

Proposal: Framingham State University - Nonprofit Giving Course

Date: 3/26/2020

Attached: FYE 2020 Budget; 501c3

1. For what purpose do you intend to utilize these funds?

Raising A Reader MA (RAR-MA) requests general operating funding from Framingham State University (FSU) that will help us to sustain, deepen, and expand programming that will serve 9,000 young children and their families over the next year in collaboration with a diverse range of 120 program partners in order to develop the highly beneficial practice of shared reading.

Our model is supported by more than 30 years of research showing that being regularly read to by a parent or caregiver before kindergarten is the most significant factor impacting a child's academic success.

Raising A Reader Massachusetts (RAR-MA) is an evidence-based early literacy and family engagement organization with a mission to close the literacy opportunity gap among children 0-6 in high need communities by helping families develop and practice shared home reading habits. RAR-MA's two primary objectives are to develop children's language and reading readiness skills and to teach families how to develop and sustain a regular practice of home book sharing.

"By some measures, 5-year-old children of lower socioeconomic status score more than two years behind on standardized language development tests by the time they enter school."
- Developmental Science (journal)

The RAR-MA program partners automatically enroll children in the Red Book Bag Rotation program, where each week they receive four different developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant books to take home and share with their families. The books expose children to a range of genres and level of text complexity. With RAR-MA coaching, partners use the rotating library to build their ongoing family engagement with parents or caregivers, communicating with families at least once per week about their common goal of supporting the child's developing literacy skills. In addition, RAR-MA's program team offers workshops in collaboration with partners where parents and caregivers receive direct instruction by trained facilitators in dialogic reading strategies and learn how to incorporate these strategies into their routines. Some partners, such as home-visiting and playgroup programs, incorporate dialogic reading strategies into their existing interactions with families.

"Building the capabilities of adult caregivers can help strengthen the environment of relationships essential to children's lifelong learning, health, and behavior...Policies and programs that address the needs of adult caregivers and help them to engage in serve and return interactions will in turn help support the healthy development of children."
- Harvard University, Center of the Developing Child

RAR-MA targets its services to high-need communities across Massachusetts where there is a below average household income and adult educational level, large immigrant or refugee populations, and large minority populations. In 2019, 34 different languages were spoken among the families served and 45% reported English was not the primary language. The model is a multi-generational and whole-child approach, designed to empower parents to be their child's first teachers. With early literacy skills and engaged parents/caregivers, children are more prepared for kindergarten, ready to succeed in the classroom and on a trajectory for academic success in life. Even further, they will be

prepared and motivated to create a culture of literacy in their own children's lives – a multi-generational solution to a systemic problem.

2. What are your other sources of funding?

In 2019, 70% of RAR-MA's funding came from foundations, with the rest coming from individuals and events, as well as 5.5% from program revenue. In 2020, grant funding is projected at 60%. Many of the foundation/grant support is restricted to a particular RAR-MA community (i.e. Raising A Reader Brockton or Raising A Reader Greater Boston). The general operating support offered by FSU would be incredibly impactful in the operational groundwork that is needed to support communities where it is needed most. Most significantly, RAR-MA was awarded \$442,000 over 3 years (conditional grant) from the Boston Children's Hospital Collaboration for Community Health to support Greater Boston programming. RAR-MA's top corporate funder is Amundi Pioneer Asset Management.

The full list of funders is available on our [2019 Annual Report](#).

3. What are your short-term and long-term goals?

RAR-MA has a series of metrics used to measure its program success. One of the short-term goals is to meet these metrics for our current 2020 program year. RAR-MA consistently meets these program metrics and benchmarks and far exceeds the goals of "family home book sharing behaviors."

- **What percentage of program partners implement the Red Book Bag Rotation model with fidelity?** RAR-MA staff use a research-based site evaluation rubric to monitor fidelity to the implementation of the model. Surveys, program site visits and metrics, attendance data, and qualitative reports form the basis for ongoing program refinement and improvement. We anticipate achieving a minimum of 90% fidelity among program partners.
- **What percentage of families participate in a dialogic reading workshop or another form of direct instruction in dialogic reading?** Our goals are to have 25% of parents or caregivers of children enrolled in the Red Book Bag program attend a workshop or other form of dialogic instruction and 25% of workshop attendees return for a subsequent session.
- **What impact does RAR-MA have on families' home book sharing behaviors?** RAR-MA's goal is that families will share books with their children at least three times per week, for approximately 20 minutes each day, a research-based benchmark that positively influences language and literacy development. We anticipate that at least 55% of parents who do not read with their children at least three times per week before participating with RAR-MA will demonstrate an increase in their shared reading routines, and at least 50% of participating parents will report using at least three dialogic reading strategies after participating with RAR-MA.

Additionally, RAR-MA just completed its most recent short-term goal of filling out its executive team and growing its Greater Boston team. In 2019, RAR-MA welcomed a full-time Director of Development and in 2020, we welcomed a full-time Director of Programs. The addition of these roles prepares RAR-MA to execute on our long-term goals. In addition, Raising A Reader MA added three new board members this fiscal year to help support our organization.

RAR-MA is in the early stages of a three-year strategic plan, where it has a long-term goal of deepening the impact in the 11 core communities that we currently serve across Massachusetts. In addition, to adding new partners and more children, this means strengthening current partnerships and relationships to ensure the RAR-MA program is run effectively at every single partner site. RAR-MA continues to seek new strategic partnerships and collaborations to better serve our constituents including offering text messaging and modeling videos as a complement to the information shared in our workshops and in our online resources.

4. Why are staff members passionate about the work that they do?

Our staff members are as diverse as the populations that we serve. Some of the RAR-MA team had a strong exposure to books in their childhood and some did not; most are parents themselves and the rest have a history of commitment to marginalized populations. The unifying factor between all staff members, whether part-time program staff in Lawrence or full-time development staff in the Boston headquarters, is the passion for and commitment to our mission.

Additionally, the entire team and organization is data-driven. The program model is evidence based and the workshop content consists of many scientific facts that express to parents/caregivers the importance of engaging their children in books. Even further, all staff recognize the importance of starting early, on day one of a child's life, to level the playing field for children in disadvantaged communities.

The three Associate Director of Programs have all worked at Raising A Reader MA for over 5 years, living in the communities they serve and creating a strong ownership for impact. They are recognizable faces in their communities and with the program partners. They also are involved in literacy and community initiatives beyond their roles at RAR-MA, serving on councils, on boards and in advisory roles.

The RAR-MA staff also includes two former program participants. One hails from El Salvador and now serves as the Greater Boston Program Manager and the other is a Moroccan immigrant who works as a Parent Liaison, coordinating the Parent Ambassadors (parent volunteers to assist with the program). They are both a testament to the impact of our program and the passion of our staff.

Last but not least, the Executive Director (ED) has worked at RAR-MA for 10 years, beginning in operations after meeting the founding ED and having an immediate passion the organization's cause. She took the leadership role of Executive Director in 2017.

5. What impacts have you made in the local community?

The impacts of RAR-MA on the local community as evidence through four impact stories:

1. Lina attended three workshops at ABCD Tri-City and her most significant learning was to read at her child's pace—finishing the book is not as important as the stimulating conversation that occurs when you come across a page or a picture that your child finds most interesting. Lina saw her son's interest in books develop. "Every time he got the Red Book Bag his teacher allow[ed] the children to pick their own books. He always got the books out of the bag and read them in the car on our way back home!" She attributes her son's love of reading to the Red Book Bag program. As he told us, "I have a Red Bag at school! I like all books about trucks!"

2. Mary is the Family Service Coordinator at Springfield Partners, where her youngest child is also enrolled. When she speaks with parents who are hesitant to engage, due to multiple jobs and busy schedules, she tells them: "Take the time for your child." What may seem like yet another thing on the to-do list is an investment in your child's future. With her own daughter, reading was challenging at first because she only wanted to flip through all the pages. When Mary learned that this was normal for her daughter's age, her eyes opened. Now at age 2, Mary beams at her daughter's progress, her increased vocabulary and how she reacts to the story. "She sees fun in reading. It is so worth it!"
3. The Chelsea Revere Family Network (CRFN) is one of Raising A Reader MA's first program partners. When asked what the power of the RAR-MA program was to her, CRFN Coordinator Jeanette said, "something so basic that is so powerful. The ability to read is the ability to understand." RAR-MA has provided early literacy coaching for CRFN parents or caregivers who are limited English speakers or struggle with reading themselves. Despite understanding the importance of reading, many parents and caregivers often express fear and discomfort in engaging their children with books. RAR-MA helps Jeanette and her staff teach parents or caregivers a variety of interactive dialogic reading techniques that do not require reading the words on the page.
4. Morgan Van Clief is the librarian at the P.A. Shaw School in Mattapan. When she began her job there, the school did not have a library. In search of a solution, Morgan reached out to Raising A Reader MA. The program provided a lot more than she was expecting, including the tools to have a stronger dialogue with parents and caregivers about their children's education as well as donated books to support the building of her library. Many of Morgan's students are experiencing homelessness or living in shelters. The Red Book Bag was one of their first possessions of their very own and provided them with the opportunity to find joy in something simple and to just be a kid. "We are quite lucky to have Raising A Reader MA at our school because it helps put our students on a level playing field with the students at schools that have a full library."

6. What makes your organization stand out as distinct?

One of the key differentiators of the RAR-MA program is its partnership model that maximizes collective impact. Raising A Reader MA provides a rotating library of high-quality books and coaches parents/caregivers on the importance of dialogic reading to affect Kindergarten readiness. It is the complement of this dual intervention that moves the needle on eliminating the literacy opportunity gap. RAR-MA has over 120 community-based organizations and adapts aspects of the implementation to meet the varying needs of all types of partners and the families they serve. The dedicated program staff meets at the beginning of the year with each partner in order to assess the best way in which to implement the program, providing the resources and support necessary to make sure each has what it needs to succeed. The customized high-touch program support remains throughout the year and throughout the partnership.