

RAISING a Reader

MASSACHUSETTS

Celebrating

20 YEARS

ANNUAL REPORT | FY 2026

July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

Dear Supporters,

As author C.S. Lewis once wrote, "The future is something which everyone reaches at the rate of sixty minutes an hour, whatever he does, whoever he is." Time moves steadily forward, giving us moments to stop, reflect, and appreciate all that has transpired.

As Raising a Reader Massachusetts' Executive Director, We've been thinking a lot about time lately, especially as we celebrate 20 years in Massachusetts. Two decades of helping children and families build strong foundations for lifelong learning is a milestone worth celebrating. Since our start in 2006, our team has brought our mission to life by helping to close the literacy opportunity gap for children from birth to age six in under-resourced communities, helping families develop and sustain shared reading habits at home. Through the foresight of the Greenlight Fund, and the unwavering support of John Simon and Margaret Hall, this organization that began in a small office in Chelsea, MA, has grown far beyond anyone's expectations. Today, we serve over 20 communities across the Commonwealth through close partnerships with over 100 trusted early education and community-based organizations. In the years since our founding, we have worked with over 120,000 children and their families. Together, we are helping families and communities break the cycle of low literacy and create stronger foundations for children's lifelong learning.

Every child comes into the world ready to learn. In the early years, a child's brain is developing rapidly, absorbing languages, sounds, and experiences in the world around them. These formative years provide a critical opportunity to build the foundation for learning and development.

The benefits of early literacy extend far beyond the classroom. Strong literacy skills help build confidence, develop a foundation for lifelong learning, and open doors to future educational and career opportunities. Investing in early literacy is an investment in a child's lifelong potential – and in the strength and well-being of our communities.

In FY 2026, we strengthened our partnerships and expanded our work to put the tools, books, and knowledge families need to build strong early literacy skills directly into their hands. Unfortunately, too many children enter school without the literacy skills they need to thrive. Rather than reporting on the problem, we are focused on fixing it with our evidence-based model.

Our team continues to listen, learn, analyze, and innovate to find new ways to make literacy meaningful, engaging, and fun for everyone who participates in the Raising a Reader Massachusetts program. Our program celebrates the diversity of our communities by offering books and resources in multiple languages and meeting families where they are. Designed to be inclusive and responsive, our program gives every child and family the opportunity they need to build a strong foundation for lifelong learning.

We are excited to share highlights from another year of meaningful impact. None of this life-changing work would be possible without the generosity of our donors, the engagement of our board, the commitment of our partners, and the dedication of our staff. We feel incredibly fortunate to work with this amazing team. Every day they bring their passion and deep commitment to the children, families, and communities we serve.

As we celebrate 20 years of raising readers, we are filled with gratitude for all we have accomplished together and energized by all that lies ahead. Thank you for believing in this work to help ensure every child has the opportunity to build the literacy skills they need to learn, thrive, and grow. **Literacy changes everything.**

With gratitude,

Christine Ward, Executive Director

Mercedes Dahar, Board of Directors Chair

"The goal of early childhood education should be to activate the child's own natural desire to learn."

- Maria Montessori

OUR MISSION & COMMUNITIES

Our mission is to close the literacy opportunity gap among children birth to age six in under-resourced communities by helping families develop and practice shared home reading habits.

We empower families with the knowledge, tools, and confidence to be active participants in their child's education, building on their success as their child's first teacher. By fostering a love of reading, strengthening caregiver behaviors, and establishing lasting family reading habits, we help children enter kindergarten ready to learn.

COMMUNITIES WE SERVE:

Our Program Team members are located across the state with a deep understanding of their local communities. Each team member works with program implementer staff to determine the best way to conduct the book rotation and parent/caregiver workshops.

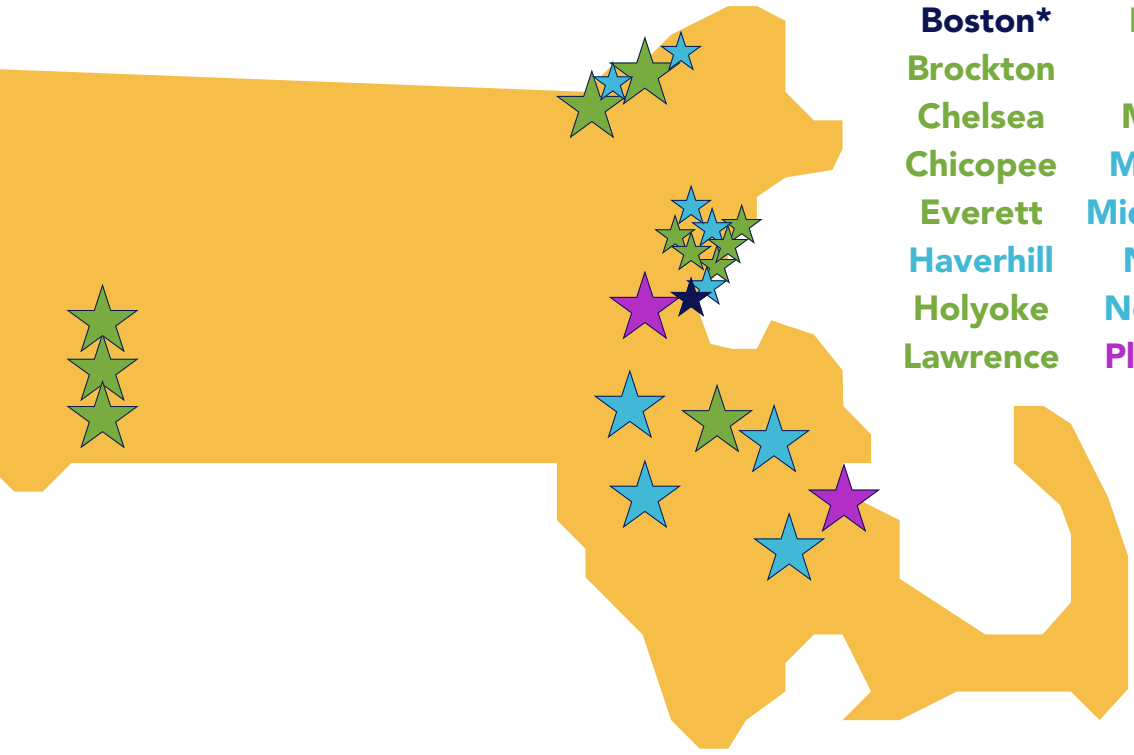


Access to age-appropriate, high-quality books (in nine different languages) combined with coaching parents/caregivers on how to best engage children in books results in an increase in reading frequency, quality, and ultimately, kindergarten readiness.

We work with partners located in Boston, 11 Gateway Cities*, seven communities with parent organizations in those Gateway Cities (Middleboro, Norton, Norwood, Saugus, Wakefield, Whitman, and Winthrop), and two satellite communities (West Newton and Plymouth).

Through our satellite model, RAR-MA offers a tailored train-the-trainer approach for organizations located outside of our core communities.

**Gateway Cities are midsize urban centers that anchor regional economies around the state. - MassINC*



Boston*
Brockton
Chelsea
Chicopee
Everett
Haverhill
Holyoke
Lawrence
Lowell
Lynn
Malden
Methuen
Middleboro
Norton
Norwood
Plymouth
Revere
Saugus
Springfield
Wakefield
West Newton
Winthrop

- **Gateway Cities**
- **Communities with parent organizations in Gateway Cities**
- **Satellite Communities**

**Boston is the only location that does not fall within these categories.*

OUR IMPACT

The impact of our work can be seen in each child, caregiver, and partner who takes part in the Raising a Reader Massachusetts program in communities throughout Massachusetts. In FY 2026, we reached over 7,200 children and families, helping to eliminate the cycle of low literacy as we work to build a lifelong love of literacy through family engagement.



3,000
Titles in Rotation



7,667
Children Served



106
Partner Implementers

SPOTLIGHT: MERRIMACK VALLEY

Every year we survey a specific area we serve, and our FY 2026 Family Survey focused on the Merrimack Valley. This geographic cohort approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the local impact and benefits to families.

WHO DID THIS SURVEY COVER?
32% response rate (286 responses) in the Merrimack Valley region with 906 children served.



84% ...of families now have a routine for looking at books with their children.

67% ...of children asked questions while looking at a book with their caregivers.

72% ...of families talked about new words after reading a book.

"I have learned that taking a little time each day to invest in your child reading helps them understand what we are reading about and makes them more engaged in what they are reading.
- RAR-MA Caregiver

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

We reach families including parents, caregivers, and children through trusted community partners. We worked with 106 partner implementers in under-resourced communities across Massachusetts.

Number of Partners by Type
FY 2026

Child Care Center 44	Schools 30	Playgroup System 17
Home Visiting Program 8	Non-Traditional Setting 6	Family Child Care Centers 1

Number of Partners by Region
FY 2026

Greater Boston 34	Boston Area 23	Pioneer Valley 22
Southeast Area 13	Merrimack Valley 12	Satellite *(Fee for Service)** 2

**Through our satellite model, RAR-MA offers a tailored train-the-trainer approach for organizations located outside of our core communities.*

"I enjoy seeing the children go home with their red bag of books and how excited they were when they came back saying they looked and read books with their families."
- RAR-MA Program Partner



DUAL INTERVENTION MODEL

With our program implementers, we teach families dialogic reading strategies to effectively engage children in interactive reading that supports healthy brain development. We also provide age-appropriate and culturally relevant books through our weekly book bag rotation.

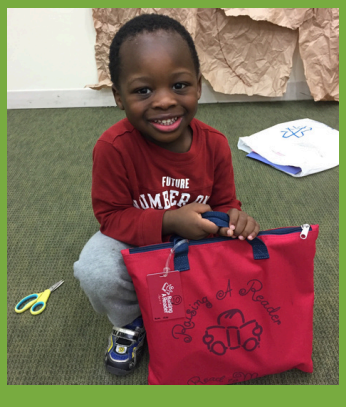
PROGRAM IMPLEMENTERS + PROGRAM MANAGERS + PARENT/CAREGIVER EDUCATION + BOOK ACCESS = **KINDERGARTEN READINESS!**

20 YEARS OF RAISING READERS

2026 marks the 20th anniversary of Raising a Reader Massachusetts. In 2006, the Greenlight Fund - led by John Simon and Margaret Hall - spearheaded the effort to bring the Raising a Reader model to the Commonwealth due to low early literacy rates that were impacting families.

WHERE WE BEGAN

The first community in Massachusetts to welcome Raising a Reader Massachusetts was Chelsea. From the beginning, the community and our partners embraced our mission, and we continue to work within that same community today.



WHERE WE ARE TODAY



Today, Raising a Reader Massachusetts has worked with over 120,000 children and their families. We operate in five regions with over 20 communities, including Boston, and we work with over 100 outstanding Program Implementation Partners.



"Our first community was Chelsea and we were so engaged…when Raising a Reader enters a community, we are part of the community. People could hear from others they live with that this program is important, why it is important, here is how you do it, and it is so fun and your kids are going to love it… My hope is in the next 20 years that Raising a Reader Massachusetts has a presence in every gateway community, the way we were in Chelsea."

- Donna DiFillippo, Founding Executive Director

2026 DINNER WITH AN AUTHOR

Our signature fundraiser, Dinner with an Author Gala, was held on May 14, 2026, at the Mandarin Oriental, Boston. The event provided attendees with a unique opportunity to engage with 27 best-selling authors while celebrating our 20th anniversary with a luxurious and lively Roaring Twenties theme. The evening was made even more special with aour fabulous hosts - Kiss 108's Lisa Donovan and Billy Costa. We also heard from Dr. Renée Greenfield, Head of School at the Carroll School, about brain development and early literacy.



The evening concluded with a lively auction, raising unrestricted funds to support our programs where they are needed most. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we raised over $430,000 in unrestricted funds.



We are deeply grateful to our 270 guests, 27 authors, 27 sponsors, and 55 in-kind donors. Along with our dedicated Gala Committee and Host Committee, Board, and volunteers, the entire Raising a Reader Massachusetts team came together to celebrate a shared love of books, making this incredible evening a success and furthering our mission to close the literacy opportunity gap.



DINNER WITH AN AUTHOR 2026
RAISING A READER MASSACHUSETTS
Celebrating 20 Years of Raising Readers

Dinner with an Author Featured Authors & Guest Speakers

Liam Callanan
Christy Cashman
Heather Clark
Julie Carrick Dalton
Laura Delano
Andre Dubus III
Emily Franklin
Josh Funk
Erin Gates
Lori Gold
Gish Jen
Jessica Brilliant Keener
Caroline Kepnes
Renée Kurilla
William Martin
Claire Messud
Ben Mezrich
Tonya Mezrich
Lex Mongo
Celeste Ng
Peter H. Reynolds
Hank Phillippi Ryan
Kate Santoro
Dan Shaughnessy
Liz Walker
Karen Winn
James Wood
Laura Zigman
Hosts: Lisa Donovan and Billy Costa
Keynote Speaker: Dr. Renée Greenfield

THANK YOU!

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

LISA'S BOOK CLUB

Since January 2023, Lisa and her community have been a transformative force for Raising a Reader MA. To date, Lisa's Book Club has raised over $50,000, mobilized dozens of book clubs, and championed over authors from a wide variety of genres in support of our mission. This collaboration has also enabled us to build a connection with 90+ Cellars. They have generously donated wine to our 2026 Dinner with an Author Gala, and presented us with a $10,000 check at the June 2026 Book Club event.



We are grateful for the wonderful connections that Lisa Donovan and her Lisa's Book Club events have allowed us to make with members of the community and businesses. Lisa is a true champion for early literacy!





PARTNERSHIPS

In FY 2026, we were excited to receive financial and volunteer support from organizations throughout Massachusetts to further our mission. They included:

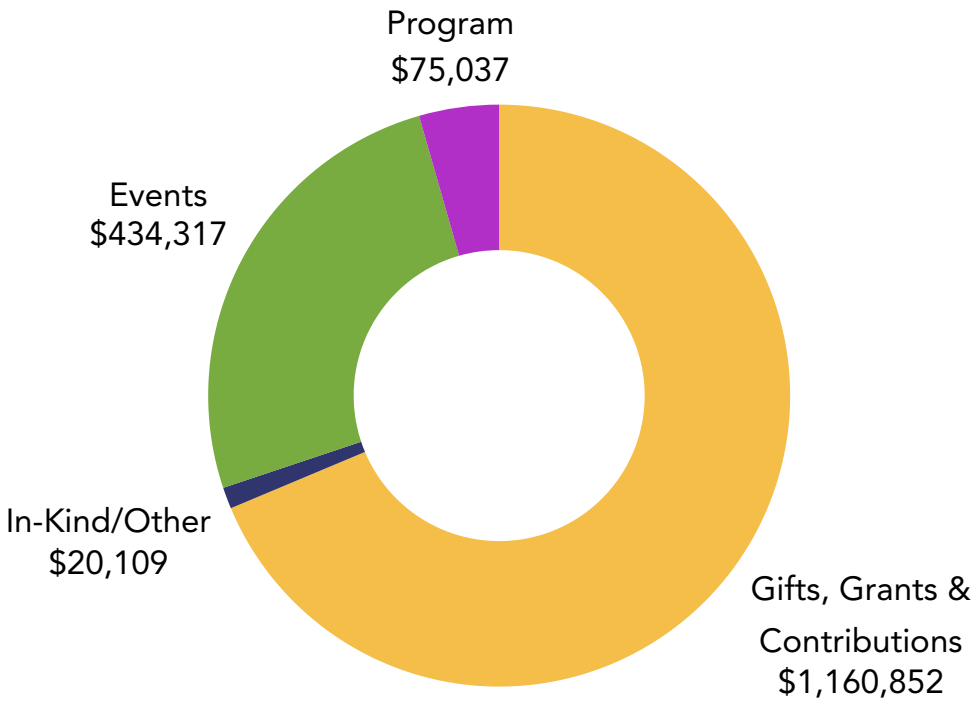
- Book Ends Winchester
- Direct Federal Credit Union
- Deloitte
- Praxis Precision Medicines
- 90+ Cellars

There were many others, and our work would not be possible without the community support we receive!

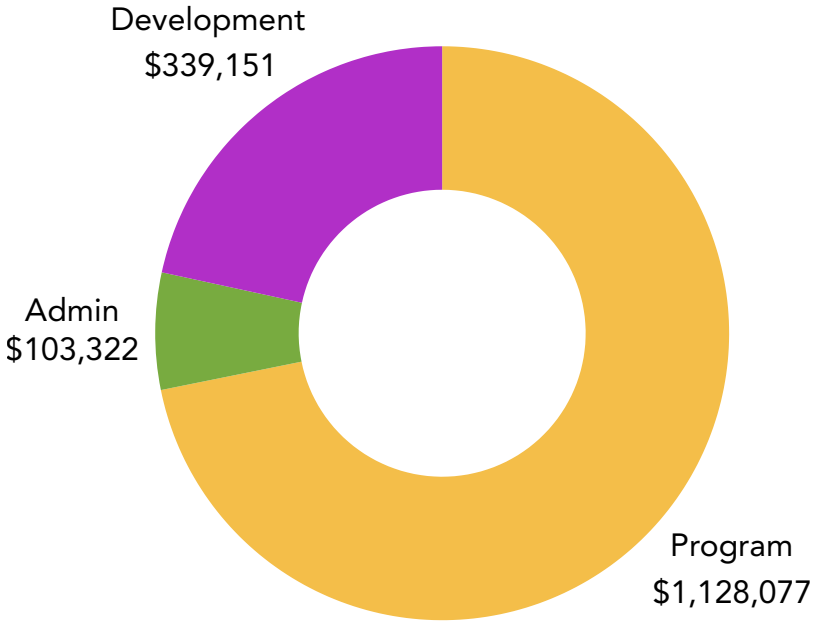


FY 2026 FINANCIALS

Revenue $1,690,315

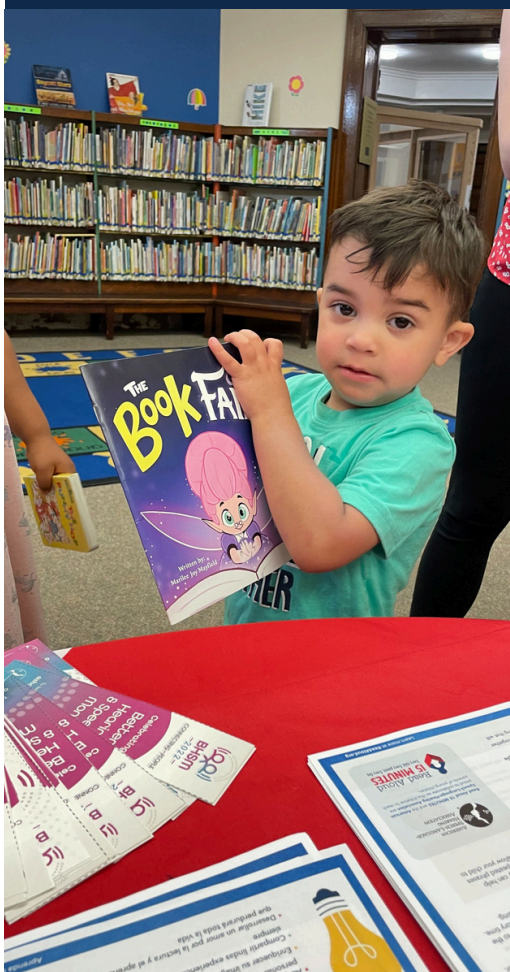


Expenses $1,570,550



Fiscal Year 2026 - 7/1/25 to 6/30/26

"This partnership is so special, as it is one of the earliest, positive family engagement opportunities offered. I truly appreciate all of the resources that RAR provides to our families and it is always a wonderful experience."
- RAR-MA Program Partner



OUR LEADERSHIP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mercedes Dahar (Chair)
Executive Director of Customer Success, athenahealth

Annie Knickman Plancher (Vice Chair)
Vice President of Grantmaking and Portfolio Management, CJP

Jill Quinby (Treasurer)
Audit Partner, Deloitte & Touche LLP

Katy Caldwell (Secretary)
Partner, Ropes & Gray LLP

Maggie Begley
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Chief Investment Officer, Fidelity Investments

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Audit Senior Manager, Deloitte & Touche LLP

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Partner, Ropes & Gray LLP

Dale Dowdie
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Pati Fernández
Chief Development Officer, Esperanza Academy

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Vice President, Portfolio Manager Team Lead, Eastern Bank

Sara Katz Razzaghi
Executive Director, Inspiring Educators

Patricia Schiapelli
Vice President of Sales, Northern Bank

Shehnaz Vollmuth
Director, Sales Success & Development, Magellan Jets

** Term finished mid-FY 2026 / ** Term began mid-FY 2026*

Community Advisors to the Board

Jeanette Velez - Director of Family & Community Services, Everett Public Schools

Lilliana Tirado Arteaga - Boston Community Hub School Coordinator, Umana Academy

EMERGING LEADERS BOARD

The Emerging Leaders associate board is a a mixture of young and mid-level career professionals who regularly take action to raise awareness and funds for our core mission and develop into future leaders.

Annie Ladinsky (Chair)
Communications Director, MassEcon

Mikaela Alioto
Content Marketing Manager, Valora

Sabrina Bauer
Regional Marketing Manager, New England Marketing, VHB

Weston Cohen
Senior Consultant, Deloitte & Touche LLP

Amanda DiMatteo
Of Counsel, Peabody & Arnold LLP

Emily Leinbach
Senior Manager, Global & Social Impact Marketing (Sustainability Practice), Bain & Company

Olivia Miller
Team Associate, Philanthropy Massachusetts

Danielle Stone
Emerson College - School of Communications

"Raising a Reader [MA] has helped me incorporate books into our every day routines."
- RAR-MA Caregiver



OUR DONORS

$50,000 and More

Bancel Philanthropies
Boston Children's Hospital
Liberty Mutual Foundation
Paul and Kristen Reeder
The Philanthropic Initiative

$20,000 - $49,999

Adelaide Breed Bayrd Foundation
Amelia Peabody Foundation
William and Vicki Barke
Camille and David Carlstrom
Christy Cashman
Community Foundation of Western Mass
Cummings Foundation
Direct Federal Credit Union
Fordham Street Foundation
Don and Pam Hawley
Lawrence J. and Anne Rubenstein Charitable Foundation
Nathaniel and Elizabeth Stevens Foundation
Annie and Brian Plancher
John and Susan Simon
Summit Partners
The TJX Companies, Inc.
Van Otterloo Family Foundation

$10,000 - $19,999

A Chance for Progress
Bushrod H. Campbell and Adah F. Hall Charity Fund
Katy and Stephen Caldwell
John and Kelly Carroll
DCU for Kids
Deborah Munroe Noonan Memorial Fund, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee
Gregg and Robin Dooling
Grace E. Brooks Trust, Bank of America, N.A., Co-Trustee
Hamilton Company Charitable Foundation
Justin and Lydia Hayward
William and Mari-Ann Hogan
Homestead Foundation
Horne Family Foundation
Jeannette Hsu
Joan and Steve Kelly
Jessica and Josh Lutzker
Latitude Beverage Company
PNC Foundation
Town Fair Tire Foundation
Julie Tremblay and Ryan Oldham
UniFirst Corporation
William and Lia G Poorvu Family Foundation
Karen and Gilbert Winn
Winning Home Inc.
Yellow Wood Partners

$5,000 - $9,999

Beacon Hill Circle for Charity
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Bluestone Bank Charitable Foundation
BNY Mellon
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Damien and Maggie Chaviano
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Donna DiFillippo and Michael Ruttner
Eastern Bank Foundation
Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation
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Amy Kossnar and Alejandra Carvajal
Literature Junkies, LLC
Eric and Judith Lubershane
Myra Majewski
Jaime and Harry Manion
Mattoon Family
McCarthy Family Foundation Charity Fund, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee
Candace and Sean McManus
Mark McPherson
Kerry Nelson and Alan Milinazzo
Kelly and Frank Panayotou
Red Sox Foundation
Thomas Shapiro and Nadine Bonda
Melissa Steffy
Vertex Foundation

$2,500 - $4,999

Bryan Connor
Greg and Jennifer Demers
Mark and Marybeth Dooling
Dale Dowdie
Dan and Sue Farrell
Forst Foundation
Hillary Gabrieli and Chris Y Gabrieli
Emily Geer
Erica Gervais Pappendick and Ted Pappendick
Greater Lowell Community Foundation
Joshua and Giana Hebert
Angela Haynes and Clif Hirtle

OUR DONORS

$2,500 - $4,999 Continued

John W. Lacy Charitable Remainder Unitrust
Emiley Lockhart
MassMutual Financial Group
Jordan and Evonne Meranus
Moses Kimball Fund
Heather Murray and Rob Pawliuk
NetScout Systems Inc.
Nutter, McClennen & Fish, LLC
Roger and Lisa Krakoff Family Fund
Fiza Singh
Gilda Smart and Chris Picotte
Joseph Theis Jr.
United Way of Greater Plymouth County
Peter Wheeler and Elizabeth Munro

$1,000 - $2,499

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Everett and Hollie Briggs
Chuck Burd and Jean Verbridge
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Cynthia Croatti
Julie Carrick Dalton
Deloitte
Richard Garver
John Gorham
Garth Hoffman and Remy Stressenger
Mandi Hogan
Lisa and Jeff Kerrigan
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Christine Ward and Nick MacShane
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Jake Parenteau
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Robert and Geary Vail
Shehnaz and Cameron Vollmuth
Robert White
Mark Wiatrowski

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Bartaco
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Camille and David Carlstrom
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citizenM Boston Back Bay
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Columbus Hospitality Group
Mercedes Dahar and Philip Dennehy
Laura Delano
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Avra Estiatorio
Emily Franklin
George Howell Coffee
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Holyoke Community College
Jeannette Hsu
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Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum
Jennifer Kinsman
Kiss 108 Radio Station
Robert Klein
Jason and Heather Lang
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Lindsay Newell Interiors & Gardens
Litho-Craft
Tonya and Ben Mezrich
MiniLuxe
Montage Resorts
Mooo….Seaport
Museum of Fine Arts
Karen Osborn
Pink Carrot
POETRY Fashion
Raffles Boston
Rivian
Robert Klein Gallery
Rosa y Marigold
Hank Phillippi Ryan and Jonathan Shapiro
Salem Country Club
Samuels & Associates
Dan and Marilou Shaughnessy
Sorellina
Nadia Liu Spellman and Kyle Spellman
The Daily Catch
The Mandarin Oriental Boston
The Montage - Palmetto Bluff
The Newbury Boston
The Tox
The Wig Shop/Merkin Lounge
Julie Tremblay and Ryan Oldham
Van Leeuwen Ice Cream
Shehnaz and Cameron Vollmuth
WS Development
Wannamoisett Country Club

Includes funding pledged in FY 2026 and received in FY 2027.

"I really appreciate the commitment of RAR with the workshops implemented in our agency, and also how moms participate and learned."
- RAR-MA Partner





RAISING A READER MA TEAM

Christine Ward
Executive Director

Katee Duffy
Director of Programs

Angela Haynes
Director of Development

Maria Mombeleur
Associate Program Director

Isaí Jiménez
Associate Program Director

Guadalupe Panameño
Senior Program Manager

Nina Norfleet
Development and Communications Manager

Lindsay Woods
Executive Administrator and Data Analytics Manager

Claudia Chavarria
Program Manager

Faten EL-Gamal
Program Manager

Tatiana Keane Forero
Program Manager

Qin Li
Program Manager

RAISING a Reader
MASSACHUSETTS

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Visit our website to learn more!

www.raisingareaderma.org

Raising a Reader Massachusetts is a 501(c)(3) organization with EIN #80-0297898.

A United Way Partner Agency