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Q: Has ATFP done enough to communicate directly with the Palestinian-American and Arab-American communities?

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A: It's true that given its limited resources and highly specific mission [2], during its first decade ATFP focused its targeted messaging mainly on Washington policy and decision-making constituencies rather than the Palestinian- and Arab-American communities. ATFP was based on a new idea, and a break from the grassroots model that had dominated Arab and Palestinian American activism for decades. Because it sought, above all, to have an impact on US policy, it consciously and deliberately identified its target audience as the Washington policy-making and policy-framing establishment, and focused and targeted its messaging towards this constituency.

The policy was adopted mainly because of the limited resources of the organization, both at the time of its founding, and until this day. ATFP chose, with some regret, as a matter of policy, to focus its communications and its attentions generally on the Washington policy establishment. However, ATFP believes that, given the success of its approach during its first decade -- which has exceeded all initial expectations -- it is now in a position to begin to place more emphasis on outreach and explaining its policies and approach to the community at length, replying to reasonable criticisms and correcting misinformation, engaging in healthy dialogue with those who disagree with us and trying to demonstrate what, precisely, our approach has been able to accomplish.

ATFP does not claim to have identified the only valid or effective model for engagement, nor has it been the first Arab-American organization to achieve policy results. But it does believe that it has been able to demonstrate that the system is open to Palestinian and Arab Americans, even on the issue of Palestine, and that it has employed a model that is effective and which can and should be replicated on many different issues and through multiple, varying organizations.

ATFP believes in a diversity of approaches, and argues that its own strategy for pursuing

goals such as ending the occupation have proven strikingly effective where a number of others, especially traditional models, have notably failed to create any policy impact. What ATFP basically encourages is following the time-proven model of all successful communities that have staked their claim in the American decision-making processes: serious, sustained and purposive engagement with the system rather than merely condemning it.

In the coming months and years, ATFP intends to become more proactive in explaining its approach to the broader community. Palestinian and Arab Americans can only empower themselves as other Americans have in the past -- by claiming their full rights as citizens [3] and becoming deeply involved in the political process and conversation at every level as patriotic Americans who put our own national interest above all.

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