



Civic Engagement in the Somali Community

HIDDO SOOR | CONFERENCE 2023

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About Hiddo Soor

Hiddo Soor International Organization was founded in 2021 as a non-profit with the goal of connecting Somali culture, literature, sports, and arts to the next generation.

Located in Minneapolis, Hiddo Soor plans to make lasting change in the local Somali community in order to advance our heritage.

Hiddo Soor envisions a thriving Minnesota where every community flourishes.

Through targeted advocacy, educational support, and authentic cultural celebrations, we aim to bridge disparities, creating an extensive community of empowered individuals and communities.

Somali Community

Somali immigrants started arriving to Minnesota in the early 90's - 00's because of the Civil War in Somalia.

According to the Minnesota Department of Human Services, 13,582 Somali refugees came to Minnesota between 2005 and 2018.

There's now a flourishing Somali community in the Twin Cities. With hundreds of families and businesses, Somalis consider Minnesota to be their home.



Somalis & Politics

After decades of building a local Somali community in the Twin cities, the first Somali representative was elected to office in 2017: Ilhan Omar.

The Somali community is still achieving milestones in local representation: last month a Somali-American woman was elected mayor of St. Louis Park.



Somalis & Politics

Even though we have some representation and progress has been made, civic engagement is something to be worked on in the Somali community.

While younger, diaspora-born Somali-Americans tend to be more politically active, we need to consider the barriers preventing older Somali immigrants and new refugees from participating in voting.

Break off into Smaller Groups

Small Group Discussion

Icebreakers:

Favorite cultural tradition?

Tea or coffee?

Always be slightly late or be super early?

Live in a big city or live on a quiet farm?

Summer or winter?

Discussion Question

“When Somalis came to [the] U.S., they moved to a foreign country where they could not communicate with people. So, for them, being close to people from their country meant having someone to communicate with and that helped them to unite their votes and resources for political [candidates],”

-Abdirahman Sharif, local imam and community advocate

How do you think a language barrier affects civic engagement? What are ways to overcome this?

Discussion Question

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“Somalis as a group tend to be politically oriented, and certainly community oriented. They have a tradition of passing along information to one another by word of mouth. The Somali language was only written down in the 1970s, meaning its oral traditions have continued.”

-Cawo Abdi, sociology professor at University of Minnesota

How can we use word of mouth to promote civic engagement?
What other mediums would you also consider?

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Discussion Question

“...for so long, Somalis have been denied the opportunity to participate in government by civil war, a failed state and decades spent in refugee camps. ‘They are beginning to embrace the opportunity to be able to make a difference with the vote.’”

-Stephanie Dickrell & Cawo Abdi, SC Times

How would we educate older Somali immigrants and new citizens who don't participate in voting?

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Large Group Discussion

Icebreaker:

What's something new that you learned today?

Did you have a favorite moment/discussion?

Do you think about the barriers of civic engagement differently?

How do we get more
diverse voters engaged?

Thank you!

Questions?

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