



20
22

IMPACT REPORT



Right Question
Institute

A Complex World Needs RQI

Welcome to RQI's first annual impact report! We hope you will find abundant evidence of the transformative impact that your support helps bring to fruition.

Why now? Why do we feel it is vital to pause, reflect on the impact of our work over the past year, and tell our worldwide community about it?

The shortest explanation is that the stakes feel incredibly high for democracy at this moment. Authoritarianism is on the rise around the globe. Persistent inequities in income, healthcare, housing, education, and legal systems impinge on many people's ability to participate fully in the decisions that affect them.

RQI maintains that without full, equitable, well-informed participation from all stakeholders — including those furthest from power — we are unlikely to find sustainable solutions to the complex issues facing our democracy and others around the world. When people feel the sense of ownership that comes from having the agency and critical thinking skills to advocate for themselves, they are able to exert their influence to change things for the better.

This process starts with knowing how to formulate questions, leading people on a pathway towards action.

In 2020, RQI launched its new Legal Empowerment Program (LEP), introducing methods for building the agency and self-advocacy skills of people in marginalized communities who are navigating the legal system. In the last year, this program has brought RQI's simple, transformative strategies to frontline workers in legal services, criminal justice, and adult education (to name only a few) around the country.

Through our Teaching and Learning program, we have supported thousands of teachers from across the globe with professional development and free resources. Together, these teachers impact the learning of more than 300,000 students — fostering ownership and agency that young people can use in school and throughout their lives.

In this report, you'll read about Richard, a client at Project Place in Boston, and you'll also learn about a young mother living in a homeless shelter. We'll share the story of fourth-graders in Nevada, and you'll meet Duc Hoang, a Vietnamese educator. Each of them has benefited from using RQI's practical strategies to solve problems, deepen discovery, and develop agency.

And you'll hear about our co-founders Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana, who continue to explore new ways to connect question formulation with learning and democratic action.

"We're committed to doing everything we can to protect our threatened democracies and bring about lasting change by building people's skills to have a voice in decisions that affect them."

Around the world, thanks to RQI's accessible methods, thousands of people are more ready to meet this moment. We're proud of the work we've done, which continues to spread steadily

among practitioners in the field, helping empower people to become better self-advocates. There's a long way to go, but we're committed to doing everything we can to protect our threatened democracies and bring about lasting change by building people's skills to have a voice in decisions that affect them.

Your continuing dedicated support is vital to our mission. On behalf of the whole RQI staff, thank you so much.

Enjoy this report, let us know what you think — and please share widely!



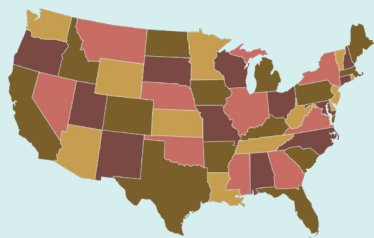
Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Betsy Smith'.

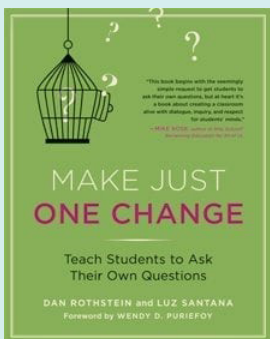
Betsy Smith
Executive Director

RQI's Impact Is Spreading

RQI's 2022 reach:



Members from **all 50 states** and **161 countries**.



Make Just One Change by co-founders Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana named the **4th bestselling book** in the history of Harvard Education Press. Published in 2011, it's now available in **7 languages**.



These educators collectively impact the learning of an estimated **300,000 students** around the globe.



71,500 members of RQI's online network — a global community building people's skills to ask questions, learn, and participate in decisions.



The **top 10 countries** for visitors to RQI's website:

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| 1 — United States | 6 — Thailand |
| 2 — Philippines | 7 — South Africa |
| 3 — United Kingdom | 8 — Canada |
| 4 — Pakistan | 9 — Australia |
| 5 — India | 10 — Iran |



3,900 educators received online and in-person training from RQI between fall 2021 and fall 2022.

Engaging Teachers and Learners

The Right Question Institute works to bring about a shift toward more equitable teaching and learning in classrooms in the United States and around the world.

Through the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) — a structured method for teaching students how to formulate, work with, and use their own questions — RQI collaborates with educators to help students take ownership of their learning and become more confident and ready to participate in civic life.

Using the QFT, students develop the lifelong skill of asking better questions. They feel more heard, valued, and seen — and learning becomes more active and joyful.

In 2022, educators in more than 160 countries were members of RQI's online community. In the U.S., educators from all 50 states came to RQI's new online hub for teaching with primary sources — an initiative supported by the Library of Congress that aims to foster curiosity, questions, and critical thinking about history, society, science, media, culture, government, and more.

Throughout the year, free teaching resources were downloaded 25,000 times from RQI's website, in 12 different languages, and RQI offered a number of new resources, online courses, and training opportunities.



"I feel happy when I ask questions ... I get excited to learn new things, and questions help me dig into more ideas that I am curious about."

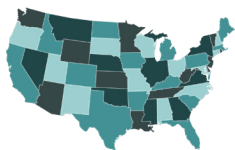
— Kindergarten student, Georgia

Professional learning that's valued, used, and shared



Boosting confidence in students and educators

After taking our online course, Teaching Students to Ask Their Own Primary Source Questions, 84% of educators saw improvements in students' confidence to ask their own questions. Educators were more confident, too. Before the course, 18% were moderately or extremely confident using primary sources with classroom questioning strategies. After the course, 95% were confident.



An experience worth talking about — a lot

Almost all these educators were inspired to share their learning experience with others. About 98% said they shared course information with at least one colleague, and most shared with multiple colleagues. We estimate that for every 100 educators trained directly through RQI, an additional 950 learned from their colleagues about using the QFT with primary sources.



A flagship online course at Harvard

In 2022, RQI trained 830 educators from around the world through our online course, Teaching Students to Ask Their Own Questions: Best Practices in the Question Formulation Technique, offered three times a year through the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Library of Congress: Teaching with Primary Sources

Online course and resource hub

With grant funding from the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources program, RQI developed a new online course, Teaching Students to Ask Their Own Primary Source Questions, along with a resource hub where educators can access videos, planning tools, lesson examples, and other materials.

On-demand learning modules

To make access to RQI's resources as barrier-free for educators as possible, RQI developed a series of on-demand, self-paced professional development modules, which are free for educators across America (and beyond).

Reaching Title I and rural schools

About one in three educators who participated in RQI's Teaching Students to Ask Their Own Primary Source Questions courses, including the on-demand modules, reported working in a Title I school, meaning they serve low-income populations. Around one in four reported working in a rural school.



National Education Association microcredential

RQI produced a microcredential — the Question Formulation Technique & Primary Sources — in collaboration with the National Education Association, Citizen U, the Primary Source Nexus, and Barat Education Foundation. The NEA offers this online professional learning module to its nearly 3 million members.

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"The discussions, the unique ideas ... It has felt invigorating for my mind. I really want to share this with colleagues and make this a practice in my district."
— Teacher and online course participant

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"It makes me feel smart and good about myself."
— Fourth-grade student, Nevada

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Educational organizations we reached in 2022

National Education Association
Kentucky Educational Development Corporation
New Mexico Public Education Department
Brooklyn Public Library
Metropolitan New York Library Council
Statewide social studies supervisors, South Carolina
EBSCO
Citizen U
First Step Discovery Project at UC Berkeley

Library of Congress, Teaching with Primary Sources
Gene L. Scarselli Elementary, Gardnerville, Nevada
National Council for History Education
InquirEd
Notre Dame AP-TIP
Griffin-Spalding County Schools, Georgia
Monticello Central School District, New York
Perrone-Sizer Institute

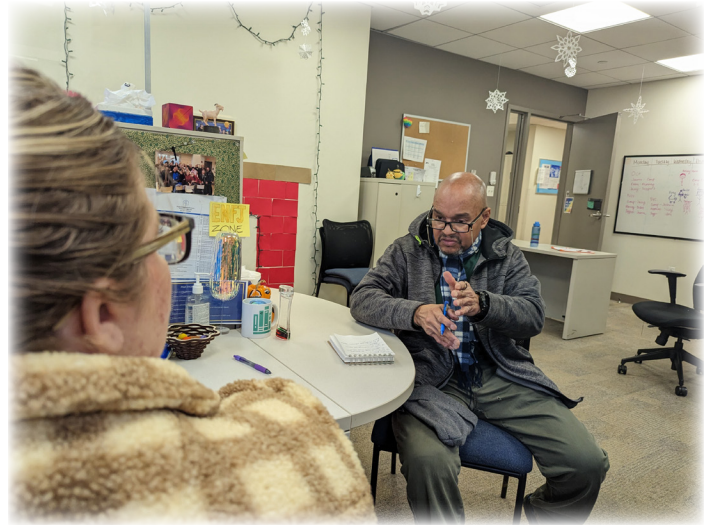
Envisioning a More Just Legal System

RQI's Legal Empowerment Program began in 2020, driven by a mission to help strengthen the voice of communities furthest from power, whose encounters with the civil and criminal legal system are too often profoundly disorienting and disempowering.

The Legal Empowerment Program provides resources, training, and technical support to legal professionals and advocates across the country, from attorneys to court navigators to community justice volunteers, who use RQI's methods to help their clients develop greater agency and voice as they navigate the legal system.

RQI's tools and strategies build clients' capacity to advocate for themselves and their families — and take action on their own behalf — in all places where decisions are being made that affect them. We serve frontline workers in:

- Criminal justice
- Legal services
- Adult education
- Youth advocacy
- Direct services
- Public agencies
- Community-based organizations



"This is something they should teach everybody ... it should be put out into the mainstream so people can learn at an earlier age how to address situations and issues by using this method ... This has been a life-changing situation."

— Richard B. Wallace, client, Project Place

"I've been on the phone with clients, and people just don't know what questions to ask. Knowing how to ask the right questions is crucial. For people on either side of the criminal justice system, it's overwhelming to deal with ... it will be groundbreaking to apply this to the legal world ... it promotes agency, and helps people take ownership, instead of letting things happen to them."

— Re-entry specialist, criminal justice organization, Georgia

"I used the strategy with a mother who had called me to say that she had an upcoming IEP" — individualized education program — "meeting and that she was worried about her son's ability to focus in a remote learning environment. She was able to come up with her priority questions and I watched her use those questions in the IEP meeting without my help or prompting. The meeting went really well. The mom sent me an email after saying that coming up with the questions was so helpful. She was confident and empowered."

— Staff member, Boston Medical Center Autism Program

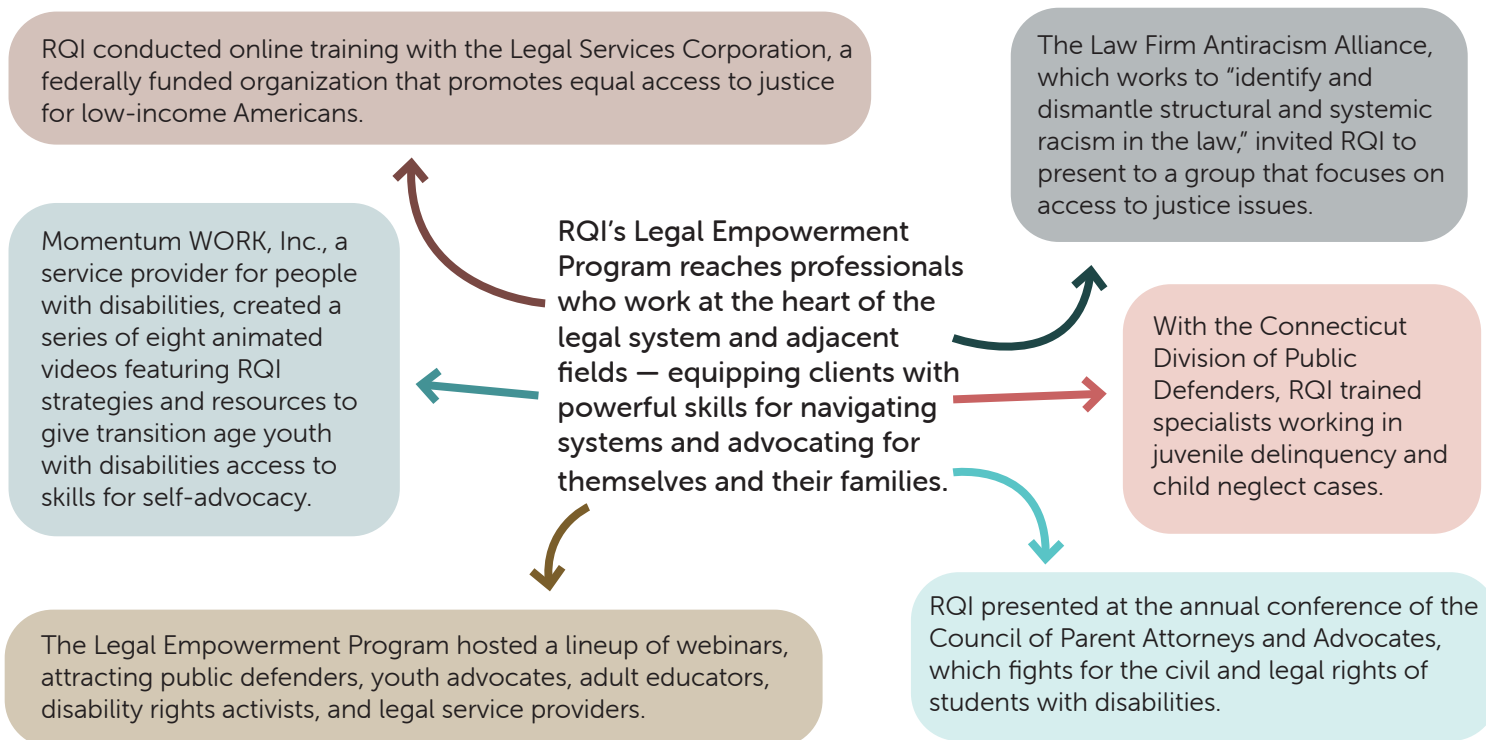
"Encouraging clients to ask questions is a way to enhance our organization's services and to lead to better client outcomes. Encouraging questions can further self-advocacy — not just with our organization, but with others that clients may be working with. Most of our clients work with multiple agencies and offices (SSA, SNAP, TANF, CPS, medical offices, their public schools, etc.) Increasing self-advocacy can then encourage them to do so with other agencies."

— RQI webinar participant

Organizations we worked with in 2022

Connecticut Division of Public Defender Services
Law Firm Antiracism Alliance
Boston Medical Center Autism Program
Tennessee Department of Health and Human Services
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Project Place
Brown University School of Public Health
National Education Association
Webinar participants from more than 30 organizations across the United States

Fostering agency at the heart of the legal system



Pioneering new thinking in higher education

National Science Foundation and high impact research questions

In partnership with Northeastern University, RQI began work on a project funded by a National Science Foundation grant, seeking to "increase the ability of academic researchers to formulate research questions and ideas with potentially transformative outcomes."

Through this grant, RQI and Northeastern will help create a rubric for high impact research questions. The project will advance the use of the Question Formulation Technique for research, and it is expected to help establish a larger community of researchers and leaders in higher education who are driven to improve research questions in pursuit of societally relevant research.

This project builds on two previous NSF grant-funded projects that RQI helped lead, bringing question formulation practices to researchers and leaders in the higher education community.

Building Nimble and Democratic Minds

During the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 academic years, RQI co-founders Luz Santana and Dan Rothstein taught a new course — Building Nimble and Democratic Minds: From Practice to Theory and Back to Practice — at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Through this course, graduate-level students explore ways to counter the authoritarian mindset and "ensure that more people can deal with complexity, think independently, resist disinformation, and apply core democratic principles to decision-making as they learn to make their voices heard on all levels."

The course leverages RQI's three decades of work in areas such as education, legal empowerment, voter engagement, health care, and school-family partnerships. Students create projects that "make it possible for more people, including those far from power, to become change agents ready to strengthen democracy."

RQI in People's Lives



When Richard B. Wallace wakes up in the morning and thinks about everything he has to do that day, he feels energized, not overwhelmed. He credits RQI's Question Formulation Technique (QFT).

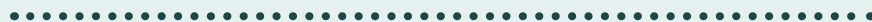
The QFT makes everything simpler, he says. "I feel like a sponge again," he adds. I feel so happy I'm able to look at things in a different way. They say you can't teach an old dog new tricks, but you can."

Richard participated in a QFT workshop last December at Project Place, a nonprofit that offers a variety of supports for homeless and low-income individuals in the Boston area. He and a group of other clients learned how to use the technique to help solve some issues they were facing related to housing and health care.

"It allowed me to look outside the box and look at questioning differently," Richard reported when we checked in with him a few weeks later.

"If I knew this at an earlier age, things would've been so much easier," he adds.

"This should be shared as quickly as we can, so everybody has the opportunity to simplify their life by knowing how to ask the right question at the right time ... this is very powerful information to have."



Jane (her name is changed to protect client confidentiality) is a social worker for a legal services organization in a primarily rural state who works with youth who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The Right Question Institute trains direct service providers like Jane across a variety of different fields to use a simple set of methods to build the self-advocacy skills of the people they serve. One of these methods, the Voice in Decisions Technique (VIDT), is designed to make it easier for people to identify decisions that affect them and build their capacity to participate in those decisions.

When Jane first meets with her clients, they are often traumatized and distrustful of the system that failed them. One of Jane's recent clients was a teenage mother living in a homeless shelter. She was going through a separation from the child's father and about to embark on a battle for the custody of their small child. She needed an attorney and a parenting plan and felt overwhelmed and shut down.

Going through the VIDT, the young mother was able to come up with a list of 28 questions related to her situation, where before she had none. She went from being almost paralyzed by the legal complexities to feeling confidence and agency as she zeroed in on what was most important to her, identified what she needed to know, and discovered possibilities that hadn't occurred to her previously. She brought priority questions to her first meeting with an attorney, who was impressed with her determination and agreed to represent her.

Jane shared: "Working with people at difficult times in their lives, there's a real vulnerability there, and this structure helps for people to feel safe and to build relationships. When you can go through something with someone where they are coming upon their own discoveries, it's pretty powerful."

Duc Hoang’s mission is to shift the culture around learning in his native country of Vietnam, where school is viewed mostly as a place to prepare for and pass exams. He wants people to know that “you have the right and opportunity to become a learner and learn anywhere at any time. You are the one who has the right to decide your learning,” he says.

Learning communities are Duc’s driving passion. Until recently, he directed an educational research center in Hanoi that offers a free e-learning platform serving more than 30,000 teachers across Vietnam, and he’s currently pursuing a Ph.D. in educational leadership and management at RMIT University (Australia).

The QFT has become a central feature of Duc’s work with teachers, because of the way it leads students to feel more ownership of and investment in their own learning. He spent time in 2022 translating *Make Just One Change*, by RQI’s Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana, into Vietnamese, and the translation came out in April 2023.

Duc says that teachers frequently ask him about the name of The Right Question Institute. “What is the right question?” they want to know.

“Speaking personally, I explain that there is no set definition of the right question or the wrong question or the left question or the up or the down question. To me, it means you have the right to ask the question. You make it by yourself.”



In May of 2022, after several years of pandemic delays, the RQI Teaching and Learning team traveled with a film crew to Nevada to create an instructional video starring Alyssa Park’s fourth grade class for our newly developed Teaching with Primary Sources course. The experience was a highlight of over a year of work funded by a Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources grant to RQI, to develop workshops and resources to support teachers.

Alyssa’s students are really excited about maps. Peering through magnifying glasses at a 19th century map of Nevada from the Library of Congress, they wonder (among other things) how the mapmakers got up high enough to create the image. This is just the beginning of a unit that culminates with students creating their own state maps.

“What I really like about approaching [lessons] this way with the QFT and these primary sources is that it’s so open-ended from the students’ perspective.” Alyssa reflects. “What is important for them? What are the questions that they want to have the answers to? Because that’s really why we create things, to express ourselves in some fashion and to make a connection with another human being.”

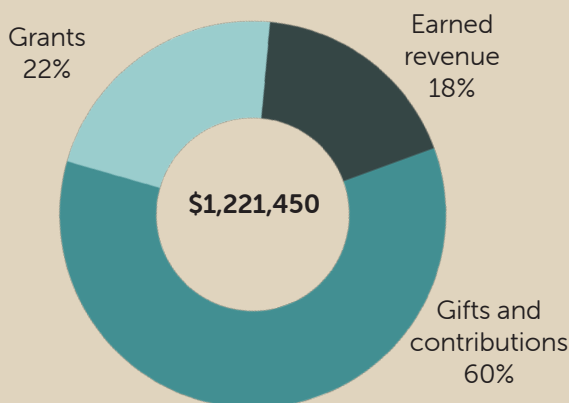
Alyssa particularly values how the QFT gives every student an equal voice in the classroom and in their learning. “Students can ask questions,” she says, “and they have the drive to pursue the answers they want. It’s the greatest gift I can give my students.”

The video of Alyssa’s class can be found on RQI’s new primary sources resource hub, developed as part of the Library of Congress grant.

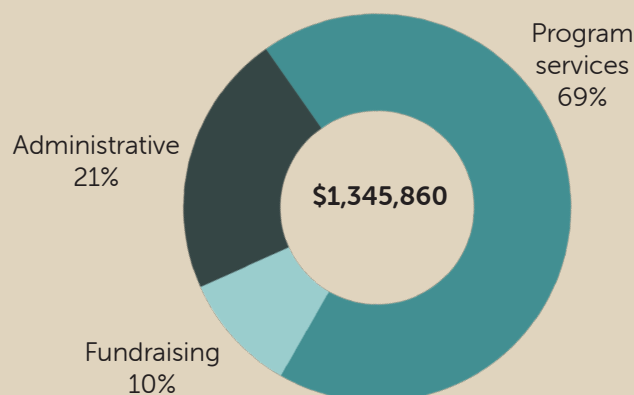


Financials and Supporters

FY22 operating revenue



FY22 operating expenses



Bridge to a Better Future Fund: \$2,022,285*

*This fund was established by the board of directors to build RQI's capacity over the next five years to advance a more just and equitable democracy. The fund was not part of RQI's operating budget in FY22.

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A generous RQI supporter offered to match all donations to our new Legal Empowerment Program during our FY22 year-end fundraising campaign.

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The Bridge Fund was established by the board of directors to build RQI's capacity over the next five years to advance a more just and equitable democracy.

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Andrew Minigan Memorial Fund Donors

This fund honors the life and memory of Andrew P. Minigan, our longtime colleague and friend, and advances the work he was so passionate about.

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Chris Willems
Connie and Rod Williams

Funders and Supporters

Thank you to all our funders and supporters who enable us to carry out our work in strengthening people's ability to ask questions, learn, and participate in decisions that affect them, their families, and their communities.

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Building a more just and equitable democracy by
strengthening people's ability to ask questions, learn,
and participate in decisions that affect them.

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