

## CREACT4MED Mapping: Best Practices

Application Number: BP\_86

1. Basic info*	
Email Address	qalam.alkhattat@gmail.com
Title of the Best Practice	AlQalam
Name of the Applicant	Mohamed Wahdan
Is the BP a registered legal entity?	Yes, I will send the certificate of registration by email
Website	al-qalm.co
Country	Egypt;
Subsector	Arts and culture (cultural heritage, gastronomy, visual arts, performing arts, leisure and recreation, crafts); Design (software, advertising, architecture, interior design, graphic design, industrial design, fashion);
Category	a) Cultural and creative entrepreneurship; b) Ecosystem enablement; c) Local and regional cooperation;
Year of establishment and duration	7/1/2015
Target group of the BP	Internet Users & Android and iPhone users that like Arabic Calligraphy and Traditional handicrafts. E-commerce stores Calligraphers & Artists & Researchers (Bufts, Expert) Children Media agency, Book Publishers, Newspaper & Magazine co. Interior, Fashion, Graphic Designer. AlQalam school' Alumni Arabic Calligraphy Schools (Student, Teacher, Outcomer) Tourist companies and agencies, independent tour guides Retailers, Wholesalers Corporate (gifts) Hotels, Restaurant, Cafe. Islamic Museum Shops.
2. Best Practice Characteristics	
Problem Statement	Islamic creative industries are facing serious challenges that negatively affect artists and the future of Islamic Arts. The formal education sector cancelled teaching Arabic calligraphy years ago, resulting in the new generation having neither knowledge nor appreciation for this essential part of Arab identity and intangible heritage. Additionally, the number of schools dedicated to teaching Arabic Calligraphy is diminishing due to their traditional teaching methods, lengthy learning process, lack of supervision, and financial resources. Consequently, the number of attendees and students is decreasing, while calligraphers work for very low salaries without receiving any support. Some of them unwillingly leave the field and shift their careers despite their invaluable experience. Furthermore, most of the Arabic calligraphy services delivered are centralised in capitals, making them out of reach for those who live in other governorates.
Mission Statement & Value proposition	Al-Qalam is dedicated to: - Nationally and internationally promoting Arabic Calligraphy, Islamic Ornaments, and their contemporary practices

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Providing unique learning environment that enables users to learn Arabic Calligraphy quickly and affordably</li> <li>- Helping individuals to build a professional network and reaching the target audience (a large user base of talented artists and experts).</li> <li>- Providing Customised Professional Design services</li> <li>- Managing our Professional Identity and Building a Professional Network</li> <li>- Access to a vast e-library that organises and presents images &amp; videos in an easy and simple way</li> <li>- Serving as a new channel and platform to showcase products and brands to clients, providing the best e-commerce experience</li> </ul>
Results and growth	<p>AlQalam is a youth-led social enterprise that aims to spread Arabic calligraphy, Islamic ornaments, and their contemporary practices through its creative space in the heart of historic Cairo and its e-platform, both nationally and internationally.</p> <p>Al-Qalam (School, Studio, Store, Space) is the largest community in Egypt for calligraphy today and seeks to promote Arabic calligraphy among youth while providing technical support to emerging calligraphers, including training and consultancy services. Through years of working on the ground, Al-Qalam developed its understanding of the needs of the community and established vital connections with stakeholders and partner organisations both on the local and regional levels. We look forward to being the first destination for all people around the world who are passionate about Arabic calligraphy and Islamic ornament.</p> <p>It serves as an exhibition and learning space, a design studio, a shop selling calligraphy supplies and art gifts, and a meeting point for creators and artists. AlQalam seeks to promote the Arabic calligraphy and Islamic ornaments scene in Egypt through its various programs, including training and workshops, empowering new generations of calligraphers and creating a support system for them, organising exhibitions and educational seminars, providing calligraphy tools and products, and digitising, marketing, and promoting calligraphy artworks.</p>
Strategy to be financially sustainable	<p>Al Qalam has been self-sustained for the past 8 years through various sources of income, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Service Fees (Design, Brand Identity, Learning, Training, and Consulting)</li> <li>- Online/Offline Sales (Products, Educational Materials, Toolkits)</li> <li>- Premium subscription fees.</li> <li>- Art Space Rent</li> <li>- Brokerage fees</li> </ul> <p>To ensure sustainability, Al Qalam makes every effort to reduce expenses, diversify its revenue sources, and form partnerships with public, private, and civil society organisations.</p>

### 3. Impact (please complete at least 3 of the 6 sub-sections)

Economic significance	<p>Al-Qalam seeks to provide integrated solutions for creative industries based on Islamic arts in light of the difficulty of accessing services and products. Over the past 8 years, Al-Qalam has become the first destination in Egypt for those interested in Islamic art. It has helped many creative people to showcase their artistic works, achieve artistic prosperity, and reach our products to major museums and internally to more than 21 governorates,</p>
-----------------------	--

	<p>more than 13 countries around the world, and students from 20 nationalities, with our budget reaching more than a million annually, thanks to partnerships with government and private sectors, and activating international and local shipping options, installment options, and electronic payments, and the market size amounts to more than 5 billion dollars annually. During the past years, we were able to increase the company's growth rate to about 200%, reduce the volume of returns to 1%, and increase the number of collaborating artists and suppliers. Despite the small size of the Islamic art market, it is growing rapidly, especially due to the state's recent interest in encouraging creative industries sectors.</p>
<p>Replicability and upscaling</p>	<p>Al Qalam strives to seize promising market opportunities, reach new markets, increase our market share, explore untapped customer segments, and meet growing demands by increasing the volume of our production line and reducing the average cost per unit, thus achieving increased profit margins by negotiating better deals with suppliers, and investing in more efficient production processes, utilizing technology to automate specific tasks. Al Qalam is moving with confident steps towards expanding our customer base and providing new products/services, preparing to handle the increasing workload and maintaining the same level of quality and efficiency by upgrading the infrastructure or adding more resources by hiring and training a flexible workforce, streamlining processes, or making our business model more dynamic to ensure we can meet customer needs.</p> <p>Al-Qalam's business model has proven its efficiency in its ability to be replicated in other places. Al-Qalam began expanding by opening branches in several regions and studying requests to open its branches/franchise rights in Arab countries outside the Egyptian country, such as Morocco and Qatar.</p>
<p>Employment generation</p>	<p>(Al-Qalam) focuses on activating the concepts of fair work, economic growth, and well-being by designing education programs that use creative people's technical and art skills to empower them and ensure their sustainability, and creating and developing products to enhance their competitiveness to meet consumer tastes. Al Qalam provides the artisans with all the resource that helps them boost their art, administrative, and professional skills to build their projects.</p> <p>Al-Qalam e-platform provides broader opportunities for creative people by raising on a broader scale the profile of the creative calligraphers, decorators, designers, and artisans working with Arabic calligraphy and its applications and helping them develop their current work to keep evolving in line with the current market trends, by creating an alternative labor market and turning it into an excellent opportunity to emerge to showcase their products and share their artistic expertise, through the online store and studio of the Qalam platform, sell and promote their creative products and services, present them in an organized and categorized manner, with clear images and accurate descriptions, and options for size, color, and size, in an easy way, while providing various options for electronic payments and local and international shipping.</p> <p>On the other hand, the creative Qalam Space is located in the heart of historic Cairo, and we have succeeded in linking it to the cultural tourism path in cooperation with tourism companies. To contribute to the sustainable economic empowerment of local artisans by promoting their</p>

	<p>artistic works and enhancing their income. QALAM's efforts have contributed to improving the payment of more than 250 artists and suppliers over the past year, half of whom are women and the majority young.</p>
<p>Inclusiveness</p>	<p>Al-Qalam is dedicated to promoting gender equality and justice in its various initiatives such as scholarships, educational programs, training opportunities, and product offerings through our store. We strive to be present and active in both rural and urban areas, based on available resources and capabilities. This month, we conducted 9 field activities to 9 different governorates, besides providing people in the surrounding neighbourhoods with free access to AlQalam programs to reduce the centralization of culture in the capital and upscale communities. We also aim to strengthen our presence in working-class and poor neighbourhoods. With support from USAID, more than 100 women have benefited from our training programs in the past month.</p> <p>Al Qalam training programs have a commendable 90% participation rate of women and youth. Al Qalam is also expanding its scope to support refugee artists from Syria, Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan.</p> <p>- Quality education and reducing inequalities: Al-Qalam School is on a mission to promote quality education and reduce inequalities. The school has launched the "Arabic Calligraphy Endowment" project, which is the most extensive digital educational archive for Arabic calligraphy. This archive includes detailed, high-quality explanations of various types of Arabic calligraphy classified and arranged -from individual letters, through their connections, to sentences and exercises. It also explains the tools and materials used in calligraphy. The Calligraphy and its materials, and the "Letters and Letters" series provide a comprehensive explanation of the uses of Arabic calligraphy on different materials, along with an English translation. The content can be accessed online and free of charge, allowing people to benefit from it at any time and from anywhere.</p>
<p>Social impact</p>	<p>Reviving Arabic Calligraphy, making it widely available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Strengthening the calligraphy movement and contributing to creating a new renaissance in Arabic calligraphy.</li> <li>- Awakening a taste for art and an aesthetic awareness of the public regarding Arabic calligraphy.</li> <li>- Enhancing the vision of society towards Arabic calligraphy and calligraphers.</li> <li>-Developing cultural tourism based on Islamic Art, benefiting the local community at the same time.</li> <li>-Encouraging people to acquire wall paintings and products whose designs are based on Arabic Calligraphy, contributing to creating a booming market for those products and bringing prosperity to this type of art.</li> <li>- Unleashing the true potential of creative calligraphers, restoring the cultural value of Arabic calligraphy and its various applications.</li> <li>- Extending the circle of people interested in Arabic calligraphy and highlighting Al-Qalam's profile as a destination for all who are interested nationally and internationally in Arabic calligraphy.</li> <li>- Designing new itineraries for tours and promoting them among domestic and foreign tourists, in cooperation with travel agencies.</li> <li>- Developing higher value-added products offered for tourists, setting Al-Qalam on a path of sustainable growth.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoting investment in sustainable cultural tourism and introducing our projects as pilot project.</li> <li>-Repurpose the heritage buildings in the context of urban development in historical areas.</li> <li>-Raising awareness of heritage among local residents to strengthen the linkage between the local residents and the heritage, encouraging them to protect it.</li> <li>- Motivating the residents of Historic Cairo, continue to be marginalized, to discover Islamic Art and explore their artistic talents</li> </ul>
Innovation	<p>Al-Qalam follows a particular approach to project management regarding planning, scheduling, and evaluation. Technically, Al-Qalam has developed a comprehensive e-platform with a simplified user interface that provides distance learning options (MOOCs), customized design, the possibility of ordering products with local and international shipping and electronic payment options, and correction of exercise services during the learning stages. As Al Qalam strives towards digital transformation, a partnership between Al Qalam and Wuzzuf is established to widen the circle of the target audience and develop their artistic skills.</p> <p>Al-Qalam extensively works on developing Arabic typefaces to address the digital divide and adopts several strategies to enhance the art scene by creating a supportive environment for creators, in addition to creating innovative partnerships with the governmental and private sectors and local, regional, and transnational cultural networks.</p>
Environmental sustainability	<p>We aspire to a greener planet and a sustainable future for all, and in order to achieve the concept of environmental sustainability in Al-Qalam, we focus on three paths: the first is related to the specifications of the Al-Qalam School building, some of which are related to developing curricula and integrating environmental sustainability issues into them, and some of which are related to the practices and activities that Al-Qalam adopts in its work.</p> <p>Our study programs include green activities, including, for example: participating in applying the concept of “waste recycling”, where the school administration allocates a place where students collect and classify recyclable waste, such as plastic bottles, glass, aluminum cans, and paper, and they try to carry out works. Artistic works and collecting them in an exhibition, as well as agricultural and fertilization activities, have been very successful recently and have received great acclaim from them.</p> <p>AlQalam works to limit the excessive printing of papers, encourage double-sided writing, and use special cups for each student instead of paper cups, etc. It is also keen to use wrapping and packaging materials from recycled materials.</p> <p>AlQalam is also a pioneer in the production of calligraphy materials from natural and recycled materials. Recycling rice straw, banana leaves, jute, cotton and linen to make traditional papers for calligraphy</p>
<b>4. Challenges and lessons learned</b>	
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic recession, consumers' hesitancy to spend, and decreased demand.</li> <li>+ Providing special incentives such as exclusive deals and offers to motivate buyers, diversifying the products and services offered, and cooperating with shipping companies to provide door-to-door delivery while facilitating electronic payment options</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consumers' dissatisfaction with e-commerce and distance learning platforms</li> <li>+ Motivate customers to try digital solutions and provide step-by-step guidance via customer service and technical support</li> <li>- A shift in consumer behaviour, turning away from cultural and artistic products and viewing them as a luxury.</li> <li>+ Boost sales with discounts, launch new products, strengthen relationships with followers, and enhance our brand image and reputation for excellence.</li> <li>- Insufficient financial coverage as the project's cash reserve</li> <li>+ Carefully reducing expenses, diversifying sources of revenue, forming alliances and partnerships, exchanging benefits, applying for some funding grants provided to artists and artistic and cultural entities, and negotiating rental fees</li> <li>- New competitors offering competitive or low-cost products or programs</li> <li>+ Delivering cost-effective and innovative programs and services that meet the needs of beneficiaries and followers</li> </ul>
Lessons learned	<p>Practical experience is of utmost importance, even with a university degree.</p> <p>It's essential to invest in building a strong network of relationships.</p> <p>We can start from scratch if necessary, should prioritise our health and well-being, and should be open to the idea of replacing employees as required. It's also important to remember that hiring people who are better than us can help us grow and learn.</p> <p>Rather than getting overly fixated on job titles, we should aim to have a deeper understanding of every aspect of our work and take advantage of every opportunity that presents itself. Investing in the development of our team and creating partnerships, alliances, and cooperation locally, regionally, and internationally can help reduce burdens and provide opportunities for rising talents and artists. It's also crucial to manage finances tightly. Everyone has the potential to be an innovator and make a significant impact.</p>
<b>5. Demographic Information</b>	
Is the organization led by a woman?	Yes
What age is the lead of the organization?	Between 16 and 35 years old