



2017-2019 Strategic Plan

Helping Save LGBTQ Lives into 2020

The Landscape

State Sponsored Homophobia Around The World

Around the world, approximately 80 countries have anti-homosexuality laws, and many more have other laws that discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. In too many countries around the world, LGBTQ people are routinely arrested, denied basic human rights, and are being brutally attacked, tortured or even murdered.

In fact, there are at least five countries where same sex intimacy is punishable by death.

The criminalization of same sex behavior results in a hostile environment for many LGBTQ people internationally. They are rejected by their families, evicted from their homes, persecuted by their community and targeted by police. The result is a reality where gay men are fired from their jobs and are forced into sex work. It is a reality where trans people face housing discrimination, homelessness, and restricted access to education and employment. It is a reality where lesbians experience violent corrective rape and other forms of sexual violence. It is a reality where people who are HIV-positive cannot get access to essential healthcare for fear of being "outed" and exposed to further persecution.

There are a small number of brave human rights defenders and civil society groups fighting for LGBTQ rights in these countries, providing a lifeline for support. However, for those not able to get access to these organizations or other forms of community, life in their home country is unbearable. For these individuals, leaving their home country can mean the difference between life and death.

Canadian Solution To A Global Problem

For over 50 years, Canada has been a humanitarian actor on the world stage and has become a leader on LGBTQ rights internationally. As the hard fought and won battle for marriage equality in 2005 signalled a turning point in LGBTQ rights, the focus of many has turned to the situation of LGBTQ people abroad who face violence and persecution. In 2006, a group of concerned LGBTQ people from Canada went to World Pride in Tel Aviv and met with a Palestinian youth who lived on the streets. This youth's plight inspired the group to help.

The result was Rainbow Railroad.

10 Years Of Vision And Innovation

Rainbow Railroad is a registered charitable organization that provides support to LGBTQ individuals seeking a safe haven from state-sponsored or enabled violence. This includes airfare and financial support for travel related costs, including costs immediately before and after travel. Beyond direct financial assistance, Rainbow Railroad provides information and resources on how to make an asylum claim directly in safer countries or through the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) resettlement process.

Since its founding in 2006, Rainbow Railroad has funded travel for nearly 200 individuals – with a record 81 people traveling to safety in 2016 alone. The majority of the cases funded have been from Jamaica, Nigeria and Uganda, but requests for help are increasingly coming from other regions of the world where the organization has few contacts and less expertise.

Originally a volunteer driven organization, in 2014 a grant from TD Bank supported the hiring of an Executive Director which relieved some of the pressure on its small working Board of Directors. But as the work of the organization has become better known demands have increased exponentially. In 2016, Rainbow Railroad received over 600 requests for help. Through an extensive verification process, this number results in over 300 open cases, the bulk of which are still handled by volunteers.

In 2016 Rainbow Railroad received a transformational grant from the Upside Down Tree Foundation – whose mission is to turn small charities upside down. This support, which will be repeated in 2017, has resulted in a sharp increase in our budget for travel support.

The support of the Upside Down Tree Foundation, coupled with the support of generous individuals, has allowed the organization to grow at a very fast pace. The speed and magnitude of this growth present the Board with a challenge: how it will govern the organization to move from scrambling to scaling. This plan is the three-year blueprint for the transition from a small grassroots entity to an effective, globally connected organization that will be sustainable in the long term.



Mission & Vision

Our Mission:

We help persecuted LGBTQ individuals get to safety.

Our Vision

A world where LGBTQ people have the freedom to live in a country where they can be free of persecution. Rainbow Railroad strives to be a trusted and globally connected organization that provides information and support to effectively help.

Our Beliefs & Practices

We are global leaders in providing information and support to help move LGBTQ people to safety.

We effectively use our global networks to help LGBTQ people in danger around the world get to safety by providing high quality information, personal support, and escape strategies.

We respect and support the empowerment of the people we help.

We are responsive and act/react with urgency.

We are collaborative and build partnerships.



Key Assumptions

This strategic plan is based on a series of issues and assumptions of how the current landscape affects our work, in addition to the current make-up of the organization.

Assumption

The potential for growth is vast – as the need increases

Implication for Rainbow Railroad

Rainbow Railroad attempts to meet this increasing demand as we help more people year after year. However, our response to this growing demand is constrained by our ability to fundraise to support direct casework and operating costs, our ability to recruit and train volunteers and staff, and our ability to build networks, contacts and knowledge to develop routes to safety.

There are people in many regions of the world who need our help

Given that fundraising is very competitive and can fluctuate from year to year, Rainbow Railroad needs to ensure there is a steady cashflow each year at a sustainable level. Additionally, we need to pace our growth at a rate that allows us to grow the supporting infrastructure for the organization and build and maintain the knowledge base and relationships that are essential to our work.

Rainbow Railroad's initial success was based on leveraging the expertise and contacts of volunteers to help a small number of people reach safety. The rapid increase in casework challenges our existing operating methods, and Rainbow Railroad must expand its toolbox in order to meet this growing demand.

Assumption

Implication for Rainbow Railroad

Canada and other countries that support LGBTQ rights are willing to help

Rainbow Railroad is uniquely positioned to provide the Canadian federal government, and other international bodies with advice on how the immigration and refugee system can be improved for persecuted LGBTQ people who need to move. Rainbow Railroad needs to engage in government relations in order to increase the number of people we are able to bring to safety.

Bringing more people to safety requires collaboration

While Rainbow Railroad is unique as one of very few organizations helping LGBTQ people get to safety, the organization recognizes that there are a wealth of organizations in Canada and abroad with expertise in refugee settlement issues, international LGBTQ issues, and immigration issues which Rainbow Railroad can leverage in order to meet its goals. In addition, building international civil society connections will be crucial to increasing its work.

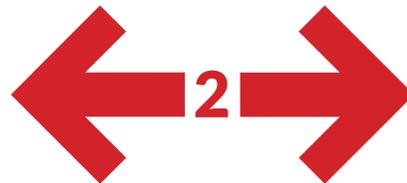
Rainbow Railroad will have the capacity to meet its goals

Rainbow Railroad's success is borne out of an understanding that the organization had to be efficient and lean, adroitly utilizing its volunteers and limited resources to maximum effectiveness. However, Rainbow Railroad has grown to a point where it needs to reassess the human resources it needs to do its work effectively. This inevitably means determining what operations are necessary in order to meet the organization's ultimate objective – bringing more people to safety from more regions around the world.

3 Strategic Priorities to 2020



Deepen
& Broaden
Current Services



Expand
Reach To New People
With New Tools



Build
The Capacity to Meet the
Organization's Needs

Strategic Priority 1

Deepen Current Services

Deepening and broadening current services ultimately means bringing more people to safety. In 2015 Rainbow Railroad provided resources which allowed 29 people to travel to safety, its highest number at the time.

Thanks to the support of the Upside Down Tree Foundation and generous individuals, in 2016 a record 81 people were brought to safety. Rainbow Railroad is committed to increasing this number steadily over the next three years.

Goals:

1: Increase the number of people we bring to safety to **170** people **by year 3** of strategic plan:

100 people to safety in **2017**

130 people to safety in **2018**

170 people to safety in **2019**

2: Increase the number of people we are able to assist outside of direct travel.

Currently the organization handles **630** requests per year

Strategic Priority 2

Expand Reach With New Tools

Currently the bulk of the Rainbow Railroad’s success is in the Caribbean, where the organization has been able to leverage its contacts in the region and respond to the needs of LGBTQ people in Jamaica, one of the most homophobic places on earth.

However, the requests from other countries continue to increase. Rainbow Railroad is committed to diversifying its toolbox, strategizing new methods and building new relationships in order to extend its reach.

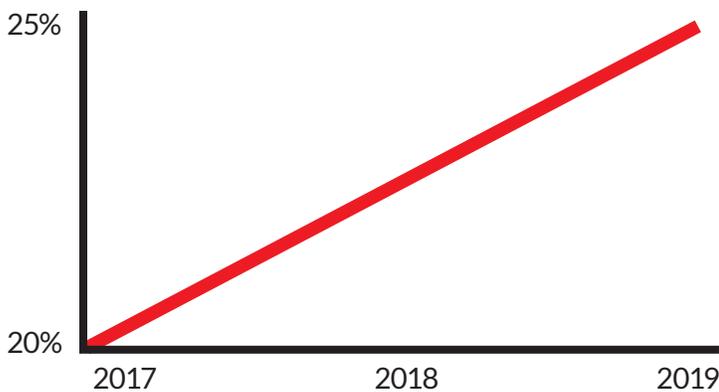
Goals:

1: Extend our ability to help individuals around the world – steadily increasing the number of cases from outside of the Caribbean to 25% by 2019.

2: Increase partnerships abroad and engage in strategic advocacy – building networks and relationships in governments in Canada and abroad, ultimately leading to policy changes which will increase the number of people we are able to help find safety.

3: Support like-minded individuals, collectives and organizations in Canada and abroad interested in our work, while expanding our definition of case-work to include help outside of direct support.

Location of Refugee Claims by %



— Cases Outside of the Caribbean

Strategic Priority 3

Build Capacity To Meet The Organization's Needs

Ultimately, increasing the number of people we bring to safety, also means an increase in resources. Management of these resources in addition to managing the hundreds of requests for safety will require further organizational capacity.

Rainbow Railroad is committed to ensuring sufficient operations in order to meet our programmatic objectives.

Goals:

- 1: Ensure** appropriate resources are in place to manage the organization.
- 2: Create** appropriate board development and succession plans.
- 3: Increase** the overall budget by increasing revenue from individual donors while diversifying funding sources by establishing relationships with new foundations.
- 4: Strengthen** the policy framework for the organization.
- 5: Develop** a volunteer requirement and development strategy.

