Read to Grow

Leading for greater impact in a literacy organization

The Inspiration

Read to Grow is an organization that raises awareness about the importance of early literacy and putting literacy resources in the hands of young children's caregivers, early educators, and health providers. Their mission and work in Connecticut, led by Executive Director Suzannah Holsenbeck, is like that of so many organizations across the nation.

What's not so commonplace is their approach.

READ TO GROW

—— OUR MISSION ——

To promote language skills and literacy for children, beginning at birth, and to support parents as their babies' first teachers.

Avoiding Intention-Impact Gaps

So, what specifically makes Read to Grow distinct?

The Read to Grow team works every day to avoid the intention-impact gap that's typical for this type of organization—failing to use population-specific data to inform targeted design and execution of their programming and resources.

In other words, Read to Grow has begun to distinguish itself from so many other organizations that are similarly strong on mission by moving beyond a general, one-size-fits-all approach to their portfolio to one that is more tailored. Today, Read to Grow is dogged about placing key data on their target population at the core of their work, and are therefore more likely to generate positive uptake and traction, be culturally responsive, and drive impact.

We think of avoiding this intention-impact gap as the difference between mounting broad *awareness-raising efforts* and implementing *community-based engagement* work.

Charting a Path Forward

What, then, has the Read to Grow journey to transcend a broad, one-size-fits-all approach looked like? Here are a few snapshots:

For years, as a testament to the importance of their mission and to guide their programming, the team focused on general literacy rates in specific communities and across the state.

- But in early 2020, they began to question whether they had specific enough information on their population's literacy needs to drive optimal programming and resource design.

Through a partnership with Lectio, Read to Grow analyzed their portfolio against their mission and target goals, and the specific needs of their participants and those they hoped to reach and serve.

- We led a series of 8 sessions with Holsenbeck and her team of 15, so they could do a deep dive on all three program models (*Books for Babies*, *Books for Kids*, *Early Steps to School Success*) and examine all relevant data.
- The team began designing: 1) a data-gathering effort to capture community-specific cultural, racial/ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, and 2) a series of stakeholder focus groups to better understand contexts, assets, and needs.

Community-Based Engagement Work:

Using Population Data for a Targeted, Responsive Approach

A Snapshot of the Results

60% increase in families requesting books

The organization reallocated resources to create a position that is focused solely on leading data-driven community engagement work *(e.g., developing metrics, methods, analyses)*

$125K additional, initial funding secured to expand and target programming when the data shows clear need and potential impact