

منار
menar

*The Middle East and
North Africa Regional
Fellowship Program*

IMPACT REPORT

2011 - 2021



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We also wish to thank our board members, partners, and fellows -- past and current -- for the insights and feedback they shared that have shaped this report.

Key Abbreviations

CRP - Collateral Repair Project

ECT - École Candienne de Tunis

EM - Experience Morocco

EMIS - Eastern Mediterranean International School

MENA - Middle East and North Africa

MENAR - Middle East and North Africa Regional Fellowship Program

PriME - Princeton in the Middle East and North Africa

RBK - ReBootKamp

SESRI - Social and Economic Survey Research Institute

UAE - United Arab Emirates

FOREWORD

I strongly believe that for any young person interested in the world, there is no experience more formative than a year spent living and working abroad early in one's career. Seeing how other cultures treat workplace norms, communicating across cultural barriers, and learning to be proactive yet flexible while outside of one's comfort zone are all invaluable professional skills that will carry through a lifetime. In personal terms, learning to navigate confusion and difficulty while thousands of miles from one's support network, constantly pushing oneself to try new things, and experiencing the thrill of connecting across language and background are foundational to shaping a sense of self. The MENAR Fellowship Program was founded in the hope of providing this type of formative experience to as many young people as possible.

To the best of our knowledge, there is no other program that offers such a wide variety of professional experiences in the MENA region. Rather than studying a language or conducting research, MENAR offers recent college graduates the chance to fully immerse themselves in a professional environment, building soft and hard skills. Our program alumni have gone on to find meaningful work in consulting, tech, refugee services, teaching, government service, and academia -- many with a continued focus on the Middle East and North Africa region.

Their strong Arabic and French language skills and their proven cultural competence have opened doors for them wherever they have gone. More importantly, they have continued to maintain friendships and connections with their host communities, and have provided a much-needed dose of empathy and understanding for those in the U.S. seeking to learn about the Middle East, and vice versa.

This report was written to celebrate both the 10th anniversary of MENAR's creation and, sadly, the end of its formal operations at the end of 2021. We are so proud of how this program has grown and evolved over the past decade, and the impact we have made possible for each of our fellows and partner organizations. The non-profit space is a challenging one, and ultimately fundraising to make MENAR's model sustainable was not possible. However, the MENAR adventure is far from over -- we cannot wait to see how our alumni will grow in their careers and their personal engagements, and how each of them will contribute to making the world a better place.

Please enjoy this report, which tells the story of our fellows and our partner organizations, and the impact they have had on the communities where our fellows have worked.



Adrienne Clermont
Chair of the Board of Directors
MENAR Fellowship Program

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

About MENAR

The Middle East and North Africa Regional (MENAR) Fellowship Program was founded by a group of Princeton alumni in 2011 with the objective of offering high-impact, one-year professional fellowships to recent U.S. college graduates at leading organizations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Over the past decade, MENAR has placed a total of 32 fellows at 14 host organizations in seven countries. Fellows have worked at businesses, non-profits, and educational institutions across the region and have taken on diverse roles from project management to economics research and language teaching to sales and marketing. These experiences have provided fellows with critical professional and cross-cultural skills, while also allowing partner organizations to implement their programs and expand their impact effectively.

Mission and Objectives

MENAR's mission is to foster a new generation of leaders with real-world experience in the culture, language, and politics of the Middle East and North Africa. By offering recent graduates an opportunity to engage with the people and institutions of the region, MENAR aims to achieve three interrelated goals:

- To provide businesses and non-profit organizations with passionate young professional talent who can forge a bridge between the U.S. and the MENA region and aid in the region's development
- To develop the skills of future leaders in the U.S. public, private, and social sectors who have experience with the challenges the MENA region faces and the potential it holds
- To increase understanding and cooperation between the U.S. and the MENA region by creating cross-cultural exchange that can dispel myths and stereotypes



Tunisia-based fellows from the 2019-2020 cohort Angela Whitfield, Jessica Murphy, and Kirsten Mullin exploring Carthage ruins just outside Tunis

Fellowship Model

At its creation, MENAR was modeled on three existing organizations that offered fellowships in other regions of the world: Princeton in Asia (founded 1898), Princeton in Africa (1999), and Princeton in Latin America (2002). These “Princeton ins,” as they are known, have a long track record of success in connecting highly qualified candidates with meaningful professional experiences at host organizations. The founders of MENAR sought to emulate this model, while filling in the clear geographic gap in fellowship program offerings.

After screening and approving a host organization, MENAR works with their team to develop a fellowship job description and set expectations regarding hosting a fellow. The full list of job descriptions is included in MENAR’s annual application, allowing candidates to express interest in the specific positions that correspond to their skills and career goals. MENAR reviews and rates all

applications, conducts first-round interviews, and creates a shortlist of finalists to share with each host organization. These organizations then conduct final-round interviews and select the fellow(s) that best suit their needs.

MENAR works with fellows to prepare them to travel abroad and start their new positions, through one-on-one discussions and an annual online orientation session. Fellows are responsible for their own airfare and travel insurance, but receive a monthly cost-of-living stipend paid directly by their host organization that covers all other expenses. Throughout the fellowship year, MENAR provides support to both fellows and partners, troubleshooting any issues that arise and providing mentorship to ensure the experience is positive for all involved. Finally, upon their return home, MENAR helps fellows integrate into the alumni network and reflect on their experiences abroad.



Experience Morocco fellows Katherine Butler-Dines (2017-2018) and Laura Robinson (2019-2020) in the Sahara Desert

“My year as a MENAR fellow was incredibly challenging but also transformative both personally and professionally. The year required me to do a great deal of self-reflection about my professional aspirations, what sort of work culture I value, and about how to create community in a new place. I grew to be a much more confident and self-sufficient individual and had the opportunity to build the MENAR role at Experience Morocco from the ground up.”

– Katherine Butler-Dines (EM, 2017-2018)

MENAR's Founding

The MENAR Fellowship Program was founded in 2011 by a group of passionate Princeton University students and young alumni. Colleen McCullough, who co-founded the organization along with classmate Gavi Barnhard, recalls, "We came up with the idea as seniors at Princeton. I'd taken two years of Arabic and some French in high school. At Princeton, I studied Middle Eastern politics, and this of course was in the post-9/11 world where, like myself, many classmates were newly focused on the region. There were the Princeton in Africa and Princeton in Asia programs but I, and some classmates, wanted to go abroad in the MENA region. We saw this gap in post-grad opportunities and created Princeton in the Middle East and North Africa, or PriME for short."

Colleen remembers, "For the initial fellowship, we partnered with Princeton in Africa so they were the official legal sponsor of the fellowship, but we helped find the fellow, Tal Eisenzweig, and the host organization, the Amadeus Institute in Rabat, Morocco. That first fellowship took place in 2012, and while Tal didn't stay the whole year, it helped us solidify our idea and mission. We then went through some reorganization, with some of the founding members leaving, and we brought on new steering committee members, Adrienne Clermont, Hesham El Halaby, and Zach Ruchman. We also rebranded and became the Middle East and North Africa Regional Fellowship Program." With the completion of incorporation paperwork and receipt of 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status in September 2015, MENAR officially became an independent non-profit organization.



"Just months after graduating from college with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa, I had the opportunity to pursue my interests in a country with a remarkably intricate culture and sociopolitical reality. I not only witnessed but enabled an important series of meetings between the representatives of two countries still very much struggling with women's rights issues -- an experience that helped to solidify my own career interests in human rights law."

- Tal Eisenzweig (Amadeus Institute, 2012-2013)

LEADERSHIP TEAM



Colleen McCullough

Years Served: 2011-2018

Role: Co-founder, Secretary

"I, like many classmates at Princeton, developed an interest in the MENA region, taking Arabic and Middle East politics classes. Yet there were few opportunities to live or work in the region and the ones that did exist were focused on language. My co-founder and I loved the Princeton-in model of work fellowships and thought, why not create this in the MENA region."



Zach Ruchman

Years Served: 2012-2018

Role: Treasurer

"My motivation was giving early career professionals who have an interest and passion in the MENA region real professional experience there. They get to experience a different culture, live abroad for a year, and put real work on their resume. That's a once-in-a-lifetime experience that MENAR is facilitating."



Adrienne Clermont

Years Served: 2012-Present

Role: Board Chair

"My own experience as a Princeton in Africa fellow was formative to who I am personally and professionally. I want to help as many other people as possible have that kind of experience. That's been the driving force for me, and seeing fellows grow, learn, overcome challenges, and truly benefit from their time in the region is what makes it all worthwhile."



Madison Marks

Years Served: 2016-Present

Role: Secretary

“What I love about MENAR is that it opens up opportunities for fellows to pursue business, tech, and social impact roles in the MENA region. It’s been so rewarding to see each fellow shape and pioneer their own space and role within the fellowship positions.”



Benjamin Lutz

Years Served: 2018-Present

Role: Treasurer

“The MENAR Fellowship Program is the quintessential opportunity to live in the MENA region, work in a transformative industry, and gain lifelong language and career skills. I had the utmost joy of managing the application and interview process for two years. This was an unparalleled chance to meet an engaged and committed pool of people who are also passionate about the MENA region.”



Grant Smith

Years Served: 2019-Present

Role: Board Member

“The MENAR Program provided a unique opportunity to engage with the Middle East and North Africa for young individuals. The ability to interact with businesses run out of the region is incredibly special in the growth of a fellow. The experiences and memories that MENAR has collected over the years are astounding.”

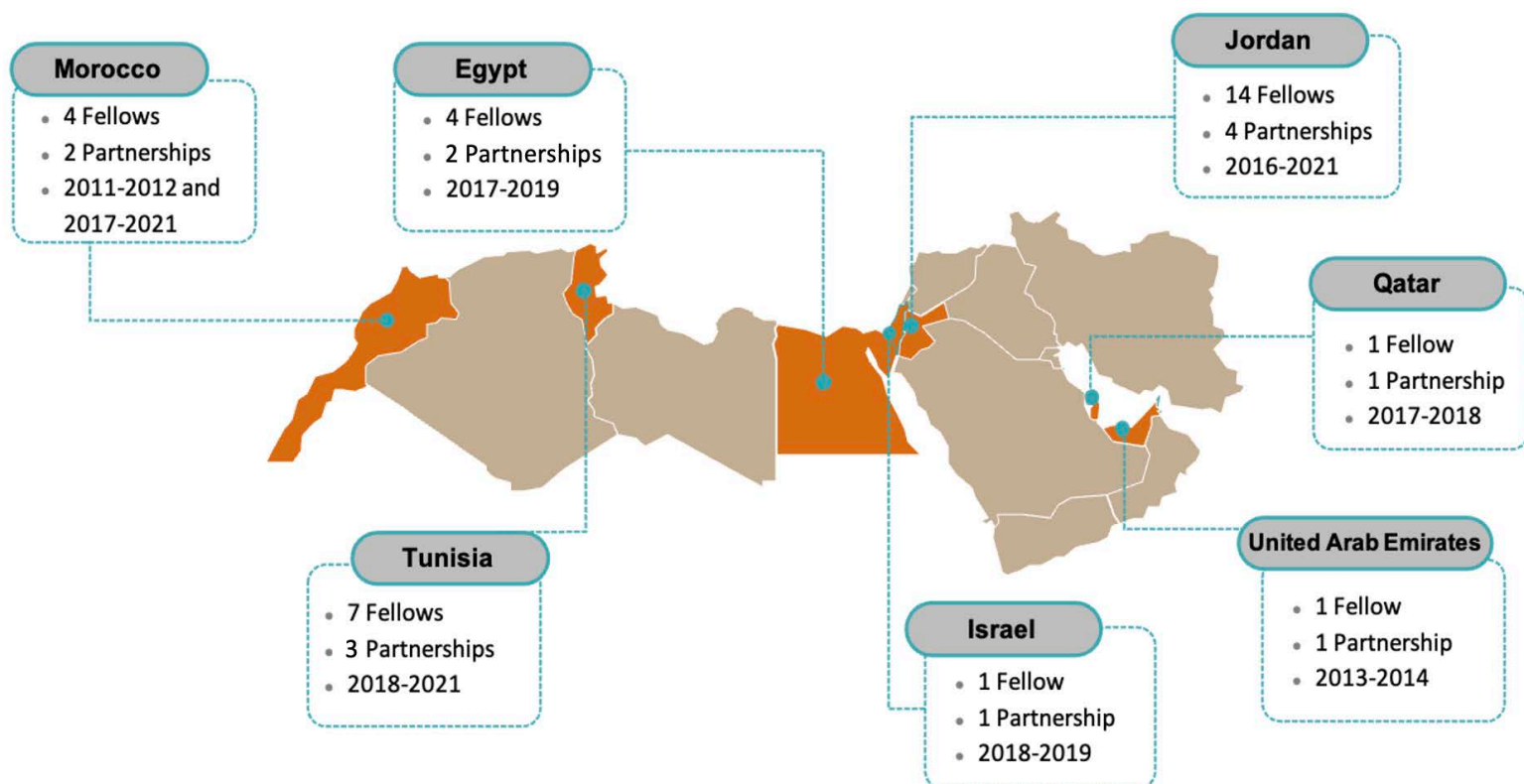
MENAR BY THE NUMBERS

Over the last 10 years:

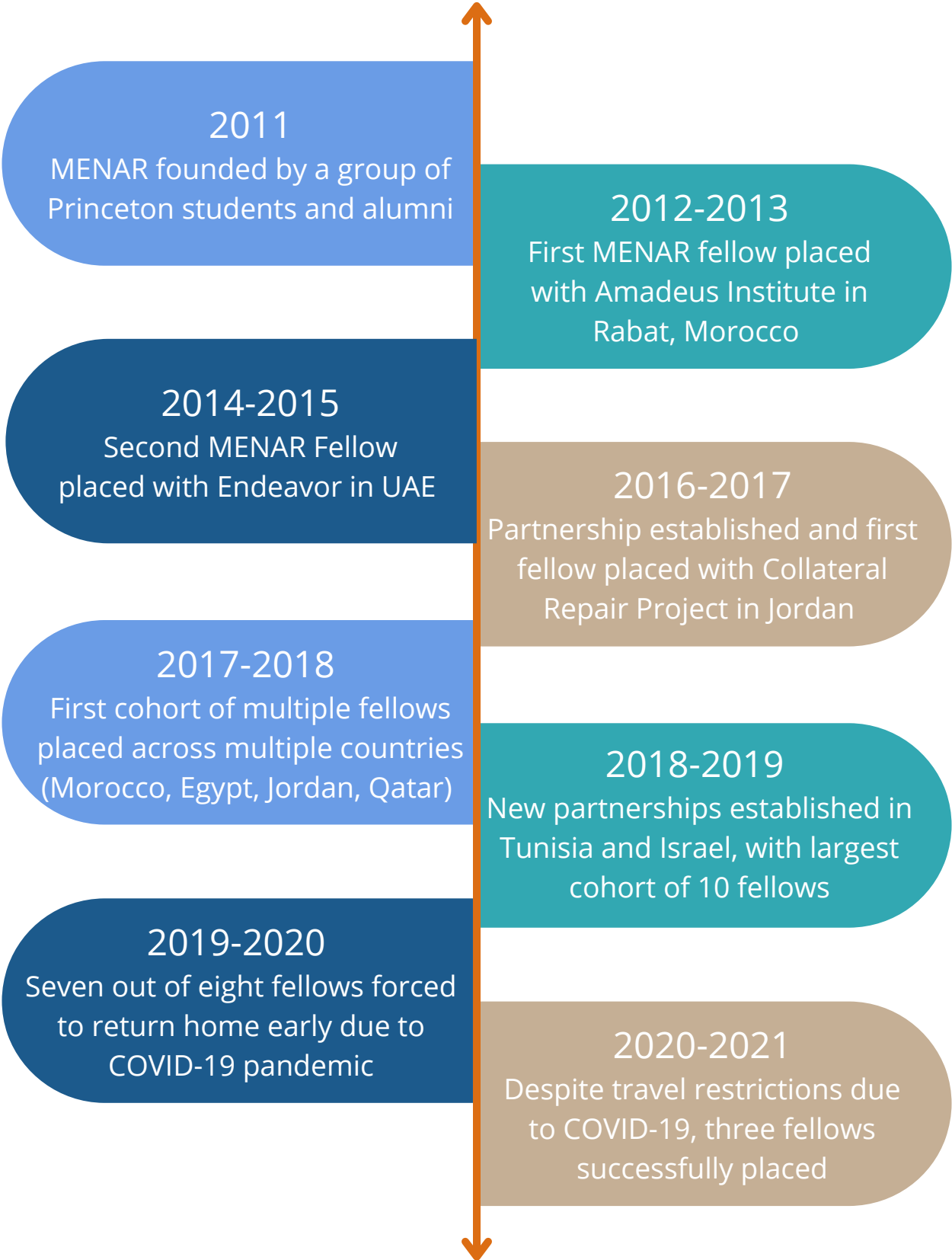
32 fellows

14 host organizations

7 countries



MENAR OVER THE YEARS



FELLOW EXPERIENCES

Diversity of Fellow Backgrounds

Since 2011, MENAR has placed 32 fellows across seven different countries. There is no single model for a successful fellow. They have come from 27 different universities and 28% had previous full-time work experience. Over the past 10 years, the applicant pool has grown by 96%, reaching a maximum of over 120 applicants for eight positions in the 2019-2020 fellowship year.

While the fellows come from many different backgrounds, what they share in common is a passion for cross-cultural learning, an interest in immersing themselves in the MENA region, and a commitment to bringing their skills and education in service of a local organization. As Laura Robinson (2019-2020) explains, "Finding opportunities for real international work experience right out of college, not just language immersion, was rare. MENAR provided the unique opportunity for cultural exchange while developing tangible professional skills."

"Being a part of the fellowship has not only been a great privilege and honor, but it has also opened doors previously inaccessible -- an incredible blessing in a challenging field."

- Tonia Bartlett (Elm International School, 2017-2018)



Fellows from the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 cohorts at a meet-up in Amman, Jordan

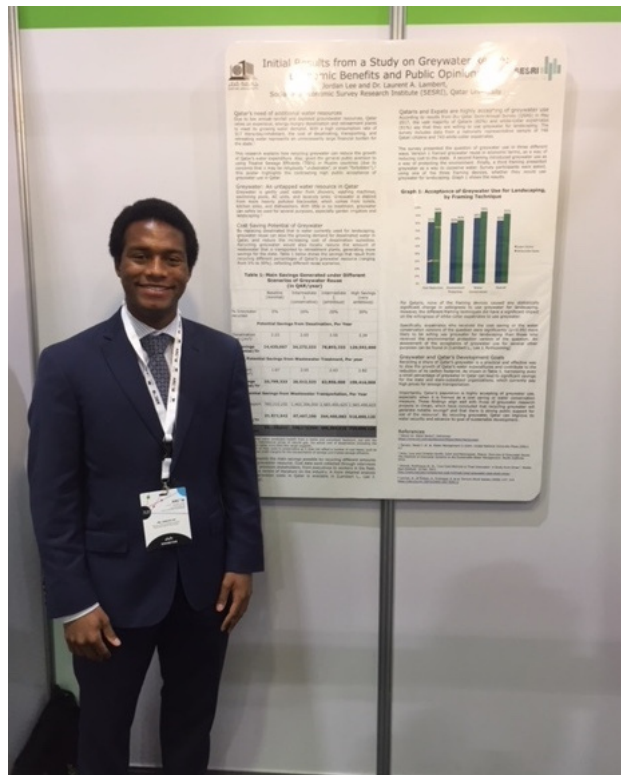
Impact with Host Organizations

Host organizations have ranged from start-ups and schools to refugee assistance programs and university research centers. The range of host organizations has created a wide array of opportunities for fellows to create impact. The following sections highlight some of the impressive accomplishments and meaningful work that fellows have done while in-country.

Data and Research

Jordan Lee served as Policy & Research Fellow (2017-2018) at the Social & Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI), a think tank housed within Qatar University. During Jordan's time at SESRI, he contributed a great deal to the institute's research on economic, energy, and sustainability policy in the Gulf region. He co-authored two papers that were published in international scientific journals, one on water conservation and another on natural gas policy in Qatar. One paper was later presented and discussed by an environmental advocacy group in Qatar. He also authored several policy briefs and gave a guest lecture for a SESRI colleague at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies.

Alex Petri is a current fellow (2020-2021) at the Collateral Repair Project (CRP) in Amman, Jordan. In his role as Data Officer, he is designing sustainable systems with data integration, crafting surveys, building a donation tracker, and working with staff on their customized data needs. He has developed creative ways to apply data to impact reporting at CRP, including creating a UNDP survey regarding the needs of Iraqi refugees, a community with which CRP is deeply involved.



Jordan Lee (2017-2018) presenting his research at a conference in Qatar

Refugee Services

Collateral Repair Project (CRP) is an international NGO founded in 2006 by two American women to provide emergency assistance and community programming to refugees of all nationalities in order to support resiliency. Throughout its five-year partnership with CRP, MENAR has placed seven fellows at their Amman office. The roles of MENAR fellows at CRP have evolved over the years, beginning with Timothy Loh (2016-2017) acting as Programs and Administration Fellow. Along the way, each fellow has made the experience and role their own. For example, Lilly Crown Wilder (2017-2018) created monitoring and evaluation systems and processes, while Asha Athman (2019-2020) headed program accessibility efforts and community-led programming.

Both Lilly and Asha were hired to stay on as full-time staff at CRP following their fellowship. Jessie Miller (2018-2019) used her undergraduate experiences as a pre-medical student to develop creative solutions to address refugee needs. In addition to coordinating ongoing programs, overseeing volunteer and intern training, and hosting visiting donors, Jessie had the opportunity to implement several new programs during her time with CRP. She explains, "I helped to develop a nutrition curriculum that educates refugees on dietary diversity and physical activity in the context of a limited income. My co-worker and I also introduced a program that addresses shortages in feminine hygiene items by distributing reusable menstrual pads to refugee women and employing the recipients to manufacture the pads. These two programs play a preventative role in facilitating sound nutrition and menstrual health."

In addition to the fellows' everyday work, they served as a catalyst for cultural exchange in the local community. Lilly Crown Wilder highlights, "A core value of CRP as a community center is that it welcomes everyone regardless of background. Not only is there a lot of cultural exchange within refugee and host communities, but it's also meaningful to refugees to interact with people from 'The West.' It's a valuable experience for people to be able to feel heard, seen, and received by someone whose country could be responsible for the turmoil their country went through. It makes people feel valued to know that someone cared about their welfare enough to leave their family and fly across the world to help. Multiculturalism is at the core of CRP's work. MENAR is a great opportunity to uphold that."



MENAR fellows support CRP's two community centers in Amman, which provide services including daycare, adult education programming, and support groups to ensure refugees have their basic needs met

ReBootKamp (RBK) is an organization that runs intensive software engineering training programs in Jordan, Tunisia, Iraq, Gaza, and the West Bank. Bev Vega (2019-2020) joined RBK in Amman, Jordan, as a Hacker in Residence. But over the course of their fellowship, driven by their own interests and skills, their role shifted toward case management and mentorship. They worked with students to put together goals, create post-graduation plans, review resumes, and cultivate community. Bev has a unique background that combines coding, global health, and trauma-informed care.

Bev's multifaceted experiences were meaningful as all RBK participants were Palestinian refugees. "With the stress of their first time outside of the West Bank/Gaza combined with the stress of a coding program, creating community and building support networks were essential," they recall.

During Bev's time at RBK, they helped to create a restorative justice project. "We would meet in small groups of six and conduct a talking circle to discuss our thoughts on topics about tech and our lives in general." The talking circles met once per week, and each student had the chance to participate. "This space was fundamental to our growth as a cohort and campus. Something as simple as providing a space and asking questions allowed for our organization and students to truly lift each other up." Bev reflects, "Going into a coding bootcamp, I expected that my biggest lesson would involve new techniques in software development. However, it turns out that my most cherished lesson was how necessary community-building is in tech if we are to build technologies for a better society."

"MENAR shifted what I wanted to do. After finishing my work at RBK, I had time to focus and make a list of things I enjoyed and didn't enjoy. I realized how I liked care work, running a restorative justice circle, creating individualized support programs, trauma-informed care, client-facing interactions, and having conversations with students about what's stressing them out. That is my passion and professional focus moving forward."

- Bev Vega (RBK, 2019-2020)

Jessie Wyatt (2017-2018) joined Reclaim Childhood as a MENAR fellow and ended up staying an additional two years post-fellowship with the organization. Reclaim Childhood empowers refugee and local Jordanian girls through playing sports and creating community. As a fellow, she was the Director of Jordan Programs and the only full-time, in-country staff member for the organization.

Jessie was responsible for program management, operations and logistics (including scheduling of coaches and sports classes), grant writing, and staff and intern management. Stepping into such a significant leadership role right off the bat was a challenge but also incredibly rewarding. As her fellowship year was wrapping up, she felt was finally hitting her stride, so she chose to stay on in her role. She says, "The best years of my work were those after my first year, but the foundational work of establishing trust and confidence happened in the first year. So by my second and third year, we were able to double the size of the program and the funding."



Jessie Wyatt (2017-2018) with one of Reclaim Childhood's youth soccer teams

Classroom Teaching

MENAR has placed 12 fellows in education roles across three different countries (Egypt, Israel, and Tunisia). Fellows have primarily been responsible for English teaching in these roles but have also engaged local students through sports and after-school programming.

Tonia Bartlett and Laura Humes (both 2017-2018) were English Teachers at Elm International School in Alexandria, Egypt. For Tonia, her fellowship at Elm was her first time as a formal teacher leading a classroom. She taught English to 35 students in grades five, six, and seven. Outside of her role at Elm, to engage further with the local community, Tonia took on an ESL teaching position for adults at a local language center. While teaching the Elm students was her main job, through her work with the adult English learners she made her closest Egyptian friends and had the opportunity for cultural exchange and learning.



Tonia Bartlett and Laura Humes (2017-2018) on their first day teaching at Elm International School

Maddie Fisher (2018-2019) served as a teacher at Eastern Mediterranean International School (EMIS) in Tel Aviv, Israel. During her fellowship, Maddie was a teaching assistant for the Arabic program, which included both Israeli and Palestinian students. While in her role, Maddie worked to create a more inclusive and safe space for dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian students. Maddie shares that she is grateful that her fellowship provided her the opportunity to explore her field of interest. "I worked directly in peacebuilding and international education, which shaped my career direction." After her fellowship, she pursued a MA in Arab Studies at Georgetown University, and currently works as a Coordinator at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University.



Students at EMIS, where Maddie Fisher taught in 2018-2019, share the flags of their home countries

Angela (Pham) Whitfield was a fellow (2019-2020) at ClubAnglais in La Marsa, Tunisia. ClubAnglais is a preschool and after-school education program that provides English language immersion through engaging activities for students ages two to 14.

Angela taught in the preschool and after-school adventure club, including teaching yoga, cooking, and bracelet making. She felt that ClubAnglais was a unique opportunity for students in Tunisia. It offered students from around the world a less structured, more immersive learning environment. She says, "Students benefited from building diverse friend groups and a style of English teaching where fun and building relationships with your teachers and peers are emphasized."

Jessica Murphy (2019-2020) taught secondary school at l'Ecole Canadienne de Tunis. One of her proudest accomplishments was facilitating conversations about current events with her students. She lived in Tunisia during a series of local elections and used those political happenings as the basis for class discussions. She remembers, "I encouraged students to share their own opinions and perspectives on current events. Mixed English levels notwithstanding (it was most students' third language, after Arabic and French) we had some fascinating discussions. In one class, a student proclaimed that the revolution was bad for Tunisia, and that [former president] Ben Ali was better than any of the candidates this year. In response, another student disagreed; many of the consequences of the Ben Ali regime were hidden, she said, primarily impacting marginalized groups. In more advanced classes, we read articles profiling each of the candidates, analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of each platform." Providing students, especially those in a country like Tunisia that is still undergoing democratic political change, a space to discuss, debate, and reflect on current events in a respectful way was important to Jessica.

Supporting Local Entrepreneurs

Bayt.com is the leading job site in the MENA region; their Jordan office has hosted five MENAR fellows since 2017. These fellows have all held the title of Product Manager, but each has had unique experiences and taken on a diverse array of projects. Cassidy Lyon (2017-2018) was in the first cohort of MENAR fellows at Bayt and brought her data analytics expertise to help programmers and other product managers design data-driven presentations and new automation systems. Beyond the work, she says, "The fellowship was an important means of cultural exchange since it provided opportunities for foreigners and Jordanians, who may not otherwise interact, to work together."

Lisa MacKenzie's (2018-2019) favorite project at Bayt was leading efforts to register more job-seekers on Bayt's website. She created an influencer campaign in Saudi Arabia that led to over 40,000 new registrations. For Hannah Rosenwinkel (2019-2020), the fellowship gave her critical exposure to product management in tech. She was part of the project team that launched a new employer job posting product. She recalls, "It was exciting to be a part of end-to-end product management activities during my time as a fellow -- from launching new products to maintaining and enhancing current ones." Seeing the power of tech and how the products she was helping to launch were facilitating meaningful employment opportunities "reaffirmed my passion for working at the intersection of business, making a positive impact on the world, and innovation."

Supporting local entrepreneurs was the focus of other fellowship positions as well. Multiple fellows at CRP, including Asha Athman (2019-2020), Eliza Davis (2018-2019), and Lilly Crown Wilder (2017-2018), helped create and scale the Hope Workshop. The Workshop is a locally run collective that provides refugee women the creative space to craft, socialize, and support one another while earning additional income for their households.



Eliza Davis (2018-2019) speaking to participants of the Hope Workshop

At Experience Morocco, fellows Katherine Butler-Dines (2017-2018) and Laura Robinson (2019-2020) created socially responsible travel experiences that linked guests with local social enterprises. Some of the activities included touring an artisan village where guests could take craft classes and shop from a local artisan cooperative; having lunch with a local family and visiting a permaculture project in the Atlas Mountains; taking an embroidery class with a women's cooperative; and meeting a local entrepreneur to learn about his project installing solar generators in rural, impoverished areas of Morocco. These socially responsible activities provided the chance for visitors to meet local Moroccans and get out

of tourist-heavy areas while providing much-needed revenue and access to new markets for local entrepreneurs and artisans.



An Experience Morocco client taking a rug weaving workshop with a local artisan

Tourism

Experience Morocco (EM) is a Moroccan-owned and run travel start-up based in Casablanca. Since 2017, three fellows have worked for the company. While the primary clients of EM are American and English-speaking travelers who visit Morocco, the fellows' impact goes beyond marketing Morocco to these clients to creating cross-cultural exchange and understanding. Laura Robinson (2019-2020) recalls helping a couple plan their trip to Morocco who were nervous about visiting a Muslim country. "They were basing what Morocco would be like on stereotypes that people hear about the MENA region. But when I spoke to the same clients after their trip finished, they were effusive about how diverse Morocco and its people were and how it didn't fit any of their negative stereotypes. They were so impressed by how safe and welcoming the country felt." That, Laura says, "Is EM's greatest impact: creating these trips that open people's perspectives and create a cross-cultural exchange."

Katherine Butler-Dines (2017-2018) was the initial MENAR fellow at EM and stayed on for two additional years as a full-time employee, rising to the role of Marketing & Business Development Manager. She says, “The power of EM fellows is to act as an ambassador, both within the office -- where we are often the only foreigner and can act as a resource on what Americans want out of travel experiences -- and also with potential clients, since speaking with an American living in Morocco often instantly reassures and excites them about the trip.” For Katherine, what motivated her to be a fellow and then stay on long-term, was seeing how transformative a travel experience can be. “Guests came to Morocco mostly excited for the food, visiting the Sahara, and doing some shopping, but they would leave raving about the incredible hospitality and warmth they felt from every local. That’s a powerful sentiment to share back in their home countries where portraits of the MENA region are so often focused on conflict and suffering.”



Katherine Butler-Dines (2017-2018) and her EM colleagues testing out a new client experience

Engagement with Local Community

From taking Arabic and French classes to joining running clubs and taking dance classes, fellows engaged in their communities in a variety of ways. They often wrote about these activities on the [MENAR blog](#), allowing readers from around the world to understand the diversity of experiences to be had while living in the Middle East and North Africa. Here are a few stories highlighting unique fellow experiences.

Art Residency

Soon after arriving in Amman, Asha Athman (2019-2020) participated in a month-long art residency at Darat al Funun, a dynamic art foundation in Jordan. The Lab of Darat al Funun was started by the foundation to support the work of emerging artists, and its residency program focuses on diaspora narratives, raw materials, and conceptions of home. Asha was thrilled to be able to participate: “I was able to complete a collage project I began working on in the United States during this program. The project was an initiative to explore my Somali heritage creatively. I digitally brought together pictures, old documents, music, and videos that reflect Somali history and culture in the 20th and 21st centuries. I grew up in the Somali-American diaspora, and this project brought me closer to home in many senses while I was adjusting to life in Jordan.”

Asha’s final exhibit was showcased in October 2019. She says, “It was incredible to show my work alongside other participants in the residency and share this experience with my friends and coworkers in Amman.” After this, she continued her work on a digital and print publication matching the style and content of the residency.

In 2020, she participated in another Darat al Funun residency virtually, looking into modes of navigating institutional obligations in art. Asha's final exhibit is available to [view online](#).



Asha Athman's (2019-2020) collage piece exploring her Somali heritage

Adopting a Puppy

While some may bring home sweets, scarves, or ceramics from their time abroad, Jessie Miller (2018-2019) brought home a puppy. In December 2018, Jessie and her friends took a pre-New Years trip to Wadi Rum. They went stargazing and laid in the sand for hours discussing the coming year and New Year's resolutions. That night, Jessie found a puppy that had wandered to their campsite. "She slept in my bed and followed us on a four-hour hike into the desert the next day. Before I knew it, she was on my lap in our rental car, heading back to Amman with us. I think it is worth noting that I had no dog food, collar, leash, or permission from my flatmates to bring a dog home. Her name is Mahzooza (Lucky), and she has set off a wave of changes in my life in Jordan." Jessie is now a medical student at the Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, and Mahzooza is still living with her.



Jessie Miller (2018-2019) returning to visit Wadi Rum, where she originally found Mahzooza as a puppy

Sports

For Lisa MacKenzie (2018-2019), joining athletic groups in Amman was a rewarding way to meet people, make friends, and cultivate community. Lisa went to an all-women's gym, played soccer, and participated in the Running Amman group.

Each Friday morning, Lisa met with 20-40 others in the Running Amman group to run the empty, quiet streets before the city awakened. She says, "In our group, there was about an equal number of foreigners rotating in and out of Amman and Jordanians, so it was a great way to get to know people. It was an interesting way to get to know Amman, too, because we ran in five different neighborhoods. This allowed me to get to know neighborhoods outside the one I lived in." Each year, the Running Amman group members can participate in a 10K, half marathon, or full marathon. Lisa did the 10K once and half marathon twice.

“Sharing congrats and welcoming each runner at the finish line reminded me of how supportive and friendly runners’ groups are. I seek out a running community wherever I am, and I am happy to have found it in Amman.”

Like the Running Amman group, the soccer club Lisa participated in was mixed-gender, mixed-nationality, and an easy way to meet new people. “We often think of Jordan as a place where it’s harder to exercise outside as a female without unwanted attention. Through joining the Running Amman and soccer clubs with mixed genders and nationalities, the fear was broken down and I developed more comfort in my existence as a person who wants to be active outdoors in Amman.” Lisa has stayed in Amman for the two years since her fellowship working as a freelance consultant, and recently started a new position as Stewardship and Proposals Specialist at the Queen Rania Foundation.



Lisa MacKenzie (2018-2019) with her running club friends in Amman

Surfing

Part of Katherine Butler-Dines’ (2017-2018) motivation for taking a fellowship in Casablanca, Morocco, was the chance to surf.

When she flew to Morocco, she came with just one suitcase of clothes but another giant bag with two surfboards. She found a local surf school and club on the beach where she could store her boards, and at least twice weekly throughout her fellowship, she went surfing. She reflects, “It was a great opportunity to pursue and improve at a sport I love while also connecting with the local community. While there aren’t many female Moroccan surfers, I always felt welcomed. One of my favorite memories was paddling out and seeing another woman in the line-up who was really good. When I got a closer look, I realized she was one of the pioneering female surfers and one of the only Moroccan surfers ever to compete internationally. She was often traveling the world surfing, but whenever she was in Casablanca, it was amazing to see how much respect in and out of the water she garnered, happily coaching me and others to catch the best waves.”



Katherine Butler-Dines (2017-2018) post-surf in a remote village in the south of Morocco

Reach the World

Reach the World (RTW) is a global education non-profit organization that seeks to make the benefits of travel and study abroad accessible to K-12 classrooms in the United States. MENAR has partnered with RTW since 2017, encouraging fellows to become Reach the World bloggers. Several fellows in Jordan and Tunisia have become “Volunteer Travelers” and shared their experiences with classrooms in the U.S. Hannah Rosenwinkel (2019-2020) was one such fellow. She says, “I wanted to volunteer with RTW so I could share my journey living in Jordan and inspire students to be curious about the world. This opportunity immediately sparked my interest; I could continue documenting my experience, hone my writing skills, and share my stories.” She was matched with a middle-school classroom in her home state of Minnesota. As a volunteer, she had to take as many photos as possible, write [weekly blog entries](#), and do regular video chats with the classroom. She reflects that “the blogs and video calls provided a great opportunity for students to learn, ask questions, and establish a personal connection to the Middle East. And for me, it helped me commit to regularly writing and reflecting on my own experiences living and working in Jordan.”

Girl Scouts

Joining a Girl Scout troop is a quintessential experience for many young girls in America and worldwide. When Hannah Byrd (2018-2019) learned there was a Girl Scout troop in Tunis in need of a troop leader, she quickly volunteered. The troop was of mixed nationalities, both Tunisians and expat children. Hannah helped organize special events and outings for the girls with programming focused on female empowerment, community development, and equipping the young women with the skills and confidence to engage in society. Volunteering with the Girl Scouts quickly became one of her main non-work activities and also one of her favorite ways of engaging with the local community.



Hannah Byrd (2018-2019) exploring Djerbahood, an open-air art museum located in Djerba, Tunisia

Journey Home **Logbooks** **Field Notes** **Journals** **Albums**

Hannah's Journey to Jordan

Current Location
Amman, Jordan
Hi, I'm Hannah, and I'm currently working in Amman, Jordan as a Product Manager Fellow at Bayt.com, a leading job website in the Middle East. Join me as I explore this fascinating place!

Logbooks
A Week in Dubai
Last week I traveled to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). My friend from Minnesota was on a work trip there, so she invited me to stay in her huge apartment with bedrooms and five bathrooms!

Journals
Ma'a Salama!
The past few months with you have gone by so quickly! It's been a great journey sharing my story with you all. Read on to learn more about my final weeks of 2019 in Amman.

Field Notes
Water in Jordan
Jordan is one of the 10 most water-scarce countries in the world. A population influx from surrounding countries coupled with depleting natural water sources make it a truly dire water crisis.

Hannah Rosenwinkel's (2019-2020) Reach the World Blog where she shared her experiences in Jordan with American middle-school students in Minnesota

Shaping Fellows' Career Paths

The MENAR fellowship experience is not limited to a fellow's time in-country. The skills and experiences gained during a MENAR fellowship have significantly influenced the career trajectories of many fellows. This includes staying on post-fellowship at their host organizations, shaping the graduate degrees they pursue, and helping them refine their long-term career goals.

MENAR supports fellows in finding post-fellowship jobs through the alumni list-serv. Board members and alumni alike can share job opportunities on the list-serv, which includes both current and former fellows. On average there are about four job opportunities per month shared with the current fellows and alumni. Tonia Bartlett (2017-2018) says it has been valuable that the alumni and board "send on available jobs and provide a strong network for job hunting."

During the 2020-2021 fellowship year, MENAR launched a new initiative to connect each current fellow with three alumni or board members who have interests and experience in the same job sectors. These informal networking chats have been an excellent opportunity to keep the MENAR community engaged and for alumni who have secured meaningful post-fellowship positions to provide expertise and advice to younger fellows.

The subsequent sections include highlights of how the MENAR fellowship has shaped the career paths of fellows. A complete list of alumni and their current endeavors is available in the MENAR Fellow Directory.

Staying on with Host Organizations

Lilly Crown Wilder (2017-2018) started her fellowship at CRP during a growth period for the organization. Lilly joined CRP as Programs and Administration Manager, managing schedules, volunteers, and staff onboarding and offboarding. As CRP scaled in her first few months as a fellow, her role quickly grew to establish CRP's monitoring and evaluation systems and create a team to supervise programs including the TEFL program and Hope Workshop. After her fellowship, Lilly continued building community and creating systems-level change at CRP as a Community Center Programs Director for two years. "I love being in the start-up environment and trying to create a system and plan where there is none, and there was so much opportunity for me to do that," she says. During Lilly's fellowship, she became integrated into the local community and cultivating community through CRP's programs. "The people coming to CRP are from all types of backgrounds, including Iraqis, Syrians, Sudanese, Somalis, Jordanians, Egyptians, Yemenis, and Palestinians. For many of these people it's like their home in a place that they were forced to flee to. That was the home I was able to make for myself."



Lilly Crown Wilder (2017-2018) saying hi to the CRP pre-schoolers

13 fellows remained in or later returned to work in the MENA region post-fellowship

5 fellows stayed on in a permanent capacity with their host organizations

Remaining in the MENA Region

Cassidy Lyon (2017-2018) initially thought she would finish her Masters program at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and stay in the Washington, DC area. Then, she received an email about the MENAR Fellowship Program, applied, and never looked back. She took a leave of absence between her first and second years of her Masters to take part in the program. Starting her fellowship at Bayt in Jordan, she was assigned to work as a Growth Hacker; by the end of the year, she managed her own product and traveled around the MENA region to Kuwait and the UAE training sales teams. Throughout her fellowship, Cassidy discovered that she thrived abroad, especially in the MENA region, too much to ever move back to the U.S., and changed the second year of her master's degree to the Hopkins SAIS campus in Bologna, Italy.

She reflects on her fellowship, saying, "I wanted to be intentional in doing my job. I didn't want to just live and work abroad because it's fun -- a common trope of expats in the Middle East that can create tension based on the juxtaposition of living and employment opportunities for Jordanians versus expats. I was there to do a job, provide value to my company, gain experience in a tech company that works across 13 different offices, and

learn as much as I could to ensure that I didn't take my work opportunity for granted in a region that has some of the highest rates of youth unemployment. It was a humbling, gratitude-inducing experience that truly paved my career path from that point on." Today, she uses much of what she learned about data analysis and visualization at Bayt in her current role as a Data and Policy Analyst at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the United Arab Emirates.

Other examples of alumni who have stayed on in the region after finishing their fellowships include Jordan Lee (2017-2018) who has a permanent job in Qatar today. After wrapping up his fellowship at SESRI in Qatar, he completed an intensive Arabic course in Jordan, and then was hired by McKinsey & Company as a Consultant in their Doha office. He is still working for McKinsey in Doha today and shares, "Having lived and worked in Qatar as a MENAR fellow made getting another job in the country far easier, as I already had a proven track record."

Hannah Rosenwinkel (2019-2020) was so determined to continue her career in the MENA region that even a pandemic couldn't stop her. While her fellowship with Bayt was cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic and she had to evacuate from Jordan back to the U.S. for five months, she returned to Jordan in September 2020. She found work as a consultant for start-ups through a European Bank for Reconstruction and Development project. She plans to continue living in Jordan and working in the tech start-up world for the foreseeable future.

Pursuing Graduate Studies

Jessie Miller (2018-2019) completed her MENAR fellowship during a gap year between undergraduate and medical school. While working at CRP, Jessie acted as the Community Center Programs Manager, coordinating trauma-sensitive programs, overseeing interns and volunteers, and liaising with international funders. Jessie shares that “taking a break from academia and the competitive culture of being a premedical student allowed me to ask myself if I was still interested in medicine from an unclouded perspective. While I was implementing programs pertaining to nutrition, mental health, and women's health, I noted that I was most driven by work pertaining to refugee wellness and empowerment. My coworkers at CRP and the beneficiaries that we collaborated with reminded me why I am so passionate about health resources and renewed my ambitions of pursuing a medical degree to advocate for refugee health equity on an international level.” Jessie is now a medical student; she feels that her experience as a MENAR fellow has given her legitimacy in the sphere of international humanitarian work, and looking to her future, she knows that the lessons learned at CRP will carry with her as she builds a medical career in the MENA region focused on refugee healthcare.

Timothy Loh (2016-2017) has always loved language learning, which was part of what took him to Jordan as a MENAR fellow and later brought him to MIT as a doctoral candidate in the Program in History, Anthropology, Science, Technology, and Society. He speaks Mandarin, English, Arabic, and American Sign Language, and is learning Jordanian Sign Language for his fieldwork.

In college, he received a grant to study the pedagogical structure of a school for the deaf in Jordan. He then returned to Jordan after graduation as a fellow at CRP. Originally from Singapore, Timothy is grateful for his MENAR experience allowing him to develop connections with the deaf community and organizations serving that population in the MENA region. Timothy reflects, “The MENAR fellowship gave me the amazing opportunity to gain actual work -- rather than volunteering or interning -- experience in the Middle East, a region where it is often difficult to find paid work remotely and as a foreigner. As an international applicant, I appreciated the fact that the MENAR fellowship was one of the few fellowships that was not restricted to Americans!”

Today, Timothy is focusing his PhD research on deafness, sign language, and the role of technology and medicine. He says his MENAR fellowship helped lay the groundwork for his doctoral studies.



Timothy Loh (2016-2017) exploring Amman, Jordan

Now, as Timothy conducts research in the region, he is reflecting not just on what he can learn but how he can give back. He recalls, “Last summer, when I was doing fieldwork, one of my deaf friends asked me straight up, ‘How does your work benefit the deaf community in Jordan?’ That’s a fair question. I told him I am still thinking about this. It’s an important question to answer well. How do anthropologists give back to the community that we’re learning from? I think for many anthropologists, we hope that our work can ‘speak truth to power,’ to resist and complicate simplistic and hegemonic narratives, like the idea that technology can provide technical solutions for political problems. I do hope that my research can eventually inform policy-making for people in the Middle East whose voices need to be heard.”

Defining Career Goals

Tonia Bartlett (2017-2018) didn’t consider education her calling. But after a year teaching English at both the Elm International School and to local Egyptian adults through a language center, she developed a true passion for international teaching. She says, “Loving teaching and seeing education as my long-term career path was unexpected.” The experience at Elm gave her valuable professional experience, making her an attractive candidate for other teaching positions, and helped her develop a network of other international teachers. After the fellowship, she returned to her home state of Colorado for a year, where she was an assistant teacher at Rocky Mountain Prep Charter School, then in the fall of 2019, she moved to Zahle, Lebanon to teach at a special school for refugees. In the fall of 2021, she will begin a Master’s in Teaching program at Meredith College.

Hannah Byrd’s (2018-2019) first experience in the MENA region was moving to Tunis as a MENAR fellow at ClubAnglais in 2018. She had studied Arabic but never had the opportunity to travel or visit the region. The fellowship was formative in giving her first-hand professional and personal experience in the region, further honing her language skills, and developing project management and leadership skills. Today, she works for the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), a non-profit in Washington, DC that supports business solutions to socioeconomic challenges. She initially worked on projects supporting entrepreneurship within the refugee community in Turkey and now helps manage projects with the Center for Women’s Economic Empowerment at CIPE. She says her fellowship experience certainly helped her land her current position. “It was a great step as a new grad to learn first-hand what I’d studied in college and develop tangible work experience that looks great on a resume.”

Hannah Byrd (2018-2019) with her Tunisian teaching assistant, Tasnime



Fellows' Personal Growth

The professional development and career opportunities through participating in MENAR, created by MENAR program are certainly of its greatest impacts. But equally as important is how the in-country experiences have shaped the personal growth of fellows.



"Moving to Morocco in the midst of the pandemic and the uncertainty and challenges that come with a new job in a new city, it has shown me how well I can adapt. I've had to step outside my comfort zone, hit the ground running, and just keep adapting."

- Emma Schneck (EM, 2020-2021)



"I learned a lot about myself. I pushed myself to grow and learn to be myself. I took classes, met new friends, and participated in dance auditions. I grew in my identity and in knowing who I am. When I moved to Jordan, I was frequently the only Texan, the only Mexican, and I started to understand the part of my identity that made me feel special. I started really embracing and cherishing that."

- Bev Vega (RBK, 2019-2020)



"MENAR allowed me to live internationally, instilled in me a sense of preparation for the unknown, and equipped me with the skills to figure things out as I go. On a human level, the friends and connections I made helped me grow in understanding myself, what I'm passionate about, and what I want to see in my career."

- Jessie Miller (CRP, 2018-2019)

Three 2018-2019 fellows serving at three different organizations -- Jessie Miller (CRP), Angela Whitfield (ClubAnglais), and Lisa MacKenzie (Bayt) -- at a meet-up in Amman

HOST ORGANIZATION EXPERIENCES

MENAR has partnered with 14 host organizations to offer fellowship positions in seven different countries across the MENA region. The needs and roles at each organization are different, so a key to making partnerships work has been matching suitable candidates with the right organization. Each host organization provides a detailed job description that is posted on MENAR's website, allowing applicants to express interest in specific roles through MENAR's application process. After the first round of interviews with MENAR board members and alumni, finalist candidates for each position are selected and forwarded on for the host organizations to then conduct interviews directly with these candidates.

This process, which emphasizes partners' needs and fellow-host fit, has led to many successful multi-year partnerships. This section highlights the experiences of several host organizations and why MENAR has been a valuable partner to them over the years.

Collateral Repair Project

CRP is MENAR's longest-running partnership. At its core, CRP aims to build community relationships. Amanda Lane, Executive Director of CRP, explains that the organization "was started in 2006 in response to refugees fleeing

to Jordan from the war in Iraq. There is a value for people in the refugee community to be witnessed as refugees in Jordan. This is how we begin to build relationships, and that's what we are about as an organization -- getting people together."

CRP Quick Facts

Location: Amman, Jordan
Partnership Started: 2016

7 total fellows

2 fellows stayed on full-time after their fellowship



Fellows Lilly Crown Wilder (2017-2018) and Jessie Miller (2018-2019) with CRP's Executive Director, Amanda Lane

The core values of building community and cultural exchange drove CRP to partner with MENAR and grow the partnership over time. MENAR provides CRP with high-quality, pre-screened candidates, making the recruitment process simple on CRP's side. Once fellows are placed with CRP, they come into a role suited to a year-long position, and then if it's a good fit, CRP aims to promote them to a permanent position to continue their work with the organization. "MENAR is a product of CRP's continued growth of staffing. Bringing on fellows with unique skills that would be hard to find in Jordan is helpful for us. We really invest in our fellows so that they build experiences, skills, and continue the work they are doing with us after their fellowship," says Amanda. As CRP has many interns and volunteers that pass through the organization every month, the MENAR fellows serve as an example of someone who is "dedicated, has strong interpersonal skills, is curious to learn, and has a good level of Arabic."

A highlight for many fellows has been the chance to interact with the refugee community that CRP serves. Fellows have not only implemented and improved CRP's programming but also served as cultural ambassadors for CRP employees and clients who were hoping to move to the U.S. or Europe. Jessie Miller (2018-2019) reflects, "As an American in an office full of refugees in the midst of applying for resettlement, I was a visualization of western countries where people were trying to resettle. This stimulated interesting conversations in the workplace about the process of their applications, what they were hoping for, and what the reality is for refugees in western countries."

"We are so grateful for the MENAR program for consistently giving us access to intelligent, motivated, mature candidates, who can hit the ground running with us. It's not only a great way for us to find talent, but for an opportunity for MENAR fellows to get real, valuable field experience serving the refugee community in Amman."

– Monica Greco, CRP Board of Directors

Experience Morocco

The partnership between Experience Morocco (EM) and MENAR was a natural fit. Hicham Alaoui, co-founder and CEO, says, "Partnering with MENAR is highly valuable for our business because cultural exchange is at the heart of what we do. Having an American person in the office and on the team, particularly to run our marketing and communications, is beneficial since they already have the linguistic and cultural knowledge of our target markets. The in-office cultural exchange too has been positive -- seeing the team take this fellow under their wing and introduce them to Moroccan culture has helped us cultivate an even greater sense of office community."

EM Quick Facts

Location: Casablanca, Morocco
Partnership Started: 2017

3 total fellows

1 fellow stayed on full-time after their fellowship

For Laura Robinson (2019-2020), the community she built through work was her favorite part of the fellowship. She reflects, "The team was super close-knit, and work also became my social circle. I feel so lucky to have found built-in friends who generously, patiently, and passionately shared their culture with me."

The fellow's role at EM is to run marketing and communications and provide project management for the annual MBA treks, a series of week-long trips for MBA students focused on learning about business and culture in Morocco. This project, in particular, has given MENAR fellows the opportunity to manage a complex project from end-to-end and gain leadership experience while also bringing in significant revenue for EM. The team at EM has appreciated having the fellow act as a point-person for the MBA treks, but the role can expand to be much more depending on the fellow.



The streets of Chefchaouen, known as "The Blue Pearl of Morocco," as captured by Laura Robinson (2019-2020)

Hicham reflects, "We've been lucky to have fellows who bring creativity, innovation, and initiative to the company. Our initial fellow, Katherine, for instance, stayed on for two extra years, establishing an entirely new line of business and unlocking significant new partnerships for us." In EM's experience, the most successful fellows are those with a go-getter attitude who enjoy navigating cultural complexities. As a start-up, Hicham says, "We need employees who can run with an idea and don't need a lot of direction." For Katherine Butler-Dines (2017-2018), having been a fellow herself and having mentored subsequent fellows, she sees "The fellows that have most flourished, getting a lot from the experience and bringing a lot to the organization, are not just smart, hard-working, and well-organized, they are also unafraid of ambiguity and uncertainty. Navigating a big city, a new culture, and a demanding job is challenging, but EM has been lucky to host fellows who have really immersed themselves in the country and job and who could adapt on the fly."



Emma Schneck (2020-2021) celebrates Eid al-Fitr with her Moroccan roommate

ClubAnglais

ClubAnglais is an English-language immersion program in La Marsa, Tunisia, not far outside the capital of Tunis. The program provides English-language education to students, both Tunisian and international, between the ages of two and 14. For students starting at age six, they can enroll in after school “clubs” for activities including yoga, crafts, and science experiments, in a fully immersive, English-only environment. ClubAnglais’ need for native speakers of English who are passionate about cross-cultural exchange aligned well with the candidates MENAR could offer.

ClubAnglais Quick Facts

Location: La Marsa, Tunisia

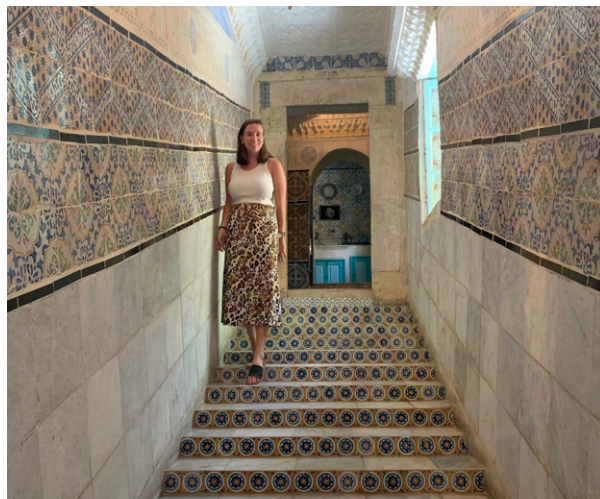
Partnership Started: 2018

3 total fellows

Eric Crane, Director of ClubAnglais, says MENAR fellows have been “essential to our operations. Our lead teachers must be native English speakers for our model of immersion education and MENAR has provided stellar fellows who are hard working, high achievers.” The main role of fellows at ClubAnglais is to be a lead teacher, running the preschool and after-school club programs. However, each fellow has also put their own spin on the role. Hannah Byrd (2018-2019), for instance, helped pilot a “ClubAnglais in School” program, traveling weekly to a local Tunisian school to lead science experiments and provide English enrichment programming. Eric Crane reflects that “how Hannah took initiative to lead this program, including designing the curriculum, was a really big contribution.”

Hannah reflects that ClubAnglais’ teaching model is powerful because “it is focused on relationship-building. Tunisian students are used to school being very structured and

teachers being very strict with what they learn and how they behave. But ClubAnglais is a more social setting that enables the students and teachers to build close relationships and really get to know each other along with providing true English immersion.”



Fellows Neely Egan (2020-2021), above, and Angela Whitfield (2019-2020), below, exploring Tunisia



Bayt.com

Bayt.com is the MENA region's largest job and recruitment site with a database of over 41 million jobseekers and over 40,000 employers using the site to find jobs or hire workers. Bayt is headquartered in Dubai and has offices across the region including in Amman, Jordan. Omar Tahboub is the former General Manager of Bayt and helped establish the company's partnership with MENAR. Reflecting on why Bayt was originally interested in hosting fellows, Omar says, "We were excited to bring in smart, fresh, energetic graduates from top American universities to work with us."

Bayt.com Quick Facts

Location: Amman, Jordan
Partnership Started: 2017

5 total fellows

1 fellow stayed on full-time after their fellowship



Based on Bayt's staffing needs, the MENAR fellows served in product management and marketing roles. Omar says, "We didn't hire fellows for super technical roles, but rather for the communication, presentation, and strategic thinking skills they could bring to our team. We were very impressed with our first two fellows in 2017-2018 and so we quickly committed to partnering with MENAR long-term." Bayt was already a diverse workplace made up of people from various nationalities and backgrounds, so integrating MENAR fellows into the team was straightforward.

One project that stands out in Omar's mind was launched by one of Bayt's first fellows, Cassidy Lyon (2017-2018). From start to finish, she managed the launch of a new data analytics product for employers. Omar was impressed by Cassidy's execution. "She worked across multiple teams at Bayt to bring the product to launch and sales to employers in just a few months." Her work on this product convinced Omar and the Bayt team of the immense value that MENAR fellows could bring to the organization and motivated them to take on additional fellows in the future. Omar was pleased with how "easy, well-organized, and supportive the process of hiring a fellow was made by MENAR's Board."



Bryce Feibel and Lisa MacKenzie (both 2018-2019) enjoying their final days as Bayt fellows

RESILIENCY DURING COVID-19

The COVID pandemic came in the middle of the 2019-2020 fellowship year. Amidst an unprecedented and rapidly evolving international situation, the eight MENAR fellows had to make a decision whether to stay at their placements in their host countries or return back to the United States. The MENAR team worked closely with each fellow to navigate their unique situation and decide how best to proceed. Because MENAR does not act as the fellows' direct employer, the final decision was left up to the individual fellows, in coordination with their host organization supervisors and their families.

All fellows from the 2019-2020 cohort except one returned to the U.S. before their official fellowship end date. The sole fellow who stayed in-country was Asha Athman at CRP. "It was an effortless decision. My work is here, and my life is here. I don't think my life would be much different living during COVID in Jordan compared to the U.S." One of Asha's most memorable moments in her fellowship was transitioning to a new position during COVID. "The idea that we could rally the community during this time was re-energizing. It was difficult, but at the same time we received funding to respond to COVID needs. To see money come, especially in the moment people needed it most, was amazing. We modified programs to focus on basic needs,

and it was beautiful to see that we could change how we spend money to help people access their basic necessities. It made me feel like my work matters."

While some fellowship positions had to end early due to the pandemic, a few fellows continued working with their host organizations remotely. Laura Robinson at EM worked the remaining four months of her fellowship from her home in Denver, waking up early to attend team meetings over Zoom. She recalls, "When COVID hit, it was very tenuous in the travel industry, but also interesting to see how the company was able to shift and make it work in a time of crisis. While our main purpose, planning trips to Morocco for foreigners, was halted, we came up with creative ways to keep sharing Moroccan culture with people during the global lockdowns, like a series of video tours of different Moroccan cities and virtual cooking classes. I'm so grateful to have continued working at EM through the pandemic. The work was a grounding aspect of the spring and summer months, and I learned a lot about how businesses can pivot and creatively problem-solve."

Partnerships Sustained Despite COVID Setbacks

The MENAR Fellowship Program has remained resilient throughout the pandemic, and was able to place three fellows for the 2020-2021 fellowship year in Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. When interviewing and placing fellows, MENAR focused on selecting individuals who demonstrated key characteristics: adaptability, resilience, and determination. It was also important to set clear expectations about what would and would not be feasible for fellows once they arrived in-country, where lockdowns were often in place, and work was still being conducted remotely.



2020-2021 fellows Neely Egan (ClubAnglais) and Emma Schneck (EM) exploring Tunisia together during Emma's visit to the country



Neely Egan

English Teacher at ClubAnglais

During college, Neely studied Modern Standard Arabic and French, so the position in Tunisia seemed like a great way to combine her language studies. She arrived in Tunisia in August 2020, where she was required to quarantine for one week in a government hotel and one week in the basement of her new boss's home. Then she was off to start her teaching fellowship. While ClubAnglais has taken COVID precautions, her experience teaching has been in-person from the beginning. She says, "I've had a real sense of pride seeing my students progress and cultivating relationships with them. The structure of the program is inherently fun, especially the after-school program, and I love teaching kids that language learning can be fun."

As Neely reflects on her experience moving to Tunisia amid a pandemic, she shares that "now I know that I am capable of moving to a new country and settling into a community in a way that makes me feel at home. My fellowship has reinvigorated my passion and interest in languages, and I've realized the real beauty of the ability to communicate with people in their own language. I have friends here now, but I moved here not knowing anyone, and many people I know didn't know where Tunisia was on a map. As I look back at myself in the future, I will be able to say that when I was 23, I moved to Tunisia during a pandemic and I was able to make it work, so I can do XYZ."



Emma Schneck

Marketing and Business Development Associate at Experience Morocco

Emma studied Arabic in college and has a strong interest in sustainable travel and tourism, having grown up in Hawaii. She joined EM in October 2020 but only had the opportunity to work a single week in the office before Morocco went back into lockdown. She and the whole team have continued to work remotely, occasionally coming into the office in small, socially distanced groups. Still, she says the difficult part is not having the chance to get to know her colleagues, most of whom she hasn't seen in person in six months. "The team is very close-knit, but all the virtual meetings have sort of disrupted that and made it more challenging to get to know people on a personal level."

Luckily, Emma found a Moroccan roommate who is now a close friend. She says getting to know the culture, learning to cook Moroccan dishes, and improving her language skills with help from her roommate is a highlight of the fellowship. These cultural exchanges, along with more casual conversations with locals she meets at the souk or in a cafe, have been the most meaningful part of the fellowship.

Emma reflects that "a lot of Moroccans ask me, 'Why would you want to leave America and come to Morocco?' They see America as a better or more interesting place than Morocco. But when having these conversations, I try to focus on all the beauty and unique experiences Morocco has to offer. I share how I love the culture, the food, the hospitality, and as I share my perspectives, people get excited and usually start adding things about Morocco they love. These conversations have helped reflect on America and what it means to be American more deeply, and I hope they've helped some Moroccans see all that Morocco has to offer a bit more clearly too."



Alex Petri

Data Officer at CRP

Alex had long dreamed of working abroad, and the pandemic didn't stand in his way. Alex began his fellowship in August 2020 and worked remotely from Illinois before arriving in Amman in January 2021.

"It was frightening, but I knew the only option was to keep moving forward and get on the plane to go to Jordan." Adaptability is a key trait Alex demonstrates. He has been able to adjust to multiple time zones, navigate working remotely both in Illinois and Jordan, and grow into the work culture of a nonprofit in Jordan. Alex says, "I've learned to slow down and be willing to be more flexible at work. I also have a new perspective about what it means to be an American in the workplace; efficiency, automation, and structure can all be good qualities, as long as you are flexible."

FINAL THOUGHTS & LESSONS LEARNED

Over the past decade, the MENAR Fellowship Program has created consistent positive impacts for fellows and host organizations. The organization has grown from a single fellow in 2012 to supporting up to 10 fellows simultaneously in 2018. Fellows have helped host organizations launch new programs, increase their revenue, and provide high-quality language instruction. They've developed deep connections with local communities through sports, art, and even adopting pets. Engaging beyond their day jobs, fellows have given back through teaching English, leading youth programs, and starting partnerships with artisan cooperatives. The fellowships have fundamentally shaped the career paths of many, helping them secure fulfilling jobs in and out of the MENA region and preparing them for graduate study programs.



MENAR Board Member Madison Marks meets with former fellow Lilly Crown Wilder (2017-2018) and the 2018-2019 Jordan fellows in Amman

MENAR remains a unique opportunity for recent grads to gain meaningful work experience in the MENA region. For young professionals passionate about the region, joining the foreign service, working for a large multinational corporation, or becoming an English teacher were previously the only available routes to get paid work in the region. MENAR presents an opportunity to have paid work at a locally run, typically small- or medium-sized organization. As its alumni continue to build their careers, MENAR will have helped create a new generation of leaders who have deep knowledge of and first-hand experience in the MENA region.

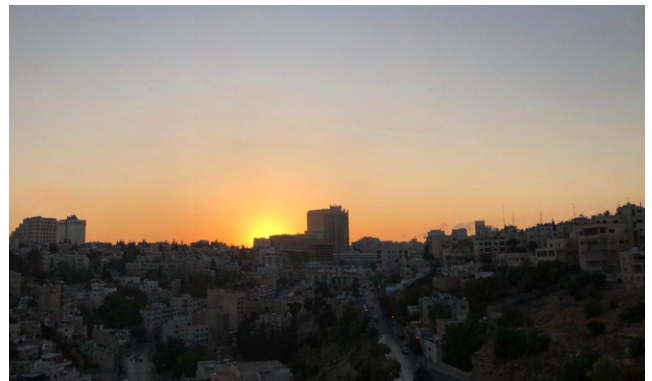
But sustaining this kind of organization is not easy. Raising external funding, managing the logistics of visa procurement and travel for fellows, and vetting new partnerships with local organizations have been challenging at times for MENAR. Lessons learned for other international fellowship programs include the following:

- There is significant demand for these types of post-grad experiences and expanding access to this kind of fellowship is important to creating a diverse community of regional experts and future leaders.
- The most successful fellows won't necessarily have regional experience or language proficiency, but they will bring

passion for cross-cultural exchange, high levels of self-sufficiency, comfort with ambiguity, and a sense of curiosity and initiative.

- Vetting host organizations will be time- and resource-intensive, but a best practice is to complete in-person site visits and request to review legal and financial documentation.
- It is important to set expectations with both incoming fellows and their future managers at host organizations regarding what appropriate supervision will entail. For fellows, this is a full-time job and should be treated as such. For managers, they should provide adequate guidance and mentorship for the fellow to grow throughout the year.
- Fellowship managers should plan to establish relationships with local embassies to help facilitate and procure work visas for fellows, since host organizations may not always be in a position to do so.
- Building community among fellows (current and past) is a key part of the fellowship program's work and should include running a pre-fellowship orientation, creating channels for fellow-only communication, and establishing regular touch-points between the fellowship organizers and participants for mentorship and growth.

Although the 2020-2021 cohort will be the last fellows supported by MENAR, and formal non-profit operations will wind down at the end of 2021, the MENAR team plans to enhance the informal connections built through the organization into the future. The alumni network will continue to be built through online engagement and events and will only become stronger as former fellows progress and grow in their careers. The MENAR website and alumni list-serv will remain active, and Board members will be available to share experiences and lessons learned with other organizations working toward similar goals. By building a community of like-minded individuals passionate about the cultures and peoples of the Middle East and North Africa, MENAR's impact will continue to be felt for many years to come.



Sunset views of host cities Amman, Jordan (above), Casablanca, Morocco (left), and Alexandria, Egypt (below) taken by fellows



MENAR FELLOW DIRECTORY



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2012-2013
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CRP, Jordan
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Reclaim Childhood, Jordan
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2020-2021
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Alex Petri
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Neely Egan
2020-2021
ClubAnglais, Tunisia
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