Hira Learning

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Lisan

Arabic language and culture after school. Program plan for schools, community groups and partner nonprofits.

Lisan means language, and tongue.

Draft for partner review, November 2026

A program of Hira Learning, with Fajr Institute, Abraham Education, Hira Ventures and OneNYC

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1. Overview

Lisan is an after-school program where children in grades 3 to 8 learn to speak, read and write Arabic, and explore the cultures that speak it. It is a cultural language program, in the same family as Spanish, Hebrew or Chinese programs, open to every child and held outside school hours.

Who	Children in grades 3 to 5 (ages 8 to 11) and grades 6 to 8 (ages 11 to 14)
When	Two days a week, 90 minutes each, for 30 weeks, about 90 contact hours
Group size	About 10 children per teacher, up to 12 to 15 in grades 6 to 8, and never fewer than two adults on site
What	Spoken Arabic, reading and writing, and culture: food, music, poetry, proverbs, stories, sports, cities and the inventions of the Arab world
Teachers	Local, background-checked, Arabic-speaking teachers, trained and coached by Abraham Education, with curriculum support from Fajr Institute
Families	A short weekly report: what the child practiced, what is going well, and one thing to try at home
Run by	A community nonprofit, in a school, library or community space

Why a cultural Arabic program

Arabic is the ninth most common language spoken in New York City, with about 72,700 speakers in the 2018 American Community Survey, yet few after-school programs teach it. City Council discretionary funding already supports cultural and heritage programs for many communities, including Chinese, Caribbean, Italian, Jewish, Latino and African programs, and a small number serve Arab New Yorkers. Lisan is designed to fit that existing path: community-based, free to families, open to everyone, and focused on language and culture.

What this document covers

The program model, the curriculum, how children are assessed and how families are kept informed, who teaches and how they are trained, a budget model, the safeguards a public program needs, and how a nonprofit partner can apply for public funding. Dollar figures are planning estimates and are labeled as such.

2. Program model

Secular, cultural and open to all

Arabic is taught as a world language and a living culture. The City Council's test for discretionary programs is that they are open to the public and do not promote a particular religion, and Lisan is built to that standard from the start.

What Lisan teaches

The alphabet and calligraphy as art; poems and proverbs; Juha folk tales; songs and music; food and markets; geography and cities; sports; the history of science and invention, such as algebra, optics and cartography; Arabic words in English, such as sugar from *sukkar* and coffee from *qahwa*; and writing from across the Arab world.

What Lisan does not do

No Quran recitation or memorization, no prayer or religious practice during program time, no religious posters, and no religious instruction. Staff sign a written Secular Content Policy, and the curriculum is reviewed by an educator outside the host school.

Open to the public

Registration is public and welcomes any child. When a program has more applicants than seats, seats go by an open lottery. We recommend that at least 30 percent of seats go to children outside the host school (a design rule, not a City requirement). Flyers go to libraries, community boards and neighborhood groups, not only to the host school.

Placement tracks

Track	Who it is for	Emphasis
Foundations	Children with no Arabic	Sounds, letters, greetings and first words
Heritage Bridge	Children who understand or speak Arabic at home but read and write little	A faster pace, with more reading and writing
Continuing	Children in a second year or beyond	Longer texts, interviews and presentations

Schedule and calendar

- Two days a week, for example Tuesday and Thursday, 90 minutes each, after school. Keeping each session under three hours may also help the program stay outside child day care definitions; this must be confirmed with the City before launch.
- Thirty program weeks from late September to early May, following the New York City public school calendar for breaks.
- Three to four setup weeks before the start (hiring, clearances, training, registration, placement) and two closing weeks after (final assessment, family reports, showcase).

- Term 1, weeks 1 to 10, includes a baseline check. Term 2, weeks 11 to 20, includes family conferences. Term 3, weeks 21 to 30, ends with the Arabic Showcase for families, with food, music and calligraphy.

Location

A school building lent or rented to the nonprofit for the program hours is the best case. Other options are a community room kept free of religious display, a library or a community center. Each site signs a use agreement stating that the program is secular and open to all.

3. The Arabic curriculum

Design

- **Standards-based units.** Each unit is planned backward from performance tasks, following the STARTALK principles for language programs: culture and content woven into language, learner-centered classrooms, performance-based assessment, at least 90 percent target-language use, and adapted real materials.
- **Honest targets.** A university STARTALK Arabic program aims at Novice-Mid with about 46 in-person hours. With 90 contact hours, Lisan aims at Novice-Mid for true beginners, and Novice-High to Intermediate-Low in listening and speaking for children who hear Arabic at home. Arabic is a demanding language for English speakers, and we do not promise fluency.
- **One framework.** Progress is described with the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements across interpretive, interpersonal and presentational modes, so parents and schools use the same words.

Modern Standard Arabic and a spoken dialect

Arabic has a formal written standard, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA, *fusha*), and many spoken dialects. Lisan teaches MSA for reading, writing and formal phrases, and Egyptian Arabic as the first spoken dialect, because it is the most widely understood across the Arab world through film, television and music, it is paired with MSA in the best-known university course series, and Fajr Institute's teachers speak it natively. A weekly Dialect Corner compares words across dialects, so a child whose family speaks Levantine, Gulf, Maghrebi or Yemeni Arabic sees their home speech valued. Before each site locks its dialect, we survey families, and Levantine stays available as an option.

Scope and sequence

Each year is three ten-week units. Foundations children start at Year 1. Heritage Bridge children begin Year 1 at an accelerated pace.

Level	Weeks 1 to 10	Weeks 11 to 20	Weeks 21 to 30
A1 grades 3 to 5, year 1	Hello Arabic: sounds, first 14 to 16 letters in isolated and connected forms, greetings, names	Me, family, home: numbers to 20, colors, possession, short descriptions	Food and the market: foods, quantities, ordering, prices, role play
A2 year 2	My day and school: time, days, routines, school objects, short sentences	My city: places, directions, transport, New York and Cairo compared	Stories and proverbs: Juha tales, 10 proverbs, retelling
A3 year 3	Weather, seasons, clothes; first paragraph writing	Sports, hobbies, music; interviews	Science and invention in the Arab world, using secular content only
B1 grades 6 to 8, year 1	Hello Arabic, faster: full alphabet by week 8	Identity, family, home; numbers to 100	Food, market, money; role plays and menus
B2 year 2	Daily life; schools abroad and at home	Travel and cities; reading short real texts	Media: songs, ads, short clips; presenting opinions

B3 year 3	Stories, poems and short texts; noticing verb patterns	Science and the arts across Arabic-speaking history	Project unit: a bilingual magazine or podcast

Share of class time by skill

Level	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
A1 and B1	35%	35%	15%	15%
A2 and B2	30%	30%	20%	20%
A3 and B3	25%	25%	25%	25%

Heritage Bridge groups move 10 points of time from listening to reading and writing.

3a. A sample unit and lesson

Unit A1.3, "Food and the Market" (10 weeks)

Essential question: How do I get what I need, politely, in Arabic?

Week	Focus	Key language	Culture and activity
1	Launch and baseline	صباح الخير (sabah al-khayr, good morning)	Goal setting; photo tour of a market
2	Foods and drinks	ماء (maa, water), شاي (shay, tea), موز (mooz, banana)	Arabic words in English: sugar and coffee
3	I like, I want	أريد (uriid, I want); Egyptian عايز (aayiz, I want)	Taste test and class survey
4	Numbers and prices	Numbers 1 to 20	Play-money market
5	**Performance task 1** (speaking with a partner): buy three items	شكرا (shukran, thank you), من فضلك (min fadlak, please)	Role play recorded for the family report
6	Letters in context	New letters inside food words	Calligraphy of food words
7	Quantities, describing food	Adjectives; noticing plurals	Picture recipes
8	Listening week	Short real market audio	Listening tasks
9	Dialect Corner and review	Bread: خبز (khubz) in MSA, عيش (aysh) in Egyptian	Mini-museum of family foods
10	**Performance task 2** (presenting): menu poster and a one-minute talk	All unit language	Gallery walk for families

A 90-minute lesson: week 5, "At the market"

Can-do: "I can ask for an item and say thank you." Arabic is used at least 90 percent of the time, with English only for brief clarification.

Minutes	Segment	What happens
0 to 10	Welcome routine	Greeting circle: مرحبا (marhaba, hello), question and answer chain
10 to 25	Input	Props and mime; children hear five key phrases ten or more times
25 to 45	Guided practice	Pairs play shopkeeper and customer with picture cards; partners rotate twice
45 to 60	Literacy block	Decode and write two food labels using letters learned so far
60 to 80	**Performance task 1**	Groups of three role play; four-point rubric; a second adult records audio

80 to 90	Reflection and exit ticket	Children color their can-do thermometer; the teacher sends home one phrase to practice

Home practice: ask a family member for something using the phrase. **Materials:** play money, food cards, whiteboards, a tablet.

Materials note. We did not find a ready-made, secular K-12 Arabic text with a dialect strand. University series such as Alif Baa and Al-Kitaab serve as teacher references, and Madinah-style course books are excluded because their purpose is religious. Lisan therefore uses its own units, reviewed by Fajr Institute's curriculum specialists.

4. Assessment and family reports

- **Placement (weeks 1 and 2):** a 10-minute oral conversation, a letter recognition check, and a parent questionnaire about Arabic at home.
- **Unit tasks:** two performance tasks per unit, scored 1 to 4 on a shared rubric, plus a short listening and reading check.
- **Can-do tracking:** every child has a can-do list for each mode. Progress is judged over time, not checked off once.
- **External check (pilot):** an end-of-year web-based assessment such as AAPPL for children in grade 5 and up, to give families and schools an outside reference.

The weekly family report

Each week every family receives a short report that shows attendance, the unit, can-dos met in each mode, letters and words mastered, rubric scores, a two-sentence note from the teacher, an audio clip of the child speaking, and one activity for home with a "how to help" tip. Teachers and coordinators see the same data rolled up by class and site, which also supports reports to funders. The system collects no personal data from children without parent consent.

Sample **Layla's Arabic this week.** Four of five practice days. Letters and sounds 82 percent, reading 64, listening 71, speaking 48. Try this at home: read one page aloud for five minutes, then say the letters ع غ ف (ayn, ghayn, fa) slowly together.

5. Teachers and training

Role	Qualifications	Duties
Program Coordinator	Two or more years of youth programming and supervisory experience	Enrollment, compliance, family contact, reporting
Lead Instructor (one per section)	Native or near-native Arabic (Egyptian preferred), strong English, a bachelor's degree or current study in Arabic or education, experience with children; a teaching certificate, TEFL or ACTFL training is a plus	Teaches, assesses, enters weekly data
Floating Aide	18 or older, high school diploma, experience with children; college students fit well	Second adult, attendance, dismissal
Fajr Institute (not on site)	Curriculum specialists in Egypt	Curriculum review, model audio and video, virtual coaching clinics

Where teachers come from

Certified or retired teachers who want part-time work; heritage-speaking college students and graduates from the city's Arabic and education programs; substitute-eligible teachers; and community members. Two cleared substitutes stay on call.

Training and coaching, by Abraham Education

- A two-day paid orientation: the standards-based approach, 90 percent Arabic in class, classroom management for ages 8 to 14, child safety and mandated reporting, the Secular Content Policy, and entering weekly data.
- A monthly one-hour group session, and four observe, debrief and plan coaching cycles per instructor per year.
- Unit packs and a one-page lesson template, prepared with Fajr Institute.

Clearances and safety

Everyone who works with children passes a child abuse registry check and fingerprint-based criminal history check through the route required by the funding agency and the site. Because teachers of record must clear these checks in the United States, teachers based overseas support the program as curriculum specialists and coaches, and may appear as short guest segments on a classroom screen only with a cleared teacher and aide in the room, never with unsupervised contact.

6. Budget model

All figures are planning estimates for one school year, based on 30 weeks, two 90-minute sessions a week, sections of 10, one lead teacher per section, one aide per two sections, a part-time coordinator, space provided in kind, and a payroll load of 12 percent. Teacher pay is planned at $38 an hour for leads, $22 for aides and $40 for the coordinator, with 140 paid hours per section to cover preparation, training and reporting. These rates are our estimates; no posted Arabic after-school wage was found.

Line item	20 children (2 sections)	40 children (4 sections)	60 children (6 sections)
Lead instructors	$10,640	$21,280	$31,920
Floating aides	$2,200	$4,400	$6,600
Program coordinator	$12,160	$18,240	$24,320
Payroll taxes, workers compensation, family leave (12%)	$3,000	$5,270	$7,541
Clearances	$500	$875	$1,250
Student materials ($50 each)	$1,000	$2,000	$3,000
Classroom kits ($300 per section)	$600	$1,200	$1,800
External assessment ($30 each)	$600	$1,200	$1,800
Family engagement, dashboard, showcase	$1,500	$2,300	$3,200
Liability insurance, including abuse coverage	$1,800	$2,400	$3,000
Bookkeeping and payroll service	$3,000	$4,000	$5,000
Teacher coaching (Abraham Education)	$3,600	$5,760	$7,920
Curriculum and remote support (Fajr Institute)	$2,000	$3,000	$4,000
Indirect costs (10%)	$4,260	$7,192	$10,135
Contingency (5%)	$2,343	$3,956	$5,574
Total	**$49,203**	**$83,073**	**$117,060**
Per child	$2,460	$2,077	$1,951

A starter module

One section of 12 children, with the host school providing a coordinator as documented in-kind support and no aide, costs about **$15,700**, or about $1,300 per child. That fits within a single typical Council award of up to $20,000 and leaves a buffer. A 40-child program usually needs several awards, from the Council Members whose districts the program serves, or philanthropy and host-school support.

Cash flow. Most public awards are paid by reimbursement, so the nonprofit spends first and is repaid after submitting documentation. A 40-child program spending about $8,300 a month needs roughly $25,000 of working capital for three months. Partners should arrange a bridge from the school, a loan or a donor before the program starts.

The cost per child-hour is higher than large City after-school programs because Lisan uses specialist teachers in small groups. Larger groups of 12 and school-provided coordination lower the cost.

7. Safeguards and compliance

Lisan is run by a nonprofit that holds its own contract, so the checklist below is for that organization. Each item should be confirmed in writing with the funding agency before launch.

Item	What it means
Nonprofit status	Incorporated in New York, its own EIN, a current IRS exemption, and a current Charities Bureau registration or an exemption. Fiscal sponsors and pass-through arrangements are not allowed.
Organization age	A newly created nonprofit (under two fiscal years old) is capped at $20,000 total and $10,000 per Council Member and cannot use subcontractors. Others that have had no Council funding in three years are capped at $50,000 total and $25,000 per Member.
City accounts	An NYC.ID and a PASSPort vendor account, with a named Vendor Admin, and a prequalification that is approved.
Training	Capacity Building Training for a board member or executive, valid for three fiscal years.
Conflict of interest	A conflict of interest policy and form. Ties between the nonprofit's board and any paid vendor are disclosed, the board approves paid vendors in writing, and vendors are paid market rates.
Public purpose	A Secular Content Policy, public registration, no fees for children, and open enrollment.
Vendors and consultants	Coaching and curriculum support stay under 30 percent of the award and are approved by the agency before work starts. The nonprofit's own team delivers the program.
Insurance	General liability including abuse coverage, workers compensation, and disability and paid family leave, with the City named as additional insured when required.
Child safety	Clearances for every adult, and a mandated-reporter training for all staff.
Child care rules	Written confirmation from the City about whether a 90-minute program is a school-age child care program under state and city rules.
Cash flow	A payee account for City payments, and working capital for reimbursement.

Risks we plan for

- **Funding is yearly and not guaranteed.** We design scalable modules, and alternative funding from philanthropy and host-school support.
- **Reimbursement delays** can strain a small nonprofit, so partners arrange bridge funding first.
- **A program run by a religious school can be read as religious.** We use a neutral name, an outside curriculum review, open enrollment and a written policy.
- **Related-party concerns.** Hira Learning, Abraham Education and Fajr Institute are paid suppliers to the nonprofit, so documented market rates and board approval are required.
- **Hiring.** Child-ready Arabic speakers are hard to find, so we budget real training time and do not overpromise results.

8. How a nonprofit applies

A school does not apply as a school. The Council funds nonprofits, so the applicant is a school's own nonprofit arm or a partner nonprofit. Each fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. In the most recent cycle the application window ran from January 5 to February 18; dates for the next cycle have not been announced, so partners should prepare now for a similar early-January opening.

When	Step
Now to December	Outreach and a funding seminar for schools and community groups; confirm each nonprofit's age, status and board; choose the host site; draft the Secular Content Policy; request insurance quotes
December to early January	Create NYC.ID and PASSPort accounts; submit the prequalification; complete Capacity Building Training; contact Council Member offices; prepare supplemental forms
January to mid February	Watch for the window to open; attend the City's information sessions; submit the application early
February to June	Follow up with Member offices; finish clearance tasks
June to July	The Council adopts the budget; awards appear in the budget schedule
July to October	Complete vendor documents, sign the contract, submit the budget, wait for registration
September onward	Hire, train, enroll, and begin classes when the agency confirms the term

Applicants should approach the Council Members whose districts the program will serve. A neighborhood often falls in more than one district, so confirm each address with the City's official district lookup. Request roughly one starter module for each $20,000 award.

What Hira Learning provides

- The Lisan curriculum, unit packs and family report system.
- Teacher recruitment help, orientation and year-long coaching.
- Placement tools, assessments and rubrics.
- Budget templates, a compliance checklist, a sample Secular Content Policy, and help preparing the funding application.

To confirm with the City before launch. Dates and rules for the next cycle; which agency holds an Arabic cultural program; the clearance route for the site; whether a 90-minute program needs child care registration; and whether short remote guest segments count toward the limit on outside providers.

Next step

Tell us about your school or group, the grades you serve, and the days that could work. Email **info@abrahameducation.com** with the subject "Lisan program inquiry", or visit hira-learning.pages.dev/lisan/.

Sources include the NYC Council FY2027 Discretionary Funding Policies and Procedures, the NYC Mayor's Office of Contract Services (MOCS) PASSPort guidance, NYC Department of City Planning language data, ACTFL and STARTALK program guidance, and NYC Department of Youth and Community Development program standards. This document is a planning draft and is not legal advice.