

Multi Nation Program



Nisreen Shahin | Ramallah, PALESTINE
Executive Director, Rawabi Foundation

Nisreen Shahin oversees quality of life projects for Rawabi City, a groundbreaking project intended to spur economic development in Palestine. The biggest construction project in modern Palestinian history, it will bring together economic development, educational achievement, sustainability, cultural opportunities, and mixed-use construction to middle class Palestinians. Previously, Ms. Shahin directed the Palestine office of The Portland Trust, a British non-profit 'action tank' that promotes peace and stability between Palestinians and Israelis through economic development. She focused her fellowship on developing and sustaining planned communities (e.g. drawing residents, attracting and supporting resident businesses, and providing cultural and social opportunities for the community); aligning educational efforts with private sector needs; and studying best practices of U.S. foundations.

Ms. Shahin's travels took her to places she had already been – New York City, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco – and also to cities she never planned to visit, including Kansas City, Pittsburgh, and Oklahoma City. She found the broadened exposure to America and its culture fascinating and reported, “it was interesting for me to meet Americans living in Oklahoma or Kansas who feel like they are living in another country in terms of how they are perceived by other Americans who live in Washington, D.C. or New York City or San Francisco, and to understand to what extent [the people of Oklahoma and Kansas] are willing to also be exposed to the whole of the U.S. – its politics and its challenges. This applies also to cities like Pittsburgh where people live in their own communities and envision their own community as the whole world.”

Her meetings were as broad ranging as the places she visited. Visits to business incubators, Main Street development programs, foundations, park conservancies, and with inspirational people advanced her fellowship goals. Of her meetings, Ms. Shahin noted, “The quantity and quality of people I met with just made the world so small. I met with people that I would not have had the chance to meet with if I was not awarded this fellowship, which is a great asset that must be leveraged. Many opportunities are there, many ideas have been generated, and many lessons have been shared that broadened my way of thinking.”

Highlights of Ms. Shahin's fellowship included meeting former Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy at the Urban Land Institute in Washington, D.C., followed by a visit to Pittsburgh where Mr. Murphy took her on a personal tour of the city. Other outstanding experiences included spending time with USA Fellow Laura Boyd in Oklahoma City, and learning about the Manchester Bidwell Corporation through its founder and MacArthur Fellow Bill Strickland. In addition, Ms. Shahin established connections with several foundations, including The San Francisco Foundation, Goldman-Sachs Foundation, Cummings Foundation, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

In particular, she observed, “the opportunity to spend this time with Fellows from different countries was such an enriching, exciting and amazing one. Different cultures, colors, values, assumptions and interests can no more be a barrier. The ability to understand and respect other points of view is the key to unite and think how to tackle the challenges of the 21st Century.” Upon her return, Ms. Shahin looks forward to giving underprivileged students the chance to be trained and become Microsoft certified engineers, pursuing an entrepreneurial development program in Palestine, and exploring the creation of a center similar to the Manchester Bidwell Corporation – a place to combine arts and vocational skills in an empowering atmosphere of art, light, and music, with a staff that strives to realize the genius in everyone.

Leaders bettering the world around them.