**Introduction and Background of Organization**

Raising A Reader (RAR)’s national family engagement and literacy program has helped more than 1.5 million children and families successfully build, practice and sustain literacy routines vital to academic success since 1999, with special attention to children at highest risk for educational failure. RAR’s mission is to engage caregivers in a routine of book sharing with their children from birth through age eight to foster healthy brain development, healthy relationships, a love of reading, and the literacy skills critical for school success.

**History**

Founded in 1999 as one of the nation’s earliest venture philanthropy enterprises, RAR has a long history of innovation and occupies a unique space in the nonprofit literacy world by filling a gap in family engagement programming for children ages 0-8. In 2001, RAR was in two California counties serving 16,500 children. Today, RAR reaches more than 120,000 children and families each year throughout the US, 75% of which are families living at or below the poverty line and 48% English Language Learners. Since its inception 17 years ago, RAR has reached over 1.5 million children and families throughout the country.

**Select Accomplishments**

RAR offers a program with proven effects and scalability. Thirty two *independent* evaluations have demonstrated significant increases in time families spend reading together, positive child language/literacy outcomes and school readiness across diverse cultural and language demographics. RAR has had a number of major accomplishments over the last year, including the following:

* In 2015, RAR served more than 125,000 children throughout the country, with 80% of those served living at or below the poverty line.
* In October 2012, RAR was awarded its first federal grant under the U.S. Department of Education’s *Innovative Approaches to Literacy* program. This two-year grant will allow RAR to serve 20,000 new pre-school and school-age children throughout the country. RAR can now point to recognition by the U.S. Department of Education as an evidence-based, innovative approach to literacy.
* As part of a multi-year strategic growth effort to expand RAR’s model to serve children through age 8, RAR successfully engaged school districts throughout the country to reach more than 20,000 new school-age students in 2013.
* RAR was awarded a grant from Annie E. Casey’s Evidence-based Practice Group to further evaluate RAR’s expansion to serve children ages 0-8 and their families. The project will examine RAR’s effects on short-term outcomes in parenting practices, child language and literacy, the relationship between parenting and child outcomes and lead to RAR’s next large scale Randomized Control Trial.
* RAR added additional titles to its vast book collection, including those in languages such as titles in Burmese, Chinese, Arabic and Somali, while others were added as extensions to existing special collections including Financial Literacy, Appalachian, African American and LGBT. RAR now has more than 20 special collections.

**Programs and Activities**

RAR’s unique contribution to the nonprofit early literacy field is its capacity to engage families and help to develop the kind of home-based literacy habits and home-program connections that are very difficult to maintain but are closely tied to children’s academic success. RAR provides a turnkey program that is among a handful of cost-effective interventions with extensive evaluation evidence demonstrating effectiveness in increasing family engagement, literacy skills and emergent literacy skills in children.

RAR rotates bright red bags filled with award-winning books into children’s homes on a weekly basis, exposing children on average to over 100 books per rotation cycle. RAR pairs this book rotation with parent training and information on how to effectively share books to promote children’s early literacy skills and love of learning. Families are also connected with their local public and school libraries and children receive a blue library book bag at the end of the program to keep so that they can continue the practice of borrowing books and build a lifelong habit of reading. RAR is an evidence-based, scalable and affordable model through which schools can engage families in home-based literacy practices.

RAR’s family engagement and literacy program has more than twenty-three independent evaluations that demonstrate the program’s impact over time and across settings. RAR’s scalable, affordable and sustainable family engagement model fills an important gap in high-quality nonprofit programming for children ages 0-8 at high-risk for educational failure. The most recent large-scale experimental study by the University of Texas, Houston, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, demonstrated that RAR, coupled with parent-oriented activities (a major component of the RAR program), demonstrates the potential of closing achievement gaps between children of color in poverty and their Caucasian peers.

**Population Served**

Last year, RAR served over 130,000 children and families, 52% of whom cited English as their primary language, 38% Spanish, 3% Chinese and 7% other. RAR participants are children birth to age eight, families and caregivers. Children and families served by Raising A Reader represent a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Currently, 42% of RAR families are Latino, 34% Caucasian, 14% African American, 6% Asian American, and 5% other.

RAR has a targeted focus on children and families most in need of early literacy supports. As many of these families are hard to reach and often disengaged from formal education settings, RAR has established unique delivery models to meet children where they are through informal settings such as home nursing, migrant education, and home visiting programs. RAR is also effective in more traditional program settings including school classrooms, community centers, preschools, Head Start classrooms and adult education settings.