

Arabic-speaking Minnesota

Arabic-speaking Minnesotans come from many countries, including Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, and Palestine, with refugee, immigrant, and U.S.-born generations.

Maintained by: Equity and Inclusion Operations Consultant

Contemporary voices, many perspectives

Mizna creates space for contemporary Arab and Southwest Asian and North African art and writing. Its work offers an invitation to encounter individual creative voices. These overlapping communities are not identical to a language group, and Arabic-speaking Minnesotans have many different identities.

- **Explore Mizna's creative work** — <https://mizna.org/about/>

A different starting point

What could you ask that welcomes a person's own perspective without expecting them to explain an entire region or faith?

Community overview

Muslim, Christian, and secular households; national identities and dialects vary widely.

Names and terms

Arabic-speaking (as a language group); national-origin terms

Also used: Arab American

Ask which variety of Arabic and how names appear on documents.

History and place

Origins — a language, not a people

Arabic is an Afro-Asiatic language with a written standard (Modern Standard Arabic / fu c % ' æB Ö ày spoken varieties that are not interchangeable in an interpreter. The language spread with trade, empire, and Islam — and it was already in the Levant and Egypt before that sentence. This is literacy for the desk. It is not a speech you give the family.

History for the meeting

Peoples who use Arabic as a first language do not share one origin story. A Lebanese Maronite household, an Iraqi Chaldean household, a Palestinian family, an Egyptian Copt, a Sudanese Muslim family, a Yemeni household, a Maghrebi household — share a language family and do not share a

Tuesday.

What people brought

Do not found “the Arabs” in a waiver meeting. Do not lecture a Christian family about the Prophet. Do not file a Black Sudanese or Nubian Arabic speaker under a Levantine picture. Shared language is not shared culture.

What people brought: a dialect, a church or a mosque or neither, kinship, and a memory of states and wars that are not one war. What they met in Minnesota: an English form, one “Arabic interpreter,” and often a Somali default because the building already has that page.

The Geography of Arabic

The Arabic-speaking world is not one flag and not one race. Levant (Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan), Egypt, Iraq, Sudan and the Nile, the Maghreb, the Gulf, Yemen. Each has dialects, churches, mosques, and class that do not travel as a blob.

Homeland

In the United States, Dearborn and the Detroit metro, southern California, New York, New Jersey, and Texas hold large communities. Minnesota is not Dearborn. Do not import a Michigan picture onto a Ramsey County lobby.

Minnesota

In Minnesota: Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota both. Compass Lebanese: 81 percent Twin Cities, 19 percent Greater Minnesota (ACS 2019–2023). Other Arabic-speaking streams are not in that profile. Do not assume Minneapolis. Do not assume the person in front of you has been to the country on the passport copy.

Culture and everyday life

People, place, and perspective

This brief is a language door. Arabic sits on the CLAS ten-language block and the fifteen-language interpreter cards at this department. It is not an Arab module. It is not a Muslim module. If you open Somali Minnesota because Arabic is on the card, you have already closed the door.

Who this is

Arabic is a first language in Lebanese, Iraqi, Syrian, Palestinian, Egyptian, Sudanese, Yemeni, Gulf, and Maghrebi households in this state. It is a liturgical and religious language in some Somali, Oromo, and other Muslim households — recitation, not the interview. Ask which language this family needs. Confirm whether Arabic is actually spoken at home.

Who this is not

There is no dated total “Arab Minnesota” population on this page. Do not invent one. Minnesota Compass (ACS 2019–2023) puts Lebanese Minnesota near 6,959 — one stream, not the whole door. Star Tribune

(31 July 2025, citing ACS 2017–2021): Arabic is about 2 percent of Minnesotans who speak a language other than English at home, grouped with German, French, Chinese, and Russian. Date the number you use. A language share is not a people-count.

How to read this

Christian and Muslim Arabs both live here. Lebanese Christian streams are real and older in some Minnesota families. Do not assume mosque. Do not assume hijab. Druze: no dated Minnesota count — do not invent one. If this family is Druze, defer.

Always defer to the person in front of you. This page is a hypothesis you still test on this family.

Many arrivals — no single foundational year

If 1975 is Hmong Minnesota and 1991 is Somali Minnesota, Arabic-speaking Minnesota has no single foundational year. That is the point. Collapse is how a module gets written.

Foundational events

Lebanese and other Levantine Christian streams include families with deep U.S. roots; Compass Lebanese foreign-born is 8.5 percent (ACS 2019–2023) — dated, one stream. Palestinian displacement is a twentieth-century and present fact. Iraqi arrival after 1991 and after 2003. Syrian after 2011. Sudanese streams. Yemeni. Maghrebi and Gulf smaller here. Secondary migration from other states.

Who you meet

The desk in 2026 meets U.S.-born children in every stream, elders who need a dialect, and people who use Arabic only at church or only in Qur+æ â 66†ööÂà If you only know “refugee” or only know “Muslim,” you will miss this room.

Distrust of government has sources that are not one source: 9/11-era surveillance, wars the United States ran, Gaza-era harassment, and ordinary ICE. A DHS badge is not automatically help.

Family

Who is in the household varies by stream, class, and generation. Some rooms are extended. Some are nuclear in the English way. Compass Lebanese average household size about 2.14 (ACS 2019–2023) is one stream — often smaller, older, more English-dominant. Do not copy it onto a Sudanese or Iraqi waiver household.

Who is in the household

Ask who should be in the room. A nuclear English form already has a who. Elders, in-laws, and adult children may sit in the same week.

Who speaks

Do not invent a last name because the database wants one. Do not treat unmatched last names as fraud by default. Patronymic and three-part patterns exist in some families; Westernized first-middle-last in others.

Women's labor and men's labor both live here. Gender norms are this family's, not "Arab." Ask.

Minnesota and Arabic as a door

Arabic is on the language block because the department already meets these households. That is operations, not a festival. There is no Cedar-Riverside of Arabic Minnesota. Named churches — Maronite, Antiochian and other Orthodox, Coptic — and named mosques and Islamic centers are partners if this family names them, not a list to extract from.

Places

Compass Lebanese (ACS 2019–2023): about 6,959; 81.0 percent Twin Cities; 19.0 percent Greater Minnesota. Greater Minnesota is not an afterthought. Other Arabic-speaking streams are not inside that count.

Partners

Arabic-speaking staff are not unpaid interpreters and not the community. Identity is not a staffing plan. A Heritage Month table is not consultation. You are a guest. It does not make you the expert.

CECLC is a door, not the whole. Pay partners. Report back.

A language door — not a heart to perform

There is no single heart of "Arab Minnesota" to put on a poster. For some people, Arabic is the language of the grandmother and the church. For some, it is the language of the Qur+æ â æB æ÷B öb F†R ¶—F6†Vâà For some, it is the only language that reaches an elder. For some U.S.-born children it is a class they do not speak.

In this state

Race in the U.S. file fails this door in more than one direction. Levantine and Iraqi Christians have often been filed White. Sudanese Arabic speakers have been filed Black. "MENA" as an emerging box is still not a person. Somali is a different people. Do not fold this household into Somali Minnesota because both might be Muslim.

This guide is a working orientation. Individual variation always supersedes group generalization.

Core Concepts

Dialect. Levantine, Egyptian, Iraqi, Maghrebi, Sudanese, Gulf, MSA. An interpreter labeled Arabic who does not speak this household's variety is a closed door. Confirm it on the line.

Home language versus liturgy

Arabic on a Somali or Oromo Muslim card may be recitation. Book the interview language. Do not open this door and skip Somali or Oromo when those are the people.

Christian and Muslim both

Do not assume the mosque. Do not assume the priest.

Hospitality and family reputation exist in many rooms

They are not a module you perform. A yes that is courtesy is not a signature. Ask whether they agree.

MSA is school and media for some; it is not the kitchen. Do not test an elder in fu c % æB 6 ÆÂ —B Æ æwV vR access.

Religion — not the language

Islam is not Arabic. Arabic is not Islam. Christian Arabs — Maronite, Orthodox, Coptic, Protestant — live in this state. Muslim Arabs — Sunni and Shi+ö r Æ—`e in this state. People who left both live in this state. Do not make a religion the case plan unless this family asked.

Streams

Arabic as Qur+æ æ-2 Æ æwV vR —2 Æ—GW&v-6 Â It is used that way in some Somali, Oromo, and other Muslim households whose interview language is not Arabic. Do not book an Arabic interpreter for a Maay grandmother because the building saw “Muslim.”

Practice

Do not assume hijab. Do not rank covering as piety or oppression. Halal matters in some rooms and not in others.

Druze: no dated Minnesota count. Do not invent a community. If this family names Druze, listen. Defer.

Ramadan, Eid, Friday prayer, Christmas, Easter, Coptic fasts — ask. A calendar click is not engagement.

Greetings

Follow this room. As-sal ðu +ö Æ ykum is ordinary in many Muslim rooms; the reply is wa-+ö Æ ykumu s-sal Òà It is not default in a Christian Arab room. Mar %aban, ahlan, and English hello are ordinary. Say the name.

Titles

Elders first. A hard handshake you assume is universal is already a closed door for some women and some elders. Many second-generation people will shake hands in English-language rooms. If a hand is not offered, nod. Do not force it.

This room

Do not import the Black nod onto this page. Do not import Somali greeting rules as if Arabic were Somali.

Physical contact: ask the room. Cross-gender touch is not a default in some families. It is ordinary in others.

Naming Conventions

Naming patterns vary. Some families use given name + father's name + family name. Some three-part names look like Somali names and are not. Some Lebanese and other Christian streams use French or English given names and a family surname that the database can already see. Some people have Westernized on U.S. forms. Ask.

How to file

Do not invent a last name because the screen requires one. That invented name becomes a gate.

Pronounce it. Ask. Do not joke about long names. Do not assume three Somali names. Do not assume a hyphen.

Women may or may not take a husband's family name in U.S. records. Ask how to file. Do not "correct" a mother and child who do not share a last name as a fraud signal until you have a reason.

Dates of Significance

Ask this family. Muslim lunar dates — Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Mawlid in some rooms — move on the Gregorian calendar. Christmas and Easter (Western, Orthodox, Coptic) in Christian rooms. National days some families name (and some refuse).

Calendar

11 September 2001 is structure in this country, not a holiday and not a personality. Gaza-era harassment is current structure. Neither is a calendar click that makes you engaged.

Do not put "Arab holiday" or "Muslim holiday" on a case note without asking. A calendar click is literacy. It is not community engagement.

Etiquette

Hospitality is a virtue in many rooms. Accept a little tea if offered. You still keep medical and legal time.

In the home

Shoes off in some homes. Right hand for food in some Muslim rooms. Do not import a rule you learned on the Somali page as automatic.

Time

Do not assume a woman will or will not cover. Do not photograph a family and call it rapport. Do not enter a prayer space as a tour.

On-time for appointments. Multi-household logistics are real. So is a courtesy-yes then no-show when the plan was never agreed. Ask whether they agree. Confirm in the language they use.

Language and Communication

Levantine, Egyptian, Iraqi, Maghrebi, Sudanese, Gulf, Modern Standard Arabic. Confirm the variety. An interpreter labeled Arabic who does not speak this household's dialect is still a closed door. Maghrebi and Levantine are not interchangeable because both are "Arabic."

Language

Confirm whether Arabic is the home language at all. On a Somali or Oromo Muslim card it may be religion. Book the interview language. Do not open Somali Minnesota by default because Arabic is on the card.

Star Tribune (31 July 2025, ACS 2017–2021): Arabic is about 2 percent of non-English-at-home speakers

in Minnesota, grouped with German, French, Chinese, and Russian. Date that. It is not a people-count.

A short English yes may be exhaustion or courtesy. Do not take a smile as consent. Do not make a coworker the interpreter. The child is not the interpreter.

LGBTQ

Queer and trans Arabs exist in Minnesota. Conservative church, mosque, and family climates can mean silence or exile. Some people live a public English life and a private home life. You use the name they use. You do not out them to an elder as cultural humility.

This person

Minnesota's Human Rights Act still applies. So does the duty not to treat a whole language group as a family-values exhibit.

Do not use this chapter to raid a household. Do not pretend the tension is not there.

Hair, Dress, and Body

Hijab, niqab, and modest dress are ordinary for some Muslim women and not for others. Christian Arab dress is Minnesota dress plus, for some, church clothes. Do not assume covering. Do not rank covering as piety or oppression.

Dress

This is not the CROWN Act chapter. Sudanese and other Black Arabic speakers may also live the hair politics of anti-Blackness. Ask this person. Do not mash.

Do not touch. Do not police covering. Do not assume a covered woman cannot speak for herself — ask her, with a gender-matched interpreter if she wants one.

Music

Arabic musical life is not one playlist. Tarab, dabke, Egyptian and Levantine pop, Maghrebi, Coptic and Orthodox hymnody, and religious caution about some music in some families all exist.

Variation

A playlist is not engagement. Do not request a dabke as icebreaker in a waiver meeting.

Knowing that oral art and poetry carry prestige in some rooms will stop you from calling a long answer “rambling.”

Sports

Soccer is a common public sport in many streams. Basketball shows up in the second generation. Do not assume the kid plays. Do not make sport the only excellence you can see.

Not the whole person

Sport clubs are social infrastructure. They are not language access and not a case plan.

World Cup loyalties are not a risk score.

Literature

Arabic is one of the world's major literary languages. Poetry is prestige in many rooms. The Qur+æ â —2 recitation and scripture in Muslim rooms — not a literacy test you give a dialect-speaking elder in the lobby.

Literacy in the lobby

MSA and dialect are not the same skill. A person who does not read fu c % —2 æ÷B W'6öâ v—F†÷WB ÆWGFW'0.

You do not need to quote Mahfouz or a pre-Islamic ode. You need to know limited English is not illiteracy.

Art

Calligraphy, geometric ornament, Levantine and Egyptian visual work, church iconography in Christian streams. Contemporary artists in the diaspora. Guest, not researcher.

Guest

A museum visit is optional professional development. It is not consultation.

Do not put a camel or a keffiyeh on a Heritage Month table and call it this door.

Conflict, War, and the State

There is no single civil-rights story to copy onto this page. The political literacy is plural: 11 September 2001 and what the United States did in its name; Iraq; Syria; Sudan; Yemen; Gaza; surveillance of Muslim communities; enforcement against some immigrants. Anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia are structure. They are not a personality.

The badge

Do not collect political speech as a risk score. A flag, a protest, a sermon, an opinion about Gaza is not a safety note.

A DHS badge is not automatically help. Do not use a war as a personality. Do not ask a person to narrate bombing for your professional development.

Adjacent Peoples — Do Not Mash

Not Somali. Not Persian / Farsi. Not Turkish. Not Hebrew as a synonym for this door. Not Oromo. Shared Islam is not shared culture. Shared region is not shared language.

Adjacent doors

Do not open Somali Minnesota because Arabic is on the card. Do not book an Arabic interpreter for a Farsi-speaking household. Do not file a Hebrew speaker here.

Lebanese Compass is one stream. Iraqi, Syrian, Palestinian, Egyptian, Sudanese, Yemeni, Gulf, Maghrebi are not that profile. Some households are mixed. Ask this household.

Never one Arab module. Never one Muslim module.

Counts, Dated

There is no dated total “Arab Minnesota” population on this page. Do not invent one.

Counts

Minnesota Compass, ACS 2019–2023, Lebanese cultural community — one stream: about 6,959; Twin Cities 81.0%; Greater Minnesota 19.0%; age 17 or younger 20.3%; 65+ 16.4%; foreign-born 8.5%; language other than English (age 5+) 11.8%; English less than “very well” suppressed on that profile; high school or higher (25+) 97.9%; bachelor’s or higher 50.5%; median household income about \$73,000 (2022 dollars, averaged); poverty 12.0%; owner-occupied 74.5%; average household size 2.14.

What the count is not

Star Tribune, 31 July 2025 (ACS 2017–2021): among Minnesotans who speak a language other than English at home, Arabic is about 2 percent, grouped with German, French, Chinese, and Russian. Date the vintage. A language share is not a people-count.

Counts disagree because definitions disagree (ancestry, language, birthplace). Date the number. A rate is not the person.

Doors and Sources

Minnesota Compass Lebanese profile (ACS 2019–2023) — one stream, not the door. Star Tribune, 31 July 2025, “What languages are most spoken in Minnesota homes?” (ACS 2017–2021). CLAS ten-language block and fifteen-language interpreter cards. Churches and mosques this family names.

Public doors

CECLC is a door, not the whole. An eList is not how every stream was reached. Pay partners. Report back.

Learn on your own time

Learn on your own time. Do not make an Arabic-speaking colleague your unpaid tutor. Book a qualified interpreter. Confirm dialect. Confirm whether Arabic is the home language. The child is not the interpreter.

Services, opportunity, and participation

Education

Streams differ. Compass Lebanese (ACS 2019–2023), among those 25 and older: about 97.9 percent high school or higher; about 50.5 percent bachelor’s or higher. That is one stream, often English-dominant. Do not copy it onto a recently arrived Sudanese or Iraqi parent.

School and language

A parent who speaks fluent Arabic and limited English is not illiterate. Literacy in Modern Standard Arabic is not guaranteed for every dialect speaker. The English-only IEP is the gate.

The child is not the interpreter. CLAS: untrained individuals and minors are not the plan. Put the dialect on the line.

Second-generation educational mobility is real in some streams. So is a gap a room that treats everyone the same will call “culture” instead of language access.

Other Considerations

Unvarnished, because Minnesota Nice is how a room that treats everyone the same deletes facts.

Named harms

Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism after 11 September 2001 and after Gaza are structure in this country and in this state. They change who opens the door, who will not put a relative's name on a form, and who reads a DHS badge as threat. That is not noncompliance.

Do not collect political speech as a risk score. Do not file a protest, a flag, or an opinion about Gaza or Iraq as a safety note. Enforcement climate is real for some streams. Do not collect status you do not need.

Queer and trans Arabs exist. You use the name. You do not out someone to kin and call it culture.

Do not assume hijab. Do not assume Muslim. Do not skip mandated reporting and call it humility.

Staff who share this community may add facts. They do not get to delete a fact because it is hard to say.

Health

No dated Minnesota-wide Arabic-speaking autism, diabetes, or PTSD rate belongs on this page. Do not invent one. War trauma sits in some Iraqi, Syrian, Sudanese, Palestinian, and Yemeni streams. It is not a personality and not every household.

Access

Gender match may be requested in maternal and intimate care. Offer it. Believe reported pain. Do not fold this door into Tuskegee or into a generic “stoicism” slide.

Mental-health stigma exists in some families. So does a fierce wish for services. You can hold both. Dialect on the interpreter line is a health gate.

Do not skip screening because you have no module. Identification is not a community personality.

Work, Markets, and Government

Streams differ: small business, professional class, public employment, shift work. Do not write one hustle onto the door.

Work

Arabic-speaking staff exist inside DHS and counties. They are not unpaid interpreters and not “the community.” Identity is not a staffing plan.

Staff

Relationship may precede a signature. That is not permission to skip a notice. It is a reason the first visit may not be the decision.

Health-care and Human-service Encounters

Confirm the language. Confirm the dialect. Confirm whether Arabic is home language or liturgy. Offer gender match. Ask who should hear. Do not force a handshake.

Language

Believe reported pain. Do not close the file because English was thin. The child is not the interpreter.

The meeting

Do not assume Muslim. Do not assume hijab. Do not mix Tuskegee into a Levantine Christian history or Somali CI into a Sudanese Arabic speaker. Mandated reporting still exists. So does the duty not to treat a whole language group as a risk score.

Enforcement climate: people skip clinic when a relative can be moved. That is not noncompliance. Do not collect status you do not need.

Connections to human services

Workplace culture and service delivery are both candidates.

Language: an interpreter labeled Arabic who does not speak Levantine, Egyptian, Iraqi, Maghrebi, Sudanese, or Gulf as this household speaks it is a closed door. MSA is not the kitchen. Arabic on a Somali or Oromo Muslim card may be recitation — book the interview language. Gender match may be requested in maternal and intimate care.

Names: the database that invents a last name, or that assumes three Somali names, is a gate that follows the person.

Hour caps, exception processes, and life-sharing matches without language are not culturally neutral.

Assuming Somali, assuming Muslim, assuming hijab: those are closed doors that look like cultural competence.

Enforcement climate and post-9/11 and Gaza-era racism: people skip clinic, school, and waiver meetings. That is not noncompliance. Do not collect status you do not need. Do not collect political speech as a risk score.

Notices and comment: an eList and an English PDF is not how every stream was reached. Empty follow-up calls are theater.

Workforce: Arabic-speaking staff are not the interpreter pool and not the community.

Legislation, funding, rule: you cannot advocate for a channel you will not study. This cultural intelligence exists so the 40% has a household in it — not a paternalistic program designed in a building that treated Arabic as a Somali default.

Practice considerations

Arabic varieties differ enough that an interpreter from one region may not serve another well; Arabic is also a religious language for many non-Arab Muslims, which is not the same as a household language.

What to ask

- Which variety of Arabic, and from which country?
- Would you like a gender-matched interpreter?
- Who should be in the room?

Access considerations

- Regional variety on the request when possible.
- Vital notices translated with human review.

Who to involve

- Language access lead or interpreter services, with the dialect written on the request.
- Equity Director for the administration or the person responsible for the program.
- Community partner organizations identified in this brief, with a clear purpose, role, compensation, and plan to report back.

Assumptions to examine

- Do not assume religion from language.
- Do not assume Somali or Oromo households want Arabic; ask.

Continue the connection

- **Community engagement or co-design effort** — program page </paths/gp-3>
- **Equity Analysis Toolkit** — program page </learn/equity-toolkit>
- **Community engagement and connections** — program page </learn/community-connections>
- **Learning and resources** — program page </learn>

Sources

- **Community self-description** — A community-informed source and representation review are still needed.