

2024

IMPACT REPORT

Sharing the Power of Questions



Right Question
Institute

Our Mission

RQI advances an original educational strategy that makes it possible for all people to ask their own questions. The transformational skill of asking questions enhances learning, promotes empowerment, and strengthens democracy. People — including those furthest from power — can use this skill to think and learn independently, participate meaningfully in decisions that affect them, and advocate on behalf of themselves, their families, and their communities.

Our Vision

An equitable world and vibrant democracy in which all people have the agency to think and act on their own behalf.

Letter from the Executive Director



Welcome to RQI's 2024 impact report, *Sharing the Power of Questions*! Thank you to our incredible donors, partners, and staff for everything you do to make this work possible.

We especially want to thank an often overlooked group of social innovators: the educators, social workers, legal aid providers, nonprofit leaders, and other professionals who share the power of questions with the people they serve.

Every year, frontline staff in public and publicly funded agencies have an estimated 100 million interactions with people in low-income communities. In classrooms, educators work with approximately 75 million students.

In 2024, RQI trained 3,975 educators and frontline professionals in how to teach the skill of formulating questions. Through daily interactions in classrooms, courtrooms, and social service offices, each of these service providers reaches hundreds of students and clients. They teach

a fundamental skill that too many people — especially those furthest from power — don't have the opportunity to learn and practice: the skill of asking questions.

Thanks to their work, people of all ages are learning to become active participants in gaining the knowledge, outcomes, and services they want and need.

This work has powerful ripple effects, helping to foster engagement, critical thinking, confidence, and empowerment in people all over the world.

From Alabama and Maine to Kenya, Hong Kong and beyond, self-sustaining communities of practice are emerging using RQI's resources. Because our methods are so accessible, people are finding innovative ways to integrate them into existing infrastructures and use them year after year, often without additional personnel or funding.

In Florida and Alabama, teams of teachers are finding collaborative solutions to educational challenges using RQI's Question Formulation Technique (QFT).

A nonprofit director in Georgia is using the QFT

to help formerly incarcerated people as they transition back into their communities.

In New York, 120,000 students in 700 classrooms are benefitting from a science curriculum that incorporates the QFT, helping them investigate and make sense of scientific phenomena.

Around the U.S., state court facilitators working with the National Center for State Courts' Eviction Diversion Initiative learned RQI's Voices in Decisions Technique to help clients advocate for themselves in eviction cases.

These and many other examples testify to the unique adaptability and accessibility of RQI's methods for different audiences.

We were delighted to receive a callout for our efforts in an October article in the Stanford Social Innovation Review titled, "The Critical Role of Questions in Building Resilient Democracies."

The authors wrote, **"The journey toward a more thoughtful, resilient, and engaged democracy starts with asking better questions and ensuring that those questions drive meaningful change."**

That's the journey we've been on at RQI for over 30 years, through many different political terrains and weathers. From all of us at RQI, thank you for walking alongside us. Your support is particularly essential in this time of changing mandates, sudden funding cuts, and pervasive uncertainty for educators and frontline service providers — a time when promoting the voice and agency of communities at the margins of power feels more important than ever.

Warmly,



Betsy Smith
Executive Director
The Right Question Institute

RQI Staff

Betsy Smith
Executive Director

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2024 Highlights



RQI's online network had more than **82,000 members**, from over 180 countries.



Visitors to rightquestion.org downloaded free resources **more than 20,000** times.



RQI **trained 975** legal aid and social service providers.



RQI trained **3,000 educators** ...

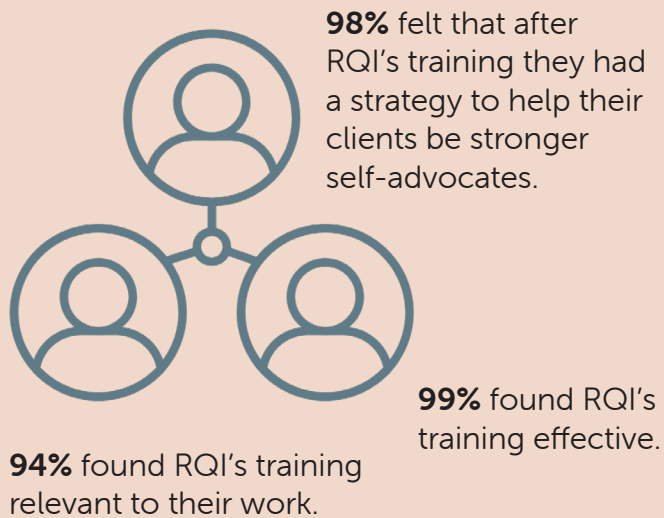


... who impacted the education of an estimated **370,000 students in 2024**.

In 2024, RQI Collaborated with:

Asia-Pacific Society for Computers in Education
Austin Community College
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Davies County Public Schools, Kentucky
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Harvard Initiative for Learning and Teaching
Harvard Math Department
The Institute for Common Power
The Learning Partnership for Children's Services at Rhode Island College
The Legal Network for Gender Equity at the National Women's Law Center
Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Program
Life Span
Maine Department of Education
Maryland Public Television
The National Center for State Courts, Eviction Diversion Initiative
National Council for History Education
National Science Foundation
New Hampshire Bureau of Adult Education
New Jersey Institute of Technology
Northeastern University
Perrone-Sizer Institute for Creative Leadership
PowerSwitch Action
Rhode Island Department of Human Services
Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training Programs
Teaching with Primary Sources Eastern Region at Waynesburg University
Tufts University, Jonathan M. Tisch College for Civic Life
University of Notre Dame Advanced Placement Teacher Investment Program (AP TIP)
Use Your Noodle Summer Camp, Birmingham, Alabama

Among legal aid and service providers surveyed by RQI:



How educators and organizations used RQI's educational strategy in 2024

Low-wage workers: A coalition for workers' rights produced a toolkit, Building Worker Power in the Digital Age, that included an RQI workshop called "Our Questions, Our Knowledge."

Engaging students in science: 1,500 students in 11 states used the Question Formulation Technique embedded in the Polar Literacy Curriculum, developed at Rutgers University and Ohio State University, to work as a team of scientists — collaborating, problem solving, and taking action to fight climate change.

Youth and climate organizing: In Kenya's Rift Valley, a nonprofit that builds community capacity to confront the climate crisis is using the QFT to help rural youth advocate for change.

Inquiry in social studies: Educators at Virginia Tech incorporated RQI's online modules for teaching with primary sources into their social studies teacher preparation curriculum.

Professional learning communities: Kenya Connect used the QFT to organize a new professional learning community of 60 teachers who serve 10 schools across a rural district southeast of Nairobi.

Educational leadership: The Perrone Sizer Institute for Creative Leadership in Massachusetts embedded the QFT in their nine-month education leader program.

Physical education: In Hong Kong, an educator trained 2,000 physical education teachers to use the QFT.

"I love love love the Question Formulation Technique and the way that it lent itself to getting the voice of the community/stakeholders. It led me to think critically about what I was proposing and allowed me to hear from and listen to others without making quick judgments."

— Fellow, Perrone-Sizer Institute for Creative Leadership

"It is one of the most effective trainings I have attended. Ever."

—Disability rights attorney

"I wish I learned [the Voice in Decisions Technique] years ago. It's a valuable, empowering process for everyone."

— Social worker, Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families

Voices From the Field

Jackson Kiptanui.



Jackson Kiptanui is the innovations director at Jenga Future, a nonprofit organization in Kenya's Rift Valley that uses a community-led approach to address a host of challenges

faced by rural residents, with a focus on building adaptability and resilience through inclusive climate technologies.

Last year, Jackson began incorporating the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) in community workshops. He wanted to help young people develop “the muscle of asking questions” as a way to think critically about problems facing the community — such as changing rain patterns that cause landslides in the region — and develop steps to advocate for change.

Jackson said he wishes people would take seriously how climate change has affected communities like his, threatening traditional livelihoods. “If we don’t adapt, we might be wiped out by poverty,” Jackson said. “We have

to be involved in educating our communities, and they have to hold officials accountable.”

Using resources on RQI’s website plus some extra support from RQI staff, Jackson learned the QFT and realized how impactful the technique could be with youth in his community — but first, it would take practice. Jackson shared, “I was interested in how asking questions can build confidence ... in a society where [asking questions] might be viewed as disrespect. It’s a muscle [the youth] were not used to using.”

By the end of the workshops, students “understood that they can use questions to go deeper into problems and also find solutions to those problems,” he said.

The young people even invited their member of parliament to meet with them and hear about their challenges and solutions. One student reflected, “This training is really important because it helped us to know that asking the right questions will lead to the right solutions. It will also help us to help someone else. In this area there is climate change and we are really feeling the impacts. We have a mandate to ensure our communities don’t go further into distress. I think all of us have a role to play.”

“*That was the ‘aha’ moment ... they understood that they can use questions to go deeper into problems and also find solutions to those problems.*
— Jackson Kiptanui”



Members of Jenga Future in Kenya's Rift Valley.



Chelsea Lawrence and Patty Gómez

are mid-career educators who belong to a growing community of practitioners who have been actively working to scale and sustain the

Question Formulation Technique (QFT) in their schools, networks, and geographic regions. Their experiences forming adult professional learning communities around the QFT provide examples for how to expand and maintain an ongoing, deeply ingrained community of curiosity throughout an entire school over several years.

Chelsea Lawrence is a high school Spanish teacher in Mobile, Alabama. She has not only taken both of RQI's online courses through the Harvard Graduate School of Education, she has also built a thriving professional learning community (PLC) focused on the QFT, for teachers from a wide range of subjects and grade levels at her school.

Now in its second year, the PLC has grown to include 10 faculty members across disciplines who rotate facilitating sessions. As the QFT becomes more embedded in curricula across multiple departments thanks to support from the PLC, students feel more empowered to ask their own questions, whatever they're learning.

"Asking my own questions has helped me understand course content better," reported one

student. Others say, "I feel more curious" and "I've learned that before coming to conclusions, it always helps to ask questions first."

Like Chelsea, Patty Gómez teaches in the World Language Department for an independent PreK-12 school, where she serves as department chair. She is part of a team of 28 language teachers serving 2,690 students.

Since 2020, the QFT has become a foundational protocol for a community of practice in the World Languages Department. The consistent use of the technique during professional development sessions has helped faculty find common ground around their teaching and grading practices, allowing them to navigate difficult conversations about their work without anyone feeling threatened or forced to change.

"The QFT was the single most powerful tool that as an educator I had encountered," Patty says. "Both in the classroom and in faculty collaborative sessions, the QFT is a clear protocol, easy to use and yet so powerful: it elicits deeper thinking and makes participants and facilitators alike question assumptions in an emotionally safe environment."

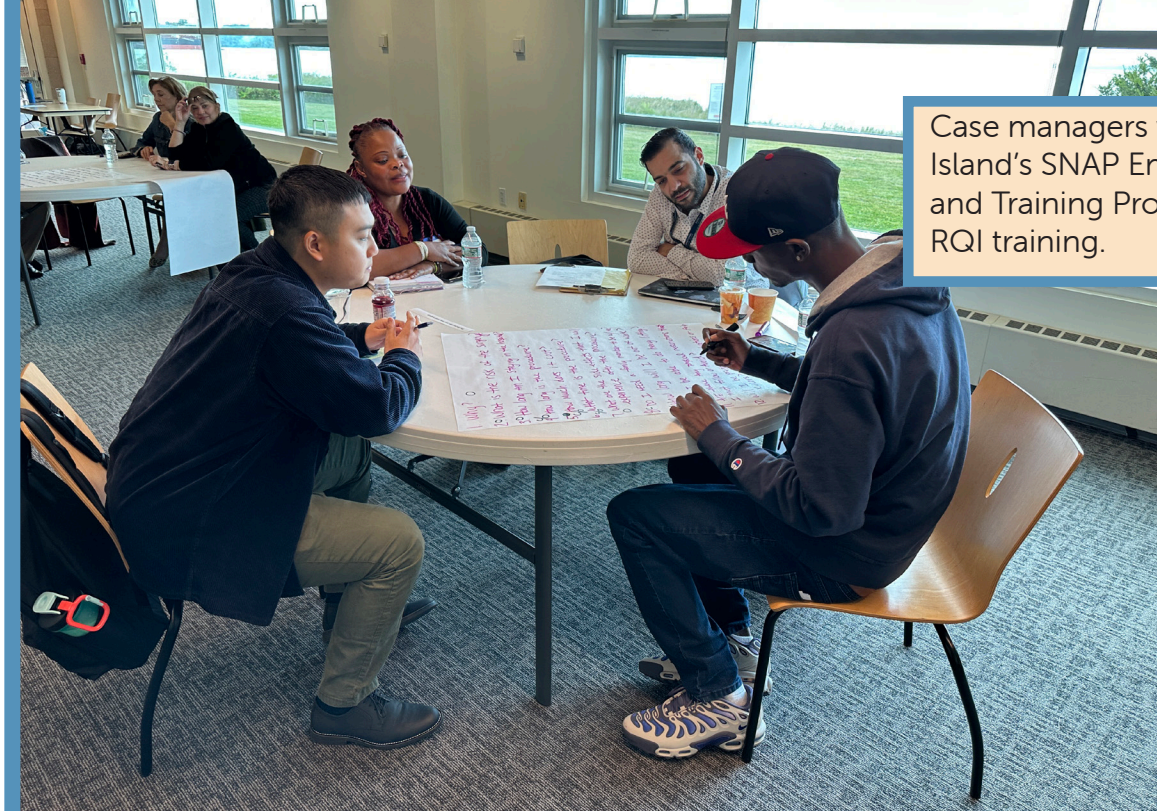
One welcome result has been an energized sense of enthusiasm and teamwork. In the last two school years with full support of the school administration, the World Languages Department has more than doubled the amount of time they spend working together.



Consistent use of the QFT leads to a mindset shift ... The power of the collective experience is the catalyst for change.
— Patty Gómez



Students in Chelsea Lawrence's class.



Case managers with Rhode Island's SNAP Employment and Training Program at an RQI training.

Building Empowerment and Agency

When Stacey French was evicted from her New Hampshire apartment with her two small children, she was overwhelmed and afraid. She had a meeting scheduled with a social worker who was going to help her find housing, and remembered a strategy that she had learned from her adult education class. She began writing down a list of questions about her case.

The Right Question Strategy “helped me to be more confident,” she said. Without it, “I wouldn’t be able to go in there and not cry and be hysterical ... I wasn’t like that at all, I was completely under control.”

RQI’s Legal Empowerment Program trained over 500 caseworkers, social workers, and attorneys in 2024, each serving clients numbering in the hundreds. By training staff who work directly with clients, we’re able to magnify the effect of this simple, powerful technique — reaching thousands of people like Stacey who are learning to ask their own questions and participate in decisions.

These skills are critically important to successfully navigating a system that presents many barriers and limitations for marginalized populations.

Social service and legal organizations from all over the United States are adapting RQI’s strategy in new contexts. The Learning Partnership for Children’s Services based at Rhode Island College is just one example of our partners who are doing challenging and important work on the ground.

Stan Brajer, a social worker who now directs the project, is passionately dedicated to supporting training for people working in the public child welfare system in Rhode Island.

In spring 2024, Stan invited us to deliver two training sessions for supervisors, case workers, and social workers at the state’s Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) — giving them a powerful self-advocacy tool to share with the children and families they support.



To learn more about how the Right Question Strategy can be applied in child welfare, both with families and colleagues, listen to the Partnership Connections podcast, hosted by Stan Brajer. In an episode titled, "Are You Asking the Right Questions?: An Approach to Building Client And Professional Agency," Brajer talks to Naomi Campbell, director of RQI's Legal Empowerment Program, about RQI's approach for building client and professional agency. **Visit rightquestion.org/blog** and scroll to the post on February 6, 2025.

Honoring the late Art Ellison

For over three decades, Art Ellison was a beloved champion of RQI's work, directly contributing to the development of the Right Question Strategy and paving the way for our extensive work with adult literacy programs around the country. In fall 2024, RQI co-founders Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana gave the keynote presentation at the New Hampshire Adult Education Conference, attended by over 150 adult educators, in Art's honor. It was special for us to be part of the event, introduce our strategy to adult educators, and hear insights from those who have long been integrating it into their work.





Educators at the 2024 Institute for Common Power Symposium using the Question Formulation Technique.

Fostering Communities of Learning & Inquiry

By supporting educators and cultivating partnerships with educational organizations, RQI works to make the transformative power of question formulation available to every student in every classroom. When students develop better question-asking skills, their confidence, curiosity, critical thinking, and engagement increase, enhancing learning for all grade levels and content areas.

In 2024, our team trained more than 3,000 teachers and education leaders across the U.S. in the Question Formulation Technique (QFT).

In 2024, RQI collaborated with the Maine Department of Education Office of Interdisciplinary Instruction to create a new, online course that the department now runs multiple times a year. The course introduces educators to the QFT and effective ways to adapt the process for learning across content areas. It's open to any Maine teachers for free. The department also designed on-demand

professional learning modules on the QFT to support teachers with inquiry-based learning.

RQI participated in a symposium in Alabama, organized by the Institute for Common Power, for educators to learn up close about the Civil Rights Movement. Our session, titled "The Power of Question Formulation for Agency, Advocacy, and Action," brought 36 educators together to practice the QFT, investigate links between question-asking and civic education, and plan action steps for themselves and their students.

Our work to build sustained communities of practice got a boost this year with a second multiyear Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Program (TPS) grant focused on engaging currently underserved populations, particularly educators and students in rural and low-income schools. This funding will allow us to expand the use of QFT-TPS resources, reaching new communities and deepening integration of the QFT among existing partners.

We're seeing more districts and educational organizations embrace the Question Formulation Technique, integrate it into existing programs, and sustain it in systematic ways. For example, the National Council for History Education's Rural Experience in America program has integrated the QFT as a core part of their three-part professional learning opportunity for teachers to develop place-based interdisciplinary units that connect students to their rural communities. And other national educational organizations such as New American History, RetroReport, National History Day, the Bill of Rights Institute, Edutopia, and more, have featured the QFT in new educational resources.

In higher education, RQI has been exploring how the QFT can build institutional capacity in support of asking better questions across disciplines, for both learning and research purposes. We conducted training for faculty and Ph.D. students in chemistry and environmental sciences at the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT). Instructors who have started using the QFT to encourage students to formulate their own

questions report the practice enhances their teaching and supports student learning.

Professor Bhavani Balasubramanian at NJIT uses RQI's techniques to encourage her organic chemistry students to become more active participants in their own learning — a tall order for an 8:30 a.m. class. Students report that formulating their own questions has transformed how they engage with the lecture content and helped them study more efficiently for exams, because they are actively seeking answers. Another benefit: Her classes are more animated and she's finding more enjoyment in teaching.

Meanwhile, after a QFT workshop with the Harvard math department, math instructors shared that they are seeing the technique's utility for problem-solving and higher-order thinking in their undergraduate classes. They have noticed their students' questions becoming more creative and reflective as they engage with the process.



2024 Institute for Common Power Symposium.

The QFT: Research Spotlight

What happens when students are explicitly taught to ask better questions?

RQI has been observing the effects of our evidence-based method, the Right Question Strategy, on student learning across subject areas for thirty years. We have found that promoting students' ability to formulate questions in the classroom facilitates students' engagement, comprehension, and discovery — and ultimately contributes to raising more motivated lifelong learners.

In 2024, new independent research showed the impact of question formulation training for early learners (ages 4-10) in a summer enrichment program in Birmingham, Alabama.

Dr. Cora Causey at the University of Alabama Birmingham and Dr. Amelia Spencer at Birmingham Southern University chose the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) as the focus of their study because it's a strategy that, in their words, "can be tailored to address all students' unique needs, developmental levels, and diverse backgrounds, fostering a safe environment for curiosity and questioning within a structured learning environment."

Their study showed that early learners who learned the QFT "demonstrated significant gains in phonemic awareness and oral story retelling," key skills for literacy acquisition.

Their findings fit with conclusions reached by other independent researchers.

For instance, in a randomized controlled study described in her doctoral dissertation, Mary T. Fernand found that high school students who used the QFT in a writing program achieved

higher scores in persuasive writing than their counterparts in the comparison group.

Meanwhile, Shelby Clark, Allen G. Harbaugh, and Scott Seider, writing in the *Journal of Adolescence*, determined the QFT contributed to increasing adolescent students' curiosity — and that high adherence to the QFT steps and dosage has a positive impact.

At the university level, Mindi Summers, Jordan Fernandez, and colleagues studied the QFT in an undergraduate upper-division biology class. They found that the QFT facilitated student engagement by increasing curiosity and joy of learning —and it benefited collaboration and creativity in groups.

Causey and Spencer are currently building on their initial study to further explore the benefits of the QFT in early learners.

Dive deeper

Causey, C., & Spencer, A., (2024). Student-generated questions: An exploration of an instructional strategy with young children. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 53, 101608.

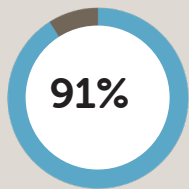
Clark, S., Harbaugh, A. G., & Seider, S. (2019). Fostering adolescent curiosity through a question brainstorming intervention. *Journal of Adolescence*, 75, 98–112.

Fernand, M. T. (2016) Effects of the Question Formulation Technique on secondary students' argument writing achievement scores [Doctoral dissertation, Western Connecticut State University].

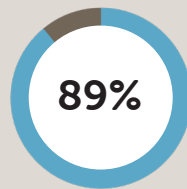
Summers, M., Fernandez, J., Handy-Hart, C.-J., Kulle, S., & Flanagan, K. (2024). Undergraduate students develop questioning, creativity, and collaboration skills by using the Question Formulation Technique. *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 15(2).

Impact by the Numbers

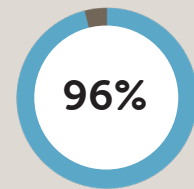
A recent survey of educators in the Right Question Institute's online network showed the value of RQI's strategy for students *and* teachers. Educators who used the Question Formulation Technique said the following:



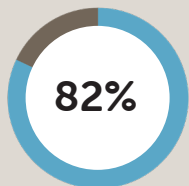
Students think deeply about the topic they're studying when using the QFT.



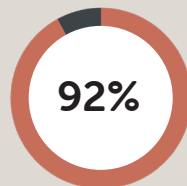
Students become more curious about the topic.



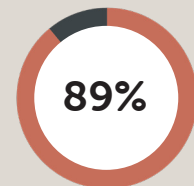
Students who use the QFT are engaged in their learning.



Students participate even if they don't usually do so.



The QFT improved their ability to foster student engagement.



The QFT made them a more effective teacher.

Testimonials

“[The Right Question Strategy] allows people who don't usually speak up to find their own voice. They don't have to depend on me or others to speak for them ... they speak for themselves.” — **Community educator and advocate**

“It has been very impactful in a deep and lasting way — something that has stuck as a technique and not just been picked up as a flashy thing to do.” — **Educator**

“I knew I was on the right track when my students started complaining that I was making them think too much!” — **Educator**

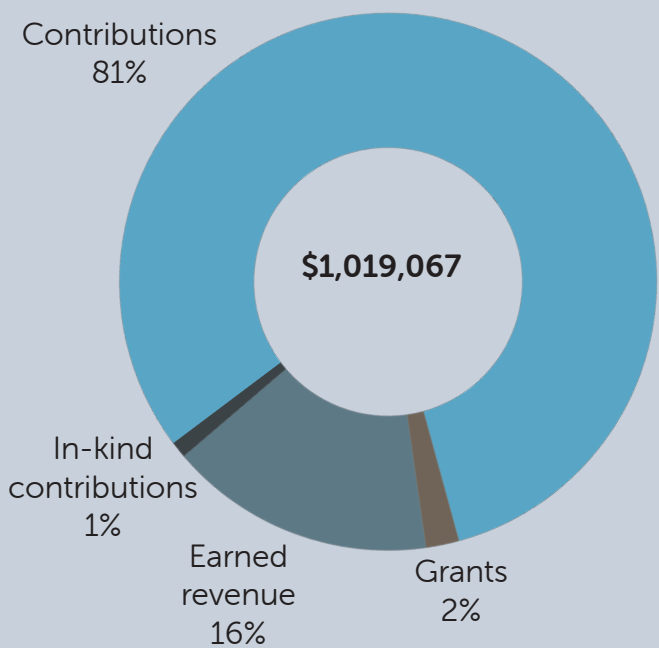
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The Right Question Strategy

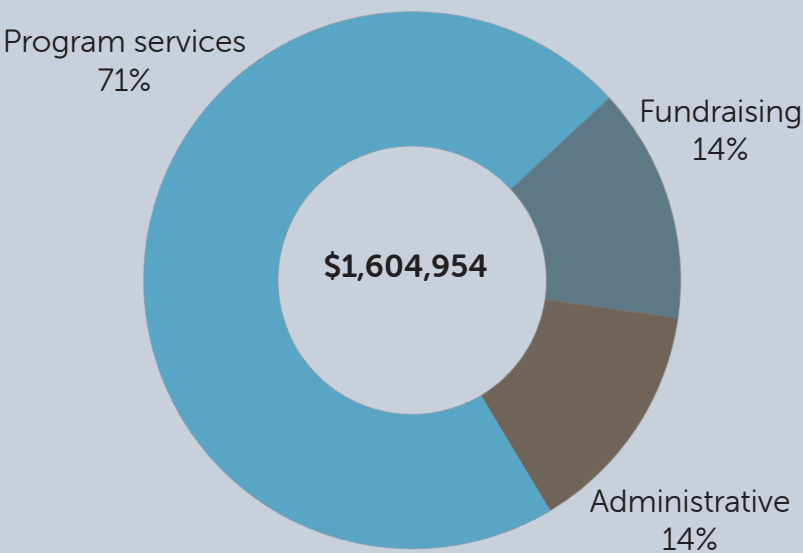
The Right Question Strategy (RQS) is a unique educational approach that develops people's skills of formulating one's own questions and focusing on decisions that affect them. The RQS includes two key methods: the Question Formulation Technique and the Voice in Decisions Technique. The strategy is delivered through educational institutions and organizations, legal service providers, health care organizations, social service organizations, community-based organizations, and public agencies.

Financials and Supporters

FY24 operating revenue



FY24 operating expenses



Operating revenue	\$ 1,019,067
Operating expenses	\$ 1,604,954
Net operating revenue	\$ -585,887
Interest and unrealized gains	\$ 285,803
Cash reserves and equity	\$ 2,982,590



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