



American Swedish Institute

Key findings from interviews with neighborhood organization representatives

From 2019-2021, Wilder Research (Wilder) partnered with the American Swedish Institute (ASI) on a number of audience- and community-focused organizational learning projects. These projects were intended to generate insights about how ASI can maintain connections to their current audiences as well as how they can make new, meaningful connections with people in their community and beyond.

From September-October 2021, Wilder conducted 10 interviews with representatives from organizations that are located in or nearby ASI's neighborhood—the Phillips West neighborhood of Minneapolis. Interview respondents included representatives of arts and culture organizations, schools and educational organizations, and organizations that assist people in meeting their basic needs, such as helping to provide healthy food and safe housing. These interviews sought to identify how ASI can support or partner with neighborhood organizations with whom their values and goals are aligned, and more generally to identify how ASI can support the interests and issues of their neighbors.

All respondents shared positive perceptions of ASI

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“It’s a beautiful place that exhibits a particular culture and a certain kind of cultural health. For the young people I was working with, I wanted them to see a castle in their neighborhood. I wanted them to be in a special cultural place and to bring their culture there to share.”

“I consider the American Swedish Institute like a community collaborative family. When I had met [an ASI staff person] years ago, their goal was to reach out to the community so that people knew who they were. For me, it brought down some of the barriers that I might have felt prior to going there—that I didn’t feel included. But then the wall came down. ... It’s been a welcoming opportunity for everyone—whether it’s Somali, Native American, African American, Caucasian, Hmong, Hispanic. We serve all those families; ASI has been very welcoming and inclusive of that.”

“There was one program that they did that really impressed me. They had their elders who were immigrants that came over from Sweden or Norway and they worked with Somali youth in the neighborhood who were immigrants themselves. While these elder immigrants may have come from somewhere very different, the whole ‘being an immigrant in a new country’ meant that they had to go through things that were similar. I was really impressed with that because it wasn’t just about the Swedish or the Norwegian background. They looked at it as a bigger picture of ‘Maybe they came from somewhere different, but some of their experiences might be similar and the elders might be able to help them work through some of that.’ So I really respect them for that.”

Respondents offered suggestions for supporting or partnering with their organizations



Continue to share the ASI space

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“Space is a huge thing. When [another neighborhood organization] said that we couldn’t use space in their building at the last minute, right away ASI said we could use one of their conference rooms. Relationships around space are really big.”

“Our families were so happy because ASI has a lot of room. We do have an outdoor space at [my organization], but it’s not that big. We don’t feel comfortable inviting too many people to it because of COVID.”

“We’ve done some fundraising events at the Swedish Institute. I think a lot of our families that live in the community were not necessarily even aware of what the Swedish Institute is. They see this big building or something, but they had no idea that it was something that they could visit or what was all to offer there.”

“ Relationships around space are really big. ”



Facilitate connections with each other's audiences and communities

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“ASI has a huge network, a huge audience, and a lot of that audience lives outside our neighborhood but some live inside the neighborhood. It would be great for ASI to spread the word around events that we are hosting.”

“We are always helping to support artists—increasing the number of artists we support and the number of audiences who see their work. We are hoping to formalize the merchandising of our artists' work and continue to expand our audiences. Part of our goals is increasing awareness of Native people—that we're still here. Are there are ways that ASI can provide platforms for Native folks to share their stories?”

“It can be hard mobility-wise for our residents to come over there [to ASI]. ... I think it would be really cool to have them bring what they do to us. I think we would get a lot of our residents to come down if it's just coming down the elevators to the lobby and then there's maybe some kind of music or some food or just education about the culture.”



Collaborate on programming and experiences for neighborhood residents

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“We talked about ASI doing Swedish language classes. Phillips West has a huge diversity of languages that are spoken, so there's lots of ideas about how ASI could collaborate, perhaps having space for language exchange and language learning for people who speak different languages in the neighborhood. It's a barrier when people don't speak the same language.”

“If there's a way that the museums and galleries in the area could work together, it'd be fun to do a tour or event to link all of these places together to share and support each other's work. ... I could also see that with events and classes. I think it could be a sister show and some community engagement project that all of these institutions tie back to and showcase together at the same time.”

“The message I'd love to send would be that we would love to explore more avenues toward extended partnership. ... Maybe we could just say, 'Hey, every year, let's pick a grade—maybe second grade—and let's have every second grader do a walking field trip over to ASI.' That way we don't even have to bus.”



Get more involved in complex neighborhood issues

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“Right where George Floyd Square is, there's a lot of hurt and damage. Our kids all saw that, they live right there. They could look out their window and see what was happening and hear what was happening. They are in that community every day. ... To have those conversations with kids about racism and policing, and what that looks like in their community and from their point of view, and from their family's point of view—there's just a lot of healing that needs to happen, I think, in these communities around here.”

“A lot of the neighborhood organizations, no matter their cause or purpose, are involved in the nitty gritty problems in the neighborhood—addiction, crime, violence. I have not seen ASI very involved in that struggle. And that's all of our struggle. There's an opportunity there to lend something to it.”

“We need green space, food access. I am hoping this garden that we're starting can be part of that. ... One reason we decided to do a food share is that there is a lack of access to healthy, organic food. There are other people that do food distribution, but the food quality though is highly processed, not organic—and it's really hard to get good quality food at the corner store.”

