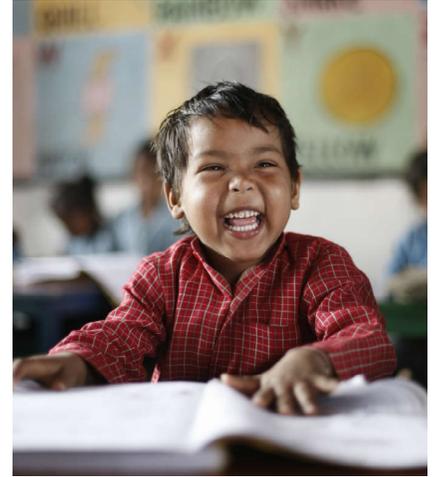




Vision 2025: Ending the Impossible



Strategic Plan 2020-2024

Achieving Literacy and Gender Equality Outcomes at Scale

Letter from Room to Read's CEO

Dear Friends,

I am delighted to share Room to Read's next global strategic plan: Vision 2025. Standing on the cusp of our 20th Anniversary, we are compelled to be bold and decisive, showcasing the best of Room to Read's ingenuity and our commitment to our mission.

Through an 18-month process, with valuable contributions from our global network, we have developed a plan to greatly expand the reach and impact of our work. Through Vision 2025, we are ending the impossible, achieving literacy and gender equality outcomes at scale. We are challenging long-held standards of what the world is and looks like with our vision of world change.

At Room to Read, we know that education is the most effective tool for solving the world's greatest challenges — such as poverty, environmental degradation and inequality. In school, young people should learn the skills that enable them to become changemakers and create pathways to solve tough problems in novel ways. These skills can help them define their place in the world and seek a fulfilling future.

Literacy, in particular, has the power to uplift entire communities and mitigate critical problems. Focused investments in girls' education, for example, contribute to overcoming the global climate crisis by stabilizing population growth, reducing consumption and increasing family and community resilience to climate change impacts.

For all communities to reap these benefits, however, education needs must be addressed successfully at a global scale. Over the past two decades, Room to Read has designed, tested and implemented program models for achieving quality learning outcomes in literacy and gender equality. We have gone "deep" instead of "wide" in our work, and in doing so have developed best-in-class programming.

Numerous assessments, both internal and independent, prove that our approach is working:

- **Girls and boys in Room to Read supported classrooms demonstrate significantly higher reading fluency and comprehension scores than their peers in comparison schools.** They are reading on average two to three times as fast as their peers and give an average of 87 percent more correct answers on reading comprehension questions.
- Our Girls' Education Program alumnae have also made remarkable progress in achieving life outcomes beyond secondary school. Recent results from our alumnae survey show **79 percent of graduates either enrolled in further education or found work within the first year of graduation.**
- In our last strategic plan, Scaling Our Impact (2015-2019), we committed to scaling our interventions to more quickly address the need for our work. We consolidated best practices in literacy and girls' education and organized them into worldwide implementation packages. These materials have formed the core content of our programs in recent years and allowed us to launch a technical assistance arm, as well as design and implement custom projects. Today, these projects allow us to share our expertise and resources with partner organizations and governments, in an effort to increase the reach, impact and influence of our work. **By the end of 2019, we will have implemented custom projects in 11 countries, bringing the total number of countries we have worked in to 16 and benefiting more than 18.7 million children.**

Now, as we set our strategy for the next five years, we are sharply focused on supporting system-level adoption and influence to build a path toward greater scale. We will continue to deliver high-quality programs at the school level and help individual girls succeed, while also producing data on the impact that is possible through targeted and well-designed interventions that promote literacy and gender equality. This work at the school level, to promote literacy and gender equality, will position us to participate in larger projects, and become an increasingly strong technical and operational partner for governments and other stakeholders around the world.

This plan presents our vision for the next five years and outlines 10 metrics of success. At the highest level, **by 2025, our programs will have benefited 40 million children.** This plan will more than double the number of children who have benefited from our work and enable us to reach new children four times faster than we did in our first two decades.

The following three strategic priorities will be essential to achieving our goals:

1. [Design programs to facilitate system-level integration](#)
2. [Enhance operational excellence and digital transformation](#)
3. [Leverage our brand to mobilize resources and strengthen influence](#)

The next five years will be a pivotal time for Room to Read, as we invest in the strategies that catapult us from an organization achieving incremental change to one driving ongoing transformational change. Together, with your support, we will end the impossible and create a world in which all children can pursue a quality education that prepares them to be fulfilled and make positive change – in their families, communities and the world.

Sincerely,



Dr. Geetha Murali, CEO



Vision 2025:

Room to Read's Guiding Framework

Our strategy is shaped by a guiding framework that includes Room to Read's vision, mission, core values, organizational commitments and theory of change. As part of this strategic plan, we streamlined and evolved this framework to reflect our commitment to vastly increasing our reach and impact, while also reinforcing the essential principles upon which the organization was founded.



Our Vision

Room to Read envisions a world in which all children can pursue a quality education that prepares them to be fulfilled and make positive change – in their families, communities and the world.



Our Mission

Room to Read transforms the lives of millions of children through education, creating a world free from illiteracy and gender inequality.



Our Tagline

World Change Starts with Educated Children®



What We Value

Collaboration: We value partnership.

Action: We take ownership to achieve positive outcomes.

Respect: We find joy in celebrating accomplishments together.

Education: We are a learning organization with a passion for education.

Scale: We focus on benefiting the most children possible, as quickly as possible.

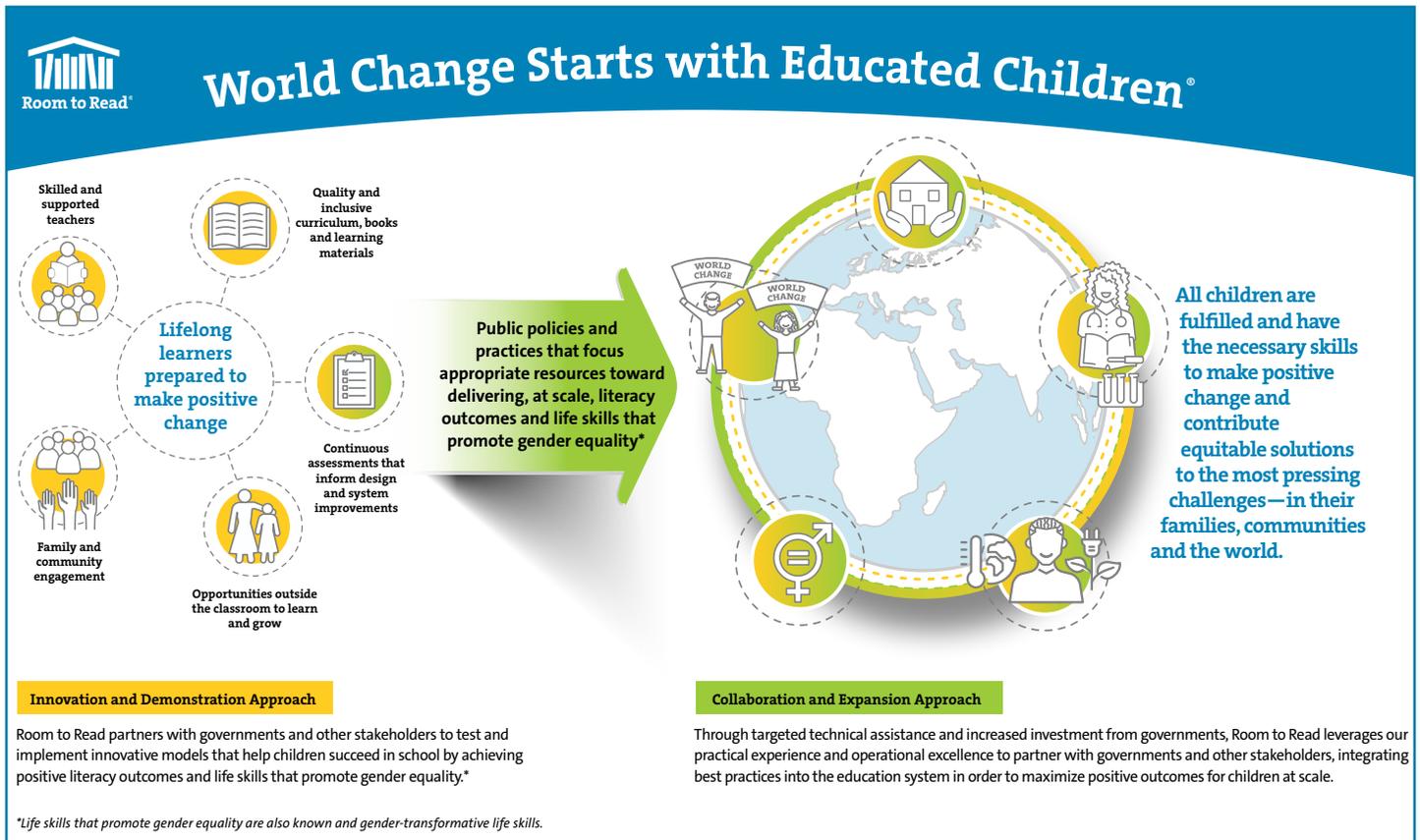


Our Organizational Commitments

During this strategic planning process, we also took the opportunity to reinforce our own organizational commitments and lead by example when it comes to creating positive change in the world. Over the next five years, we are boldly committing to strengthening gender-sensitive, inclusive and environmentally sustainable practices in our organization and will share progress through internal and external communication channels.

Our Theory of Change

As part of our strategic planning process, we refined our theory of change to reflect the relationship between program demonstration and our goal of supporting and enhancing education systems, reaching more children and preparing them to catalyze transformative world change.



Definitions of Key Words and Phrases Used in the Theory of Change

- **Lifelong Learners:** Individuals with an ongoing and voluntary motivation to continue learning and growing for personal and professional fulfillment.
- **Make Positive Change:** Contribute equitable solutions to the most pressing challenges — in one’s own family, community, and the world.
- **Fulfilled:** Capable of maximizing one’s own potential by making informed choices and, as a result, finding satisfaction in one’s own life trajectory.
- **Most Pressing Challenges:** Challenges like illiteracy, gender inequality, climate change, poverty, conflict and poor health.

Our Portfolio of Programs

At the heart of what we do is our unwavering focus on creating a world free of illiteracy and gender inequality through the programs described below.



Literacy Portfolio

Through our Literacy Portfolio, we support children to become independent readers and lifelong learners. Our Literacy Program trains and coaches teachers, creates quality books and curricular materials, and establishes libraries filled with children's books in local languages that can be enjoyed at school or home. We partner with local communities, governments and the publishing industry to test and implement innovative models that help children succeed in school and develop a love of reading. We also integrate our literacy practices into public education systems to achieve literacy outcomes at scale.

Girls' Education and Gender Equality Portfolio

Our Girls' Education Program ensures that girls build the skills to succeed in school and make key life decisions. We prepare girls to make positive change by providing life skills curriculum, opportunities for mentorship and peer support, and family and community engagement. Our work goes further by supporting young people of all genders to build knowledge and skills with which they can create a gender equal world. We help governments deliver similar programs through their own education systems.



Strategic Priority One:

Design Programs to Facilitate System-Level Integration

With Room to Read's core programmatic expertise solidly in place, we are now in a position to focus on how we can maximize our areas of expertise to build a path toward scale, which is not just about increasing the number of schools or girls supported directly by Room to Read, but also exercising system-level influence.

We will achieve the following objectives:

Integrate proven components of our literacy portfolio into government systems

We will look at the education ecosystem in each country and determine how to support the government's current efforts, while also recommending the materials and methods that are missing in a government's approach to literacy. We will establish a set of demonstration schools in a range of geographies where Room to Read can model effective literacy interventions. Based on evidence from these demonstration sites, we will influence curricula, train teachers and provide technical assistance to ministry staff as they scale-up implementation of literacy interventions in a broader set of schools.

Example:

We are leading an initiative in Vietnam with the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to achieve a countrywide library scale-up and incorporate our library model into national policies. We will establish libraries through an innovative approach that, over time, equips the MOET with the technical expertise to implement libraries on its own.



Integrate proven components of our gender portfolio into government systems

We will work with national and subnational governments in specific countries to integrate and mainstream core elements of our girls' education and gender equality portfolio into teacher training, school counseling and other mechanisms of government school systems. We will also develop and test a life skills curriculum that supports boys and challenges norms and attitudes that perpetuate inequality. While Room to Read has worked with families, school administrators, teachers and community leaders to understand the gender-specific challenges facing girls, boys are also an important stakeholder to engage, so that communities can collectively create a more gender equal society.

Example:

In 2018, Room to Read launched a three-year project to provide girls across the Indian states of Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan with life skills. This represents our first girls' education-focused scale-up project within a government system. The project will benefit more than 68,000 girls ages 11 to 13 years-old, providing them with skills to help them negotiate life decisions and build better futures.

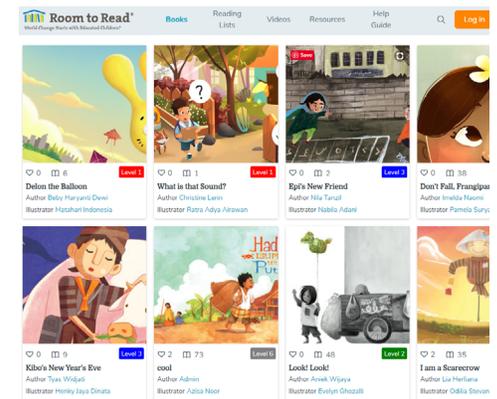


Increase access to high-quality local language children's books in print and digital formats

We will continue to work directly with schools to increase demand for high-quality books in classrooms and libraries. We will also expand our efforts to partner with government ministries to increase their exposure to high-quality children's books and to influence national standards for book development and use. Through our direct publishing work and co-publishing opportunities, we will fill the gaps that remain in target countries to create the diverse range of books (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, decodable readers,¹ storybooks) that children need to develop strong reading skills and habits. Some of this content will become part of a curated collection of Room to Read and locally published titles, called Room to Read's Starter Book Collection. We will make this collection available in a digital library for partners (e.g., local publishing houses) interested in printing and potentially selling copies of our titles.

Example:

In partnership with Google.org, we are developing a digital literacy platform called Literacy Cloud. This will include the digitization of Room to Read's local language children's book catalog. It will also offer training materials and resources for teachers, authors, illustrators and publishers.



Increase evidence base in the fields of literacy and gender equality

We will continue to rigorously measure the impact of our interventions, further establishing our models as some of the most consistently effective programs to improve reading outcomes for children and girls' progression in school. We will also expand our efforts to implement three strategic research initiatives that will not only help to refine our own work but will persuade governments to implement our programs and contribute to the sector at large.

1. **Cost-effectiveness analyses:**² We will couple cost data with existing program impact data, which will allow us to answer questions such as: how cost-effective are our literacy and gender equality interventions across countries; what is the comparative cost-effectiveness of different program models and implementation strategies; and how cost-effective are our interventions as compared to typical government education delivery?
2. **Literacy coaching study:** Multiple studies and evidence reviews have found that providing coaching support to teachers is critical to improve teacher practices and student learning outcomes. Despite this growing body of evidence, we still do not have the precise and generalizable evidence that is needed to inform policy and investments at the country level. Over the next five years,

Example:

Room to Read partnered with independent researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of our program through a rigorous, randomized controlled trial (RCT) study in Rajasthan, India. The study spanned 119 schools over two years and surveyed a total of 2,400 girls and their parents – half of whom were enrolled in our program and half of whom were not.

The Life Skills Evaluation found that girls who participated in our program had a 25 percent lower dropout rate and showed higher levels of grade progression than girls in control schools. Furthermore, the evaluation showed the program made a positive and statistically significant impact on specific life skills. These results reaffirm that our program has a measurable impact on its two primary goals: helping girls to stay in school longer and developing the skills that enable them to thrive.



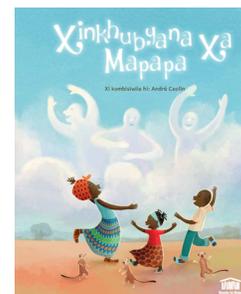
¹ Decodable readers are an important part of Room to Read's phonics-based reading instruction program. These readers are sequenced to systematically incorporate words that are consistent with the letters and sounds that are taught to children in classroom lessons. Therefore, decodable readers give children the chance to build reading skills in a way that allows them to "decode" new words, building confidence in their ability to read independently.

² Cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA) is a method for evaluating interventions, reforms and policies. CEA complements evaluation methods related to program effectiveness by adding an economic component to the evaluation. "CEA indicates which intervention is the most (technically) efficient by looking at which intervention generates the biggest improvement in educational objectives per dollar spent." Page 141 from Ladd, Helen F., and Goertz, Margaret E. (2014). Handbook of Research Education Finance and Policy.

we will conduct a literacy coaching study that compares the effects of different models of coaching with possible variations for delivery strategy (e.g., in-person, technology-enabled), delivery staff (e.g., Room to Read staff, head teachers) and level of exposure (e.g., once or twice monthly). This information, coupled with results from our cost-effectiveness work, will better position us to create the most effective and scalable implementation packages possible.

3. **Longitudinal outcomes study on the impact of girls' education:** There is a broadly recognized gap in the evidence that connects life skills education with improved private gains (e.g., income and quality of occupation, health outcomes, delayed marriage) and public gains (e.g., increase in GDP, lower public health spending, more active civil society). This lack of evidence is impeding efforts to advocate for comprehensive inclusion of life skills into government education systems. In response, we will conduct a 10-year study to compare the outcomes of our participants with those of similar young women who have not received our intervention.

Building off our work on fluency benchmarking, reading comprehension, oral language measurement and life skills assessment, we will also pioneer global instruments and methodologies for assessing reading and life skills that can be applied across contexts.³ Lastly, we will intensify our thought-leadership activities to expand dissemination of our research findings, best practices and lessons learned. We will be more deliberate and focused about sharing our longitudinal data and outcome research with government ministries, researchers and other actors working on literacy and gender equality.



³ Instruments and methodologies will include habit of reading measurement tools, continued work on reading skills measurement and benchmarking, life skills assessment for girls and boys, and supply and demand chain landscape tools for book publishing.

Strategic Priority Two: **Enhance Operational Excellence and Digital Transformation**

Over the last decade, we have invested in the organizational infrastructure necessary to prove that our program approach achieves positive and measurable learning outcomes for children in a variety of contexts. Looking ahead, we will need the operational infrastructure in place to significantly increase our reach and impact.

We will achieve the following objectives:

Prepare our people and systems to swiftly and nimbly respond to scale-up opportunities

Over the next five years, we will focus on building staff capacity to adapt programs and design custom projects for system-level integration. We will also expand our resource planning to include a variable-workforce approach, whereby we can identify essential talent and nimbly form and disband teams to tackle projects quickly. As we expand geographically and bring in more project-based staff, we will continue to foster one cohesive Room to Read culture and further establish Room to Read as an employer of choice in the field.

Utilize technology to improve operational excellence and efficiency

The next phase in the evolution of our technology strategy is to consider how technology can dramatically reshape how we operate. Moving forward, we will work to integrate existing operational systems and key business data, so that our staff can generate a consolidated view of the information they need to make decisions effectively. We will implement technology solutions that speed up collaboration and communication among Room to Read staff, implementing partners, funders and technical experts. And we will continue to use technology to execute recurring tasks or processes, with the goal of reducing costs, improving efficiency and streamlining processes that are typically done manually.

Employ technology to scale program delivery, speed program analytics and deepen program impact

Based on our portfolio of projects and associated funding, on an annual basis, we will explore innovations in education technology that offer the best opportunities to optimize outcomes, advance our research, monitoring and evaluation agenda, and contribute to the field. To begin our efforts in education technology, we will create a complete digital library of current and new local language titles. This tool will serve as an entry point to access new geographies and to facilitate licensing and other content-sharing arrangements with key stakeholders interested in broadening access to Room to Read's content. We will also leverage an affordable mobile technology solution to implement a more streamlined and actionable system for collecting, storing and analyzing data collected by field-based staff. This investment will be a game-changer for Room to Read, transforming our ability to use data quickly to resolve implementation challenges, improve program quality and share results with the development community in more powerful ways.

Strategic Priority Three: Leverage Our Brand to Mobilize Resources and Strengthen Influence

Our pro-bono partnerships with world-class communications and marketing agencies, such as Ketchum, adam&eveDDB and Prophet, combined with our investment in technology and marketing talent, render us capable of building our brand in unprecedented ways. Over the next five years, we will become a “go-to” resource in literacy and gender equality – the first call a reporter makes when working on a related story, and a prominent speaker at education and philanthropy conferences and events.

We will achieve the following objectives:

Expand brand awareness to continue building our reputation and attracting new audiences

We will create a powerful and differentiated brand platform that drives urgency around our mission by actively promoting the idea of education as the key to solving major world problems. Our new platform will focus on the foundational message that it all starts with education, as we build out powerful materials and events that link education to solving issues such as climate change, conflict and poverty.

We will cement our role as thought leaders in the fields of literacy and gender equality by better promoting, highlighting and sharing our research findings and preparing a deep bench of spokespersons who can share our insights in an authoritative and digestible way.

Increase revenue through major fundraising initiatives

By the end of 2024, we are projecting to achieve a total revenue target of \$84.4 million. This transformational growth will be based on the enhancement of existing fundraising strategies and the creation of new activities, described below, that better position us to optimize our reach and impact.

1. **Create digital experiences that generate revenue and awareness for the organization:** We will leverage digital tools that enable us to broaden our support base and create personalized digital experiences for investors to connect with our projects, programs and other topics of interest.
2. **Build Room to Read’s Future Fund:** With a support base that has worked with us for 20 years, we are now in a position to begin building Room to Read’s Future Fund — a five-year, \$10 million initiative to raise incremental unrestricted funds.

The Path to Becoming a Globally Recognized Brand

Already, Room to Read has made strides to increase brand awareness, including:



Launching a global book club, building brand awareness and showcasing our children’s books.



Leveraging our relationships with influencers, such as YouTube star and network talk show host Lilly Singh, who visited our work in India this year, and tennis star Garbiñe Muguruza, who has raised more than \$50,000 for Room to Read.



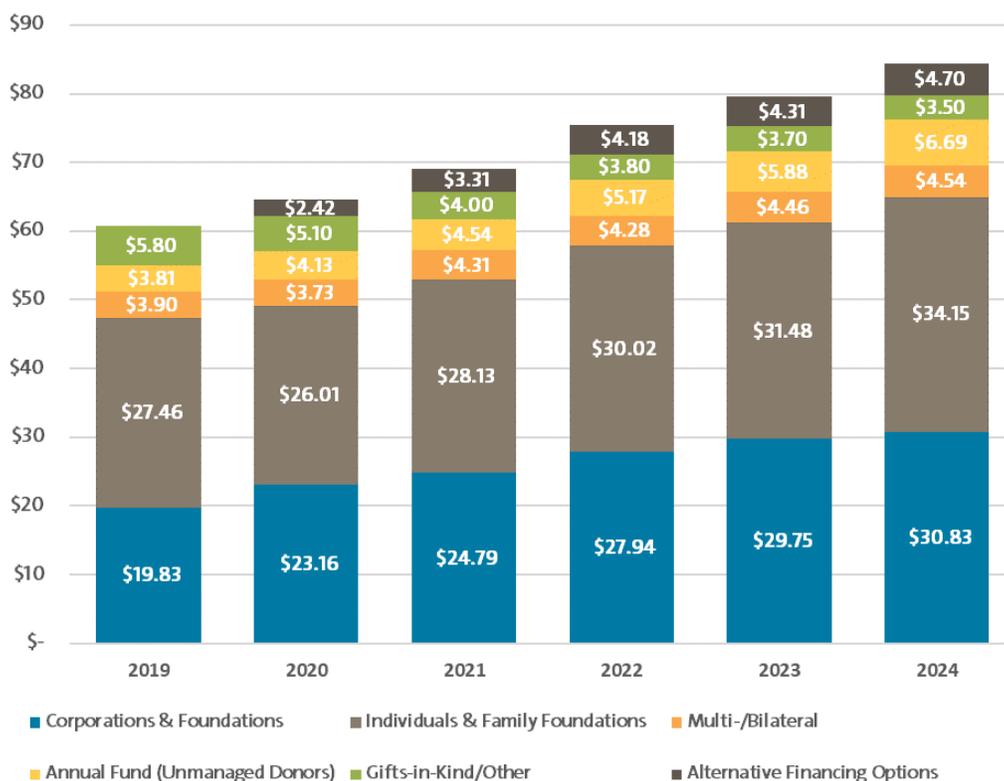
Building our brand platform, “It All Starts with Education,” through ads, speaking engagements and thought leadership that show how world problems such as climate change and poverty can be remedied through education.

The Future Fund will provide us with the financial resources needed to quickly and nimbly respond to emerging opportunities in the education arena and make early investments in innovations to test new program interventions. For example, funds could be used to:

- Respond to urgent situations, such as supporting refugee communities with vital education interventions during times of crisis
- Capitalize on unexpected opportunities for exponential growth, such as public-private partnerships
- Ensure six months of operating reserves for weathering any difficult political or economic situation

3. **Apply for transformational prizes and awards:** This strategic plan gives us the programmatic flexibility and partnership opportunities we need to more aggressively pursue high-profile awards. We will put greater focus on applying for these transformational opportunities that contribute to our brand recognition, move us closer to our revenue goals and help us achieve our mission to create a world free from illiteracy and gender inequality.
4. **Pursue higher-value bilateral and multilateral funding:** Over the past five years, we have successfully established ourselves as a reputable technical assistance partner and secured awards from a number of bilateral and multilateral funders. This work has enabled us to test new regions for expansion, build our network of project partners and heighten our visibility among a new set of donors. Leveraging this initial success, we will grow our ability to secure higher-value bilateral and multilateral funding and cooperative agreements.
5. **Participate in Development Impact Bonds:**⁴ Room to Read’s programmatic excellence, cost efficiency and measurable impact align well with this type of initiative. Additionally, our reputation for metric-driven projects and a donor base that has shown interest in these types of investments indicate we could excel in this emerging funding environment.

Projected Revenue Growth by Donor Segment (in MM)



⁴ A Development Impact Bond (DIB) is an adaption of a Social Impact Bond (SIB) for private financial institutions, where a nonprofit receives a contract to provide a social service in a lower-income country. Operating over a fixed time period, DIBs connect investors to service providers and directly tie funding to measurable impact results. The service provider is paid for programmatic implementation, but the investors are paid a rate of return based on programmatic outcome results.

Metrics of Success

To achieve the ambitious goals presented in this plan, we have identified the following metrics for defining our success:

1. Benefit at least **40 million children worldwide**, increasing the number of **girls benefited by 400 percent** through our Girls' Education Program and broader gender portfolio.
2. Influence system-level change in all countries where we work with full-scale operations, such that **at least one component of our program approach is integrated** at the national or subnational level.
3. Transform the lives of children in at least **10 new countries** through education with a focus on increasing our footprint in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East.
4. Create children's books in at least **five more languages**, while expanding content in existing languages.
5. Contribute to the international education sector by **developing contextualized tools to measure reading and life skills** that can be used by Room to Read and other organizations to assess program effectiveness.
6. Increase the number of open **supervisor positions filled by internal candidates by 10 percent**.
7. Improve internal operational efficiencies with **overhead remaining under 15 percent**.
8. Elevate **global brand awareness** as measured by independent surveys and increasing Annual Fund revenue by a minimum of 75 percent.
9. Raise the **custom project budget from 20 to 40 percent** of our total project budget.
10. **Grow overall revenue by 40 percent** while growing our operating reserves to at least six months of expenses.



Conclusion

For almost two decades, Room to Read has designed, tested and implemented education program models for achieving quality learning outcomes in literacy and gender equality. By utilizing innovative project work, continuous programmatic refinements, rigorous evidence and operational streamlining, we have been able to progressively impact greater numbers of children every year since our inception. As a result, we continue to earn the trust of the most discerning audiences – partner communities, governments, investors and other NGOs.

In order to accomplish the ambitious goals laid out in this plan, we will build upon our strong legacy as an innovative leader in global education, even as we seek new opportunities to shape our future. We will focus on the following priorities: (1) design programs to facilitate system-level integration; (2) enhance operational excellence and digital transformation; and (3) leverage our brand to mobilize resources and strengthen influence. These priorities have been selected to better leverage our demonstration

approach and to yield system-level impact across the largest number of communities. They will also cement our reputation as a leading voice in education and gender equality. As our brand awareness and reputation grow, so too will support from government leaders, investors and other influencers.

Without the commitment of our global network of partners and investors, we would not be where we are today. Our organization draws strength from this network and because of it, our team has no doubt that we have, collectively, the right expertise, commitment and passion to realize the bold goals presented in this plan.

Your belief in our mission and our ability enables us to push the boundaries on what is possible. Together, we will achieve literacy and gender equality outcomes at scale. We will leave a lasting positive impact on children's lives as well as in education systems, creating sustainable benefits for many generations to come.

