

# AVIVARA

## Charting Impact Report \* Prepared 05.16.2012

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This report represents AVIVARA 's responses to Charting Impact, a joint project of **BBB Wise Giving Alliance**, **GuideStar USA Inc**, and **Independent Sector**. Charting Impact uses five simple yet powerful questions to encourage strategic thinking and help organizations share concise information about their plans and progress toward impact.



### AVIVARA

7202 33RD Ave Nw c/o Thomas Friedman,  
Seattle, WA 98117

<http://www.avivara.org>

### Mission:

To improve the quality of and access to education in Guatemala, and to cultivate interconnectedness between the peoples of Guatemala and the United States.

- CEO Reviewed
- Board Chair Reviewed
- Not yet stakeholder reviewed

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## 1. What are we aiming to accomplish?

The primary goal of Avivara is to improve the quality of and access to education in rural, poverty-impacted villages in Guatemala.

Schools in Guatemala, by any measure, are very poorly funded and have been considered "failing" by many outside observers (The U.N., human rights organizations, The World Bank, etc.) Our work and resources have provided not only encouragement and hope to both teachers and students, it has also met their very real and concrete needs in trying to improve the quality of education and enhance student success in those rural villages of Guatemala that have experienced a 500 year history of economic and political oppression and discrimination.

By increasing the quality of education in the villages and helping more students gain access to higher levels of education, we would expect to see the following long-term benefits (as shown in numerous international studies to be beneficial outcomes of improved and higher levels of education in a developing society):

1. Decreased infant and maternal mortality
2. Increased family economic capacity and decreased economic vulnerability (thus reducing the motivators for external and internal migration and allowing for a better quality of life.)
3. Slowing of the birth rate
4. Increased opportunities for women and indigenous groups
5. Increased civic participation
6. Decreased incidence of social risk factors (drug use, criminal activity, domestic violence, etc.)

Our goals over the next five years will be to continue the collaborative relationships we have developed with the schools we currently support, plus seek out schools that wish to engage in a more comprehensive "School Improvement Process" which would provide adequate funding for teacher and building administrator training, adequate curriculum resources (textbooks, school supplies, etc.) for all students in the school, and the utilization of student learning assessments to track student progress towards achieving basic literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking.

We also intend to continue expansion of our scholarship program and support those graduates who wish to continue on to study at the university level.

## 2. What are our strategies for making this happen?

Our strategies for improving educational quality in Guatemala include providing the following to schools and students in rural, poverty-impacted villages:

1. **School Improvement Grants** for teaching materials, classroom equipment, student supplies, school infrastructure projects, breakfast programs, and teacher development. This support helps to improve the general school environment,

gives teachers the feeling that they are being supported, and provides students with the supplies they need to attend and learn in school. Specifically we have provided funding to over eleven schools and 1600 students for the following items:

- a. Teaching materials and supplies, such as curriculum guides, photocopying services, textbooks, etc,
- b. Classroom equipment such as desks, tables, bookshelves, whiteboards, etc.
- c. Student supplies so that all students are able to attend school with the basic tools they need for learning (notebooks, pencils, erasers, etc.)
- d. School infrastructure projects such as additional classrooms, water systems, computer labs, etc.
- e. Breakfast programs so that children are not coming to school hungry and malnourished, which impedes their ability to learn.
- f. Teacher workshops on "best practices" teaching methods.
- g. Funding for supplemental teacher salaries in the areas of math and science.

2. **Scholarships** to students from those same rural villages. These scholarships help students from families living at the poverty level be able to attend secondary schools (junior high and high schools) only available in the larger towns and cities by covering the costs of transportation, books, and other necessary school supplies. We have provided scholarships to over 120 students, with three of our graduates now receiving assistance to continue their studies at the university level.

3. **After-school learning centers** - These centers provide homework assistance to students whose parents can neither read or write, and who lack the financial resources to purchase school supplies required by the schools. The two centers that we currently fund serve over 70 students a day.

While these efforts may seem small in the face of the massive reforms needed in the Guatemalan educational system, they do provide hope and encouragement to teachers, students and families who have been traditionally ignored and exploited by the current economic structures and interests in Guatemala.

### 3. What are our organization's capabilities for doing this?

Avivara has a strong and stable administrative team with extensive educational and non-profit administration experience, a committed Board of Directors who exercise thoughtful and careful oversight of the organization, and a growing number of volunteers involved in fundraising for the organization.

In Guatemala, we have established strong working relationships with the rural schools we support, collaborative partnerships with other Guatemalan NGOs and recognition by the Ministry of Education as an organization that is working thoughtfully and concretely to improve educational quality for the children in the rural areas.

Since its inception, Avivara has maintained the philosophy that it would distribute the donations it receives in the most effective, transparent and respectful way possible. Since its founding in 2008, our revenues and donor base have grown at a rate of approximately 60% each year. It is projected that by the end of 2011, Avivara will have raised over \$250,000 to support its educational improvement efforts in Guatemala.

As the donations we receive increase, our ability to help larger numbers of schools and students also increases. We currently accomplish this with an all-volunteer Board and an administrative staff with two unpaid volunteers and one paid Guatemalan staff member. This has allowed us to distribute approximately 90% of every dollar donated directly to programs, 3% to administration and 7% to fund-raising.

Our administrative staff has over 50 years of combined experience in education, including training pre and in-service teachers at the university level, and first-hand experience teaching in the rural schools we serve. This background and our willingness to share the daily realities of teaching in rural villages with only limited resources places Avivara in the unique position of being able to fully collaborate with Guatemalan teachers and be seen by those teachers as full partners in the struggle to improve education in their schools.

The primary limit to our work at the present time is funding. As that grows, our ability to channel more resources to the rural schools in Guatemala will increase. We have also worked with representatives of the Guatemalan Ministry of Education and foreign funding organizations such as USAID to advocate for more systemic changes in the Guatemalan education system. However, recent history has shown that neither the Guatemalan government and/or the Guatemalan Ministry of Education have the resources or political will and leadership to significantly improve the quality of education in Guatemala anytime in the near future.

## 4. How will we know if we're making progress?

It is very difficult at the present time to quantitatively chart progress in the key indicator of student learning. There is simply no valid or reliable standardized testing instruments currently being used on a regular basis in Guatemala to measure student learning progress. (Note: USAID is in the process of developing a standardized test, but it is still very much in the development phase.) We have begun to implement our own testing using the EGRA Reading Fluency test, and are working on the development on grade level literacy, numeracy and critical thinking assessment tools that can be used by the teachers to monitor their student's learning. These however, are quite challenging to develop and will need to be linguistically and culturally relevant to the students.

Therefore, our current indicators of program effectiveness come primarily from comments and evaluations we collect on an annual basis from the teachers in the schools we work with. However, these too have some bias since culturally a Guatemalan will rarely, if ever, say anything negative to someone who has provided them assistance. We also rely on our own personal observations, which from our years of experience in education is actually more critical and reflective about the impact of our work than what we receive from our program recipients.

In our scholarship program, it is much easier to measure results since we can use grades and graduation rates as indicators of the success of our scholarship program. Of the over 120 scholarships we have granted in the last three years, only 5 students have not been able to complete their program of studies.

In our after-school programs, our primary indicators of success and impact are the increasing number of students who use the centers on a regular basis. In some cases we do track the grades of those students who have learning disabilities to determine if they are getting the support they need to pass their classes.

All of this information is gathered and used by our staff and board to critically reflect on where our distribution of resources is having the most impact. It has also led to budget increases in those areas where we have seen the most impact on family economic capacity (scholarships) and toward those schools who have most effectively utilized the resources we have provided them in the past.

## 5. What have and haven't we accomplished so far?

We haven't brought about world peace. We haven't stopped the drug-trafficking and criminal violence in Guatemala, and we haven't rid the Guatemalan education system of corruption, inefficiency and indifference.

What we have accomplished has been to bring new energy, hope and commitment to improving education in village schools where the teachers and families have felt that they were pretty much forgotten by the Guatemalan government and the rest of the world. We have helped families realize their dream of having at least one member of their family complete high school.

We have seen parents who could only sign their name with a thumbprint listen to their children read and have tears of joy in their eyes. We have watched young women give their 6th grade graduation speech and indicate their hope for greater equality for women and indigenous peoples in Guatemala.

Guatemala is a country where if you wake up in the morning and your house hasn't been swept away by a mudslide, or your children had enough to eat for breakfast, you are having a good day. Long-term goals are a North American luxury. Here, people simply try to survive another day. And to do so is considered a blessing (Gracias a Dios!).

What we have learned as an organization is that imposing our values, beliefs and technologies upon the people of Guatemala is not only offensive and arrogant, it is also often not very productive. We have seen many well-meaning people come to Guatemala to help in ways that fit their own ideologies and preconceptions of what should be done, but then have their "help" inadvertently create either a greater dependency on a paternalistic "patron," or end up being graciously accepted by the Guatemalans, and then ignored and not maintained after the donors have left.

It is clear to us that any assistance we provide must grow out of a collaborative relationship that can take years to build and where the Guatemalan are the owners and primary definers of what is the next best step in their own development. All other efforts are pretty much doomed to failure and breakdown after the foreigners have returned to their own lives.

For these reasons our goals as an organization are very dynamic, organic and some times at odds with the "Logic Model" expectations of North American foundations. So, our adjustments have been to try and bridge the expectations and realities of two very different cultures, and to provide the most assistance we can to Guatemalan teachers and students in concrete and specific ways that make sense to them.