only two sessions – likely due to the "too liberal" views that were discussed.

- One delegate had proposed an Action Plan intended to bring disparate groups together to bridge the widely acknowledged cultural communication gap in her city – especially as it pertains to Muslim youth. However, because her work supervisor did not give her permission to advance the plan during work time, its implementation has been delayed.
- Another participant developed a project focused on the phenomenon of widespread unemployment among Muslims in an urban neighborhood. The intention of the network is to eschew government funding (*another lesson taken from the US*) and to attempt instead to procure funding from businesses, which are confronting the reality that they need a diverse workforce. Initially, he had recruited ten people to work with him on this initiative; however, due to time constraints and the serious nature of the problems at hand, only five remained by late fall. At the time of this evaluative interview, these volunteers had created a network for training and job placement for Muslims – and had placed three people in jobs.

- Two delegates from a geographically isolated region of the country collaborated on the development and implementation of a day-long conference on the topic of Muslim communities in civic society. These NEMY participants recognized that the negative portrayals of Muslims on a national level adversely affected the status of Muslims locally. A principal point of departure for this conference was the newly-formulated idea that the problems of Muslims in the Netherlands stem in large part from socio-economic factors, rather than from their religious affiliation. The conference was attended by approximately eighty people and was scheduled to coincide with the visit of NEMY's US delegates, which allowed their US colleagues to participate in the day's workshops. The feedback received from the conference participants was "very positive." Afterward, the organizers sent newsletters to conference attendees and others with the intention of creating a network among organizations in the region.

### © **ADDITIONAL OUTCOMES RELATED TO PARTICIPATION**

As is posited above [*please see "Methodological Approaches and Limitations"*], the design of this evaluation does not allow for the assignment of causality. However, it is nevertheless useful within this evaluative context to explore the extent to which the project's participants credit this experience with self-reported changes or outcomes.

Interviewees reported ancillary outcomes that were less concrete in nature than their Action Plans, but no less important to them. These are enumerated, below:

- Participants did not envision replicating programs they had seen in the US, but rather **spoke of applying the new knowledge and ideas they had acquired to their work**. For example, one interviewee defined her "take-away" in terms of new models for problem-solving that can be used in the context of Dutch discussion and debate.
- Another delegate was appreciative of the new resources he has available to him; when he needs to choose a method or strategy with which to approach his work, he finds that "the arsenal is bigger" now.
- One participant described the impact of her participation in NEMY as having prompted the recognition that **being a Muslim in the Netherlands** –and thinking like a Muslim in the Netherlands – **does not make her "less Dutch."** Although she did not agree with all of the opinions espoused by the Muslims she met in the US, she nevertheless felt empowered by their ability to speak their minds as Muslims without compromising their status as Americans. She returned to the Netherlands with a newly-formed conviction: "We can make room for each other."
- Many group members returned to the Netherlands informed and inspired by the programs they had visited and the people they had met in the US. One respondent stated that he was encouraged and energized by the experience of meeting people "from another world" who shared his values and a commitment to these issues; he was reminded that he was "not alone in

this world" working to solve these problems.

Another delegate remarked that having been introduced to a new way of thinking about NGOs gave her hope: "There must be other ways to accomplish our goals in the Netherlands. If people in the US can do it, why not in Europe?" One interviewee described her attempt to obtain private business funding to start a Muslim women's cooperative; her initial effort brought only limited results, but she hasn't abandoned the idea.

Another example of this inspiration was directly related to youth work. It was noted that in the US, Muslim youth can contribute to their local communities – communities that include non-Muslims. In the Netherlands, Muslim youth are encouraged to be role models, but only for other Muslims. It occurred to one participant that if Muslim youth are encouraged to be role models in the wider community, then it follows that they would feel part of the larger Dutch society. She is currently exploring strategies with which to pursue this idea.

- Beyond individual outcomes, a subgroup of the delegation has formed what is described by many as new and strong relationships. It is worth noting that this group is composed of the participants who are Muslims of Moroccan and Turkish descent; eight of these ten delegates meet regularly – two more are occasional participants. Group members communicate by telephone, electronic mail, and gather every few months. They describe their connection as based on shared interests and their experience of learning, exploring, and experiencing what it is like to be a Muslim in the US. One participant calls it "a network across the Netherlands." Over and above social gatherings, these participants call on each other professionally: For example, a police officer invited an educator to give a lecture to local police in order to inform their Islamic diversity policy.
- In addition, there was publicity about NEMY in the Dutch media. In many of these newspaper articles and radio and television shows, delegates reported what they had learned in the course of the exchange. A sampling of this coverage includes:
  - Radio Interview: Avro in the Afternoon, November 19, 2007  
Interview with Fatima Fitskie-Aajoud  
*Excerpt translated from the Dutch:*  
I thought Muslims must have it bad [in the US]. But they have a lot of freedom and space to practice their religion and beliefs. And there are a lot of institutes and organizations that make it easier for them to integrate.
  - Radio Interview: The Other Sound – Radio 5, November 20, 2007  
Interview with Mohamed Azahaf and Pieter Paul Bakker  
*Excerpt translated from the Dutch:*  
When I talked with Muslims in America, I asked them how they saw themselves – as Muslims, as Arabs, as Americans, or something else. And what I heard was: "We are Americans." What I concluded from that was that they were well integrated.
  - Newspaper Article, *Limburgse Dagblad*, December 29, 2007

Interview with Leyla Cakir

*Excerpt translated from the Dutch:*

I am just back from a trip to the US on an exchange project about integration of minorities... My most important conclusion: Muslims in the Netherlands and in the US have nothing in common except their religion. Muslims in the Netherlands are here as guest workers, much less educated, newcomers. Muslims in the US went there to settle. They are usually highly educated, work as doctors, lawyers, or judges, and have above-average salaries and feel themselves to be American. Muslims in the Netherlands...are comparable to Latinos in the US. Latinos have a strong connection with their homeland, speak the [English] language poorly, and are over-represented in the lower social-economic class. For me this is proof that integration doesn't have anything to do with religion. Let's keep the integration discussion clean. We shouldn't keep talking just about crime and unemployment figures. Integration means feeling a connection with the Netherlands. You don't have to deny your own heritage or give up your religion. Integration is not assimilation. That's what I found so nice in America. There is literally and figuratively more room to be different.

◦ Newspaper Article: *De Volkskrant*, January 7, 2008

Interview with Mohamed Azahaf, Rachid Habchi, and Fatima Lamkharrat

*Excerpt translated from the Dutch:*

The three Moroccan-Dutch now have a more open mind about the US. According to [Azahaf], the Netherlands can even learn something from the US. In Springfield, they visited a mosque where Sunnis and Shiites and Muslims from different ethnicities pray together. "If you ask what they are, they say American," says Azahaf. "If the Muslims here were also to feel Dutch, then they would be part of society..."

## **DELEGATES' RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT**

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In some cases, delegates' ideas for changes in program content or design are a function of individual preference. For example, two delegates – both young Muslim women – offered contradictory suggestions: one commented that the program included too many visits to Muslim organizations (*"very Islamic to me"*), while another felt that there were not enough (*"missed the 'Muslim' in the project"*). However, the proposals highlighted below are those that were made by many or most of NEMY's participants. These include recommendations in the areas of (1) the depth versus breadth of the program; (2) group dynamics within the delegation; (3) action plan development, implementation, and follow-up; (4) articulated project objectives; and (5) sustainability of the initiative.

### **☉ DEPTH VERSUS BREADTH**

Although they spoke highly of the many people they met and places they visited, a majority of the interviewees nevertheless expressed the opinion that their trip might have been even more valuable if it had been narrower in scope.

**These respondents felt that the combination of such a heavy schedule and lack of time to reflect detracted from their ability to think clearly about how they might apply their new learning to their work at home.**

According to some delegates, the group would have benefitted from time for collective reflection. However, there was not sufficient time allotted for reflection – and, if there had been, many participants would have been too tired to take advantage of it.

**Many interviewees suggested alterations to the delegation structure that would, in their opinion, allow for greater depth and reflection:** A number of participants said they would readily trade theory for practice, in order to allow for a more "in-depth exploration." One respondent suggested that ITD may have to choose between extending the time of the visit or making choices about activities based on priorities. Another delegate commented that although her experience in the US was very positive, it "only touched the surface." She suggested that it would behoove ITD to make the experience "deeper" and "more extensive" by placing participant(s) at one agency for a week or more; according to her proposal, **Dutch visitors would be matched to an NGO in the US, in accordance with areas of interest or the potential scope of an Action Plan.** This structure would facilitate the meaningful exchange of sustainable knowledge and practice pertaining to one issue in particular.

Other delegates – who were not aware of her comments to the interviewer – echoed these thoughts. Two respondents suggested that ITD arrange a teacher exchange among educators who work with immigrant youth. Similarly, one interviewee suggested that participants come together for a few days to visit sites in the US, after which delegates would participate in intensive exchanges based on interests or profession; this would be followed by another joint program during which participants would report back on their experiences. Another had a similar recommendation as to how ITD might intensify the impact of its exchanges: Matches could be made between US and Dutch organizations, which would consecutively swap its colleagues – perhaps with an eye toward the development of collaborative projects. "Not just to *observe*, but to work *together*" – to generate a real product together. It was a commonly held belief that this type of "real exchange" would lead to greater impact.

### © *DIVERSITY AND DYNAMICS AMONG DUTCH DELEGATES*

In the course of the evaluative interviews, many of the Dutch delegates were outspokenly critical in their assessment of each other's participation in NEMY: "There was depth lacking in [many of the] individuals." "Many had big mouths in the US but did nothing when they returned [home]." "There was a perception that we weren't serious, but we were the ones who completed our Action Plans." "It was a pity that [some delegates had] big mouths but empty bodies."

This criticism appears to underlie **a group dynamic that was largely characterized by a lack of understanding and a concomitant lack of trust.**

According to the accounts shared by respondents, there were ongoing conflicts of opinion on everything from best Muslim practices to homosexuality to Shia versus Sunni traditions. There was a perception that some delegates were not required to attend meetings that were compulsory for everyone else, or that there were different behavioral standards for extroverts versus introverts. There were perceived divisions based on religion and ethnicity. One delegate described these difficulties as a "communication gap" between the ethnic Dutch and the Dutch of Moroccan and Turkish origin; although they communicated well "on the surface," in fact they did not, in a figurative sense, speak the same language – despite considerable effort.

Unfortunately, these disagreements and disgruntlements led to negative interpersonal relationships among group members. These tensions persisted in the daily program activities into the evening recreational time.

These difficulties were particularly painful for some, given that the goal of the project itself was to explore issues of integration. **It was troubling to observe that the delegation became a microcosm of the communication gap that exists in Dutch society.**

At times, the considerable concern about the group dynamic took focus and energy away from the project's learning objectives; in the words of one interviewee, it "colored the experience" for everyone. **Every delegate from the Netherlands mentioned the challenges presented by the group's interrelationships.** One participant commented that the group dynamic "surpassed the program content in creating impact" on the participants. Another was of the opinion that negative group dynamics detracted from the program as well as from the achievement of the program's goals.

Although some interviewees took pains to express their opinion that ITD was not responsible for these divisions, it was widely agreed that in order for the project to be successful, the group dynamics must also be a focus of the program, in addition to its content. It was suggested that more time – before travel as well as at the beginning of the trip – be devoted to "learning how to be a group" and to establish a shared commitment to group process.

The selection process was considered to be a cornerstone of creating a well-balanced delegation. Many interviewees were quick to lay blame at the feet of NJi for its role in the selection process, which some saw as faulty. Despite NJi's experience with youth, it was felt that the institution lacked experience with immigrant communities and therefore were not familiar with key people in various Muslim groups. One respondent warned that the selection committee must be careful in terms of whom they see as "representative" of certain communities. One participant suggested that there should have been more occupational diversity. Another delegate was of the opinion that the group should have been more diverse in terms of religion, so that the discussion could have gone beyond the "Muslim context"; one ethnic Dutch participant felt that a kind of "Group Think" took over –

and that a more diverse group could have offered another perspective. Another interviewee suggested that it is critical to emphasize group respect and acceptance during the selection process.

Delegates posited that a healthy group dynamic would facilitate the ability of delegation members to carry forward a common commitment to the project's goals and objectives once they return to their home country. In the view of one participant, the delegates could have collaborated on important and far-reaching projects upon their return to the Netherlands if there had been a coordinated effort to keep the group together.

Suggestions to avoid such troubled group dynamics in the future included:

- **Extensive team-building activities prior to and throughout travel;**
- Agreed-upon ground rules for behavior and communication;
- Sharing one's hopes and expectations with each other;
- Establishment of "a safe space" within which to discuss interpersonal dynamics;
- **Designation of a group leader;**
- A coordinating body – such as NJI – that has the necessary time, energy, and experience to provide such leadership; *and*
- Post-travel sessions that include reflection on the group dynamic as well as reports on the implementation of Action Plans.

With regard to the last few recommendations, it was suggested that "someone with leadership qualities" or "emotional knowledge" would be better prepared to facilitate the inclusion of all participants, respond to group conflicts, and insure accountability vis-à-vis the implementation of Action Plans. It should be noted that there was considerable confusion about the role of NJI's representative in this regard, as many delegates expected that the NJI coordinator would serve a leadership function. **There was a great deal of disappointment and frustration expressed at the perceived failure of this individual to act in a neutral and proactive fashion.**

The only criticism leveled at ITD was the concern voiced by a few respondents that ITD should have initially approached the tension in a more even-handed manner – that is, with all the facts about the situation and without assuming fault.

### © ***RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING ACTION PLANS***

Many delegates expressed their support for the action planning process. Action Plans were alternately described as an obligation to "do something in the Netherlands with what [they] had learned" and an important opportunity to "give back" and to produce "concrete results to evaluate."

Although they embraced the action planning process in theory, project participants encountered challenges in the actual development of their plans as well as in their implementation.

- *DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES:* Many participants felt that the presentations on action planning

were not as dynamic as they might have been. Apart from the workshops themselves, the process of Action Plan development occurred in the midst of so much new information that it was difficult for delegates to make connections between what they were learning and the reality of their work at home.

One delegate compared the development of Action Plans to asking Muslim street youth what they want: "They don't know!" He suggested that delegates, like youth on the street, are "stuck" in their existing perspectives and need a facilitator who can assist them to think "out of the box."

A common concern expressed was the need to consult with others at one's organization before making a commitment to an Action Plan.

In keeping with this feedback, a few interviewees suggested that it might be more effective to develop an Action Plan once the delegates had returned to their country. This would allow participants more time to think carefully about how to apply new learning to the situation at home. From a logistical standpoint, respondents suggested that the Dutch coordinating agency could provide action planning workshops, technical assistance, and follow up. It was recognized that this would likely present another set of challenges to the process and would also require a strong and ongoing commitment from the partner agency in the Netherlands.

Interviewees had other comments on the process, as well: Delegates who worked on Action Plan teams commented that multi-organizational work was challenging – and that it would have been easier to implement an individual action plan. One respondent recommended that action planning development might focus on bridging research and evidence with practice at the local level.

- *IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES:* Many interviewees recounted a **disparity between their initial planning efforts in the US and their attempts to implement their plans in the Netherlands**. As one team reported: "On paper, it was possible" – but once back home, they found that they had not been realistic about the plan's application to "real life." Since many delegates could not implement their Action Plans as originally proposed, they developed more feasible alternatives instead.

Most participants reported that they simply did not have enough time to implement their Action Plans as they had been written. Many of their Action Plans were not considered part of their paid work; thus, it was a challenge for them to find time to carry them out. Some had not recognized the extent of the work required by what they had proposed. Likewise, many of their employers did not realize the time that delegates would have to spend on the implementation of the Action Plans.

**In order to address this latter point, it was recommended that ITD procure prior commitments not only from the individual delegates, but also from the organizations they represent.** Interviewees were hopeful that this would allow future participants to carry out their

plans with support from their employers – a situation that would not only facilitate implementation, but would also likely create greater impact. It was suggested that this might also encourage greater networking at the agency-level, rather than only among individuals. One respondent used the Dutch term *draagvlak* – roughly understood as backing or support – to describe her hope for the eventual broad-based acceptance of ITD Action Plans in the workplace.

- *FOLLOW UP AND ACCOUNTABILITY*: Many delegates commented that they would have benefited from more ongoing follow-up from NJi with regard to the development and implementation of the Action Plans.

**The perceived lack of accountability vis-à-vis the Action Plans was upsetting to some participants.** They seemed eager to learn what their colleagues had accomplished and disappointed not to have the opportunity to share their implementation experiences. A number of delegates suggested that some of the tensions within the group are due to the perception of inconsistent efforts vis-à-vis the Action Plans.

#### ☉ *ARTICULATION OF PROJECT OBJECTIVES*

A number of delegates remarked that they had spent time and effort considering the question of NEMY's objectives from the standpoint of the US government: "What are the gains for the Department of State and for ITD? What does the US gain by investing in us?"

One participant said he assumed that one of the goals of the project was to show foreigners "another US" – in place of the one seen through the lens of politics and Hollywood. Another delegate said she and others had identified two possible project goals: (1) the promotion of a more positive image of the US in order to defuse a Muslim threat, and (2) the opportunity for participants to learn from each other.

**It was suggested that the project's goals be discussed openly and explicitly with participants,** in order to avoid such speculation.

#### ☉ *SUSTAINABILITY*

A number of delegates emphasized the importance of maintaining links among delegates and to the issues of immigration and integration. One suggested the establishment of a periodic "study day" for past participants – and others, as appropriate – on the issues of integration and the Muslim world. It was recognized that this would be challenging, but it is nevertheless considered extremely important.

One respondent proposed the use of technology to facilitate ongoing contact between delegations – perhaps in the form of a shared website through which US and Dutch delegates could communicate about issues pertaining to immigration and integration. In addition, it was recommended that ITD

and NJi hold an annual conference in the Netherlands or the US, which would allow for a continuation of the shared thinking that began during travel.

A few respondents expressed a desire to look back – as well as forward – together. Given the difficulties and lessons of the experience, they expressed a desire to reflect together. (*According to some, a post-travel meeting was held, but many delegates were not in attendance.*)

## **ITD'S ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

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The evaluative interview with NEMY's Project Director focused on: (1) ITD's perceived progress toward the project's objectives; (2) the agency's assessment of the action planning process; and (3) valuable lessons learned from the administration and facilitation of the NEMY Project.

### **☉ PROGRESS TOWARD PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

NEMY's Project Director described the goals of the initiative as follows: (1) to support participants in expanding their consciousness – defined as a blend of knowledge and experience – in their professional fields; and (2) to provide the opportunity for them to expand their knowledge and experience of the United States. These goals were to be realized through exposure to a selection of individuals and groups – Muslims as well as non-Muslims – who offer different perspectives on the integration of Muslims in US society.

In the assessment of the Project Director, these goals were achieved. She noted that "from [the participants'] perspective, "these goals were achieved "more or less." The diversity of the group – highlighted earlier in this report – made it difficult to satisfy all of its members to the same degree.

Based on comments from the participants and their responses to ITD's internal evaluation surveys, she surmised that the delegates experienced "very significant" changes in their view of the United States: "It blew their concepts of the US out of the water!" She remarked that participants had arrived in the US with a "limited and one-dimensional view" of the US. The "very intense experience [of ITD's program], in which they meet a lot of different people, necessarily complicates that perspective." This was especially the case for the Muslim participants. This appraisal is corroborated by interview data described in this report.

In addition to the aforementioned desired outcomes, NEMY's Project Director reported other observations related to the program, including:

- Strong bonds of friendship and collegiality established and sustained among some participants;
- The extent to which three participants from one city became close collaborators and colleagues;
- The establishment of professional connections between two participants from a somewhat isolated region of the country; *and*
- Close ties established and maintained between many Dutch participants and the US Embassy in

the Netherlands.

There were negative observations noted as well, in particular:

- The vehement opinion of several delegates that NJi was a bad choice for ITD's in-country partner; *and*
- The disappointment that the delegation turned into a microcosm of the limitations of tolerance in today's Holland.

From its organizational perspective, ITD considers NJi to be a very strong institution with a well-established track record of working with youth: "NJi embraced the project and did the best they could." The Project Director suggested that perhaps ITD could have further clarified the role of NJi's representative, since many delegates were unhappy with the lack of leadership displayed by NJi over the course of the trip to the US – but ITD did not in fact have the expectation that NJi would provide leadership within the group.

Regarding the group dynamic, it had been ITD's hope that removing people from their social context would allow them to break free of these unfortunate patterns of interaction. ITD understood its role in mediating these conflicts to be limited. These limitations were due in part to the short-term nature of the project; moreover, if ITD had prioritized the issues related to the group dynamic, it would have done so at the expense of the program goals.

### ***ACTION PLANNING PROCESS***

In the assessment of the NEMY Project Director, there was a mismatch between the NEMY delegation and the ITD staff member assigned to facilitate the action planning process. The facilitator was a very experienced group leader who approached the sessions slowly and deliberately; however, the group members were impatient to move forward.

According to the Project Director, the preliminary versions of the Action Plans were quite varied. ITD was especially pleased with those Action Plans that resulted in constructive collaborative efforts among delegates who previously had not known each other. In some cases, these action planning efforts have provided an impetus for continued collaboration.

### **☉ *VALUABLE LESSONS LEARNED***

ITD has facilitated many, many international delegations over the years, and each one engenders distinct lessons. The most notable lessons or considerations gleaned from the NEMY Project included: (1) the role of ITD in promoting team-building; (2) the value of in-country planning visits; (3) conditions for successful collaborations with the in-country partner; and (4) the question of how broad a spectrum of constituencies should be represented in ITD programming.

The NEMY Project provided an especially important occasion for reflection regarding group dynamics and the role of ITD in offering team-building opportunities. Some of the questions that arise upon consideration of these issues are: How can ITD anticipate which groups will require intensive team-building? Can a small scale intervention be effective in addressing such complex and deep-rooted issues? How can ITD be assured that the outcome of such intervention will be beneficial and not detrimental? What could be taken out of the program content to allow for the inclusion of such training?

With regard to pre-program planning, NEMY's Project Director noted that it proved very helpful to have had the chance to carry out in-country planning over three visits to the Netherlands prior to the program. During these trips, she met with Dutch NGO leaders, US Embassy personnel, and attended extensive planning sessions with NJi. She was able to participate in orientation workshops and applicant interviews. In addition, she was able to learn about US Embassy efforts in the area of Muslim integration, so that ITD could coordinate with and build on those. In the estimation of NEMY's Project Director, a minimum of two trips previous to project execution are required.

In collaborating with NJi on the NEMY project, ITD applied a lesson learned from one of its previous exchanges: to provide clear parameters for its organizational partner with regard to the development of the program to be carried out in their country. Among these, ITD insisted on strict restrictions in scheduling, so as to discourage NJi from "over-filling" the schedule. In addition – and perhaps most importantly – ITD required the inclusion and participation of the Dutch delegates in the planning and execution of the program planned for US delegates. Although this broad participation "necessarily makes for a bit more disjointed [delegation] experience," it also makes use of the delegates' extensive knowledge.

In most other ways, however, ITD is committed to the development of an exchange program by an in-country partner as "an exercise in letting go" – in respecting the knowledge of the organizational partner and country delegates.

Finally, NEMY offered ITD the opportunity to consider how it might represent a broader variety of communities in its future programming. Some US delegates to the Netherlands expressed an interest in hearing a more diverse range of perspectives on the reality of Muslims in the Netherlands: One suggested that the delegation meet the clients of the programs they visited, in addition to the programs' staff members; another broached the idea of meeting members of an extremist group, in order to appreciate the "spectrum" of experience and opinion. Although NEMY's Project Director was clear that ITD would not want to bring validation to an extremist fringe, she was nevertheless willing to consider how to expand the range of communities represented in ITD's programs.

## ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As is often the case when a study is based on extensive qualitative data, the findings in this evaluation speak for themselves to a large extent. As such, this penultimate section of the evaluation report is devoted primarily to examining the most salient points of the study's results.

### © *PROGRAM DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS*

**ITD may want to consider restructuring the schedule of some of its delegations with the objective of creating fewer but more meaningful interactions for visiting groups.**

There were two alternate structures recommended by interviewees: (1) a schedule that includes more lengthy and intensive interactions with fewer individuals and agencies; *and/or* (2) an exchange that includes a shortened version of a typical "survey" delegation experience, in addition to an intensive "match" between delegates and pre-selected organizations.

These models would require a much greater commitment from ITD's US-based partners, since their responsibilities as hosts would increase significantly. An effective matching process, as proposed in the latter model, would likely require additional pre-program planning on ITD's part, which could in turn signify changes in the application and screening processes.

Despite the challenges inherent in these kinds of programmatic shifts, they seem worthy of ITD's consideration, given the articulate feedback from the project's participants on this subject.

### © *INCREASED LATINO REPRESENTATION IN PROGRAM CONTENT*

NEMY programming appeared to include a balanced variety of views on the integration of Muslims. These perspectives came from Muslim scholars, religious leaders, laypeople, and children – as well as from agencies serving non-Muslim minority communities in similar or comparable contexts.

In the course of this evaluation process, most if not all of the project participants underscored their recognition that comparisons between Muslims in the Netherlands and Latinos in the US were significant and important. Their insight prompts the following query: Might ITD consider increasing the quantity of Latino-influenced content in its programs for European Muslims? Would it be helpful for European delegates to have a broader or deeper understanding of community and societal approaches and solutions to the challenges faced by Latinos in the US?

Although such a change would necessarily imply a decrease in other program content, **it may be worth considering if a greater number and variety of Latino presenters and site visits would advance the objectives of the next delegation of European Muslims.**

## ☉ *ACTION PLANS*

Although ITD has extensive experience in the development of Action Plans, it may be useful for the organization to explore changes or additions to its existing model.

A seemingly simple but important suggestion made by some NEMY delegates is that of **procuring early support and agreement from participants' employers vis-à-vis the implementation of the Action Plans.**

Other delegates suggested a much more complex modification to the action planning process: an alteration to its chronology, such that the development of the Action Plans would occur once the delegation had returned home. Such a change seems daunting, as it would involve a new and intensive role for an in-country partner. Nevertheless, the **question of the timing and context in which Action Plans are developed is worth ITD's consideration.**

Along these lines, it may be helpful to examine the role of the Action Plan in ITD's work. In order to probe whether improvements to the action planning process may be called for, ITD could explore these questions as they relate to the goals of ITD's programs: How effective are Action Plans in providing a forum through which participants can apply their newfound knowledge and experience to the situations they face at home? Do Action Plans as they are currently executed facilitate the dissemination of information regarding the experience and viewpoints of delegates? Does the action planning process create and sustain meaningful linkages between or among project participants?

*A parenthetical comment on a related note:* Although some delegates claimed that it would have been easier to work alone rather than in groups, one could argue from an evaluative standpoint that carrying out an Action Plan across organizations and professions: (a) facilitates sustained contact between delegates who might otherwise not have reason to work together, and (b) allows the Action Plan to reach a much broader audience in the course of its implementation.

**In addition to these considerations, an evaluator would enforce the inclusion of clearly-defined benchmarks and desired outcomes in the delegates' Action Plans.** These would support participants and others in their efforts to assess the progress and success of the plans' implementation. In addition, such measures could constitute one component of an improved system for participant accountability vis-à-vis the action planning process – an issue that was of significant concern to many NEMY delegates.

## ☉ *DELEGATION DIVERSITY AND DYNAMICS*

The group dynamics among participants in delegations such as NEMY appear to be highly complex. Such challenging interactions can in fact offer group members an opportunity for profound learning – in conjunction with considerable strife. However, in order to take advantage of this opportunity,

such programs would have to dedicate a significant amount of time and effort to the development of participants' consciousness and skills in team-building, interpersonal communication, and understanding and challenging societal prejudice and discrimination.

ITD would be called upon to provide sensitive and highly skilled facilitation in such a process. For their part, program participants would have to be willing to engage in these highly personal and potentially painful discussions. **In order for these interventions to be sustainable, they would have to be undertaken with the understanding that delegates would learn to apply these methods in their own work.**

That such an approach could be taken does not imply that it *should* be taken. It is up to ITD to ask questions such as these: Is this within the purview of ITD's work? Would such an approach supplement or supplant ITD's traditional program content? **Could ITD collaborate with another organization – in the US or in the delegates' home country – that specializes in this type of work?** If nothing is done to address these issues, how might these ongoing dynamics affect the intended outcomes of ITD's program?

## CONCLUSION

The data contained in these pages speak to the impact that NEMY has occasioned for its participants. These findings affirm the capacity of ITD to facilitate such impact.

While certain areas for improvement were identified in the course of this report, it should be noted that many of the issues broached in the report are not easily resolved but, like the social dilemmas the program aimed to address, must be carefully considered and rectified to the extent possible.

As stated in the introductory paragraph of this report, the primary goal articulated by the Department of State with respect to this project was to expand and facilitate the work of Dutch professionals to support the successful integration of Muslim and other immigrant youth in the Netherlands. More specifically, NEMY intended to achieve this (1) by fostering ongoing communication among professionals in the Netherlands and the US who are in a position to influence outcomes for Muslim and other immigrant youth, and (2) by increasing the quantity and quality of services extended to these youth and their communities.

NEMY has inarguably resulted in sustained communication among professionals in the Netherlands who work with Muslim youth. It is unclear – due to the lack of response from US delegates – whether or not NEMY has accomplished the same among the US cohort. The extent to which Dutch and American professionals have maintained communication with each other has been limited in part by the difficulties inherent in transatlantic communication; in addition, however, it appears that sustained and meaningful communication across these groups requires longer-term coordination and oversight than is currently available.

According to information provided by the Dutch delegates, it appears that the quality – and perhaps to a lesser extent, the quantity – of services provided to Muslim youth and their families has been significantly influenced by the delegates' participation in NEMY.

Notwithstanding interpersonal and structural challenges inherent in such an undertaking, the value of this type of exchange is clearly expressed by project participants. It appears that there is no substitute for experiential learning in the context of international relations. Dutch and US delegates alike spoke of the unique nature of direct observation and experience. In the course of one interview, a Dutch participant spoke about developing a new paradigm of comparison between Muslims in the Netherlands and African-Americans and Latinos in the US; he emphasized **the importance of "seeing and feeling" that difference, rather than simply reading about it**. A US delegate responded to the evaluative survey as follows: " I had done a lot of reading beforehand and had already had an idea of the tense integration debate there... but following the situation through reading articles and books or watching news clips or *Fitna* **is not a substitute for visiting a country and meeting with its inhabitants.**" (*Emphasis added*) Perhaps this sentiment was most aptly framed by one of the Dutch Muslim participants, who remarked that such exchanges produce "more peace" in the world; he quoted an Arabic aphorism that translates roughly as "If you don't know somebody, you can't love him" – or establish peace with him.