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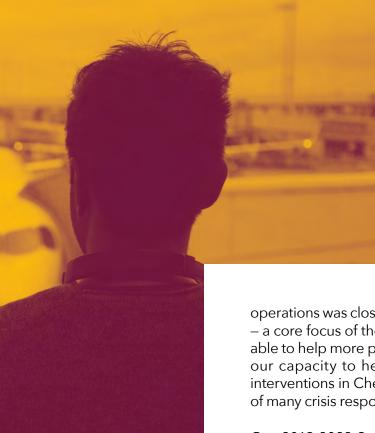
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Since its founding in 2006, Rainbow Railroad has been dedicated to supporting LGBTQI+ individuals who are at risk of violence and persecution due to their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or sex characteristics (SOGIESC). We believe that everyone should be able to freely express themselves and live their lives free from harm. Our work is driven by and centered on individuals who make the difficult decision to leave behind everything they have known to pursue a life of safety and freedom. We envision a world where this is no longer necessary; until then, our strategic plan recommits the organization to a mission of providing more at-risk LGBTQI+ people with pathways to safety now.

This is Rainbow Railroad's third Strategic Plan since its establishment as a charitable organization in 2014. Each plan has not only marked an important milestone for the organization, but has also been a crucial blueprint for its success. The first plan, released in 2016, focused on scaling the operations of Rainbow Railroad. At the time, we were an organization that had expertise in supporting at-risk LGBTQI+ persons resettle in countries around the world, and our ability to scale our



operations was closely tied to the possibility of gaining further resources – a core focus of the plan. By the end of the first plan, we were not only able to help more people and build partnerships, but we also increased our capacity to help LGBTQI+ folks facing mass persecution. Our interventions in Chechnya, Egypt, and Tanzania are just three examples of many crisis responses.

Our 2019-2023 Strategic Plan served as a roadmap to continue the transformational growth from previous years by expanding what it means to help people "find safety". This meant diversifying who we helped, given that the vast majority of people we had been supporting were cisgender men. It also meant clarifying our view of where people are safe. Since we were founded in Toronto, people often assume that we only help people relocate to Canada, but this has always been inaccurate. We help people get to safety wherever possible. Traditionally, that has meant high-income countries such as Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, France, Canada and the United States. Our last Strategic Plan expanded what it meant to help people safely resettle in middle-income and transit countries, or to find safety in their country of origin.

COVID-19 was declared a worldwide pandemic early in the start of our second Strategic Plan. The global health crisis became a new justification for closed borders and the exclusion of asylum seekers; we witnessed the proliferation of policies that sealed off the few available pathways to safety for LGBTQI+ persons at risk of imminent harm. And yet, even though at one point, when every single international border was closed, we did not stray from our mission. In fact, we leaned into our Strategic Plan, understanding that our job is to help people find safety, wherever that may be. We invested in and expanded the tools we had available to offer safety, including providing safehouses and shelter, cash assistance, working with partners on the ground, and relocating individuals to different parts of their countries of origin. We focused our efforts and doubled in growth – twice.

The growth of our organization was necessary because the demand for our services had grown in the face of rising global economic disparity, the sweeping fomentation of populism and anti-LGBTQI+ sentiment, and the continued and pervasive lack of durable and sustainable mechanisms to get asylum seekers to safety. Right now, there are more forcibly displaced people in the world than at any other time in recorded history. Given that 67 countries criminalize same-sex intimacy, LGBTQI+ people are uniquely vulnerable.

#### Our 2023-2026 Strategic Plan tackles this challenge head-on.

Through this plan, we will share our commitment to expanding and refining our programs, centering our work on the people we aim to help. In 2022, we received nearly 10,000 requests for help from LGBTQI+ persons seeking safety – a number we anticipate will grow. In addition, since 2021, we demonstrated through interventions in Afghanistan and Ukraine that our organization is uniquely positioned to respond to geopolitical crises that affect LGBTQI+ persons. As such, we will need new and creative methods to accomplish our goals.

However, not enough governments have stepped up to help tackle this immense challenge. This is why we must continue to advocate for systemic change. In this plan, we refer to queering the system. This is a term that we embrace in the spirit of movements that have galvanized the LGBTQI+ community in the past. The HIV epidemic is a key example. Those who fought injustices before us understood that we needed to be experts for our own survival. Rainbow Railroad was founded with the same intent. Although there have been various movements that help evacuate at-risk people (such as the Underground Railroad, which proudly inspires our name), resettlement and humanitarian responses that affect the LGBTQI+ community must be led by LGBTQI+ persons and organizations. This means we need to advocate for more partnerships with governments around the world to facilitate support. It also means we must remain subversive and facilitate the right to seek asylum as recognized under international law. Finally, it means we need to challenge aspects of the refugee protection system which exclude at-risk LGBTQI+ people, while using our LGBTQI+ perspective to bring new thinking to humanitarian crises, natural and climate-related disasters, and other situations causing forced displacement.

The factors driving demand for our services have also highlighted the need to stabilize our systems and solidify our foundation. Strengthening our operations is a crucial step in this process. Rainbow Railroad strives to be a force for good, not only for the people we help, but for the spaces in which we operate. This also means bringing more stakeholders on our journey.

Together, with you, we can create a world in which all LGBTQI+ individuals can live freely and safely. We invite you to join us.



CALEB GOODMAN Board Chair Rainbow Railroad (he/him)

## SITUATIONAL SUMMARY

Rainbow Railroad is a global not-for-profit organization that envisions a world where LGBTQI+ people are free to live with dignity and without fear of persecution based on SOGIESC. Our work is critical at a time when there are more displaced people than ever before. With the support of partners across the globe, we collaborate to champion the rights of LGBTQI+ people to access justice, peace, economic stability, and safety. In doing so, since 2006, we have rallied the support of human rights defenders, refugees, governments, corporations, donors, volunteers, agencies and organizations to create pathways for thousands of LGBTQI+ people to relocate to countries that have legislative frameworks and cultural attitudes that protect their rights. As we continue to grow, we remain committed to this work and its transformative impact on people's quality of life.

Our work is also at the intersection of many world issues – including war, climate change, and unstable political systems that, in 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates will result in a total of 110 million displaced people worldwide. As a result of violence and discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals around the world, many people with diverse SOGIESC are forced to make the excruciating decision to flee.

At times, people seek safer locations within their country of origin, where they often find themselves experiencing increased discrimination and violence as LGBTQI+ persons who are internally displaced. Frequently, forced displacements stem from state-sponsored anti-LGBTQI+ crackdowns. In these situations, agents of persecution, including hostile family members, may attempt to track down LGBTQI+ persons who have fled.

Many individuals must flee across international borders, often to neighboring countries that also criminalize same-sex intimacy. When LGBTQI+ folks cross borders, they frequently become confined in refugee camps or holding centers, where their safety is often



compromised due to climates of homophobia, biphobia or transphobia, commonly sanctioned by local authorities. This means that many forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people do not feel safe in these facilities and flee, opting to live on the margins of society in urban centers.

These factors create the need for a crisis response and humanitarian role, a responsibility that Rainbow Railroad has assumed to help build a world in which LGBTQI+ persons do not experience continued persecution and are able to live a life of their choosing.

The lack of government commitments to fund resettlement and admissions options presents a significant barrier to our mission of getting people to safety. While we have been able to support nearly 2,000 people through emergency travel support, there are thousands more waiting – nearly 10,000 people in 2022. Having 10,000 requests for assistance annually for an organization of Rainbow Railroad's size also leads to the uncomfortable truth that people who reach out to Rainbow Railroad often have to wait. At this critical stage of our growth, we must rethink and reimagine how we handle case management in order to empower the people who reach out for assistance.

Geopolitical crises and their impact on LGBTQI+ persons have also demonstrated the dearth of humanitarian and crisis response for the community globally. These crises also reinforce the need for a queer lens on refugee protection, humanitarian support, and crisis intervention, building on earlier calls for increased coordination to address LGBTQI+ forced displacement. The 2021 Global Roundtable on Protection and Solutions for LGBTIQ+ People in Forced Displacement, convened by UNHCR, put forward 39 recommendations which highlighted the need for a broader network of government, civil society and people with lived experience to coordinate responses to help LGBTQI+ people at risk.

As a trusted organization within the global LGBTQI+ movement, Rainbow Railroad is uniquely positioned to convene and coordinate grassroots organizations, including the vetting of prospective partners.



## WE HAVE ALWAYS INVESTED IN RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING WITH GLOBAL LGBTQI+ RIGHTS DEFENDERS TO ACHIEVE OUR MISSION OF ASSISTING PERSECUTED LGBTQI+ INDIVIDUALS TO ACCESS PATHWAYS TO SAFETY.

We have always invested in relationship-building with global LGBTQI+ rights defenders to achieve our mission of assisting persecuted LGBTQI+ individuals to access pathways to safety. Our staff includes several human rights defenders who have lived experience of forced migration or persecution based on their LGBTQI+ identities. Hailing from diverse backgrounds, our team has spent decades developing relationships across the global LGBTQI+ rights movement. As a result, we have been able to establish deep levels of trust with LGBTQI+ civil society organizations, human rights defenders, and activists working on the ground in the Global South.

Since 2019, Rainbow Railroad has partnered with over 50 organizations engaged with the LGBTQI+ community. While these partners are headquartered in 24 countries, many of the organizations work regionally and their reach extends into neighboring countries. Countries represented across Rainbow Railroad's partnerships include: Argentina, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guyana, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Lithuania, Malawi, Mexico, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa, South Sudan, Tunisia, Russia, Rwanda, Turkey, Uganda and Ukraine.

Rainbow Railroad has invested considerable efforts in building our reputation and partnership framework within the LGBTQI+ community. We are at the table at almost every multilateral fora including the Equal Rights Coalition, where we play a leading role as a civil society co-chair. There exists an opportunity to expand our network into international development and humanitarian spaces and queer these systems. Under the leadership of our current CEO, Rainbow Railroad has grown from a team of one permanent staff role to 53 staff. This exponential growth to respond to increasing demand puts additional pressure on the organization and highlights the need for Rainbow Railroad to stabilize systems and refine programmatic services to ensure a solid foundation for continued future growth.

## HORKE HORK

#### **OUR WORK IS V-I-T-A-L**

#### **WE VERIFY**

We thoroughly verify and identify each case through interviews, documentary evidence, and supporting testimony to learn about the circumstances of the individual facing persecution and to determine how we can help. We always apply a queer-sensitive, trauma-informed, survivor-centered approach in our verification process. Our team has unique expertise that allows for verification in a way that is not only robust and systematic, but also tailored to the complexities of LGBTQI+ experiences of persecution. We do this in collaboration and partnerships with human rights defenders on the ground, mindful of the security risks for field operations in countries that criminalize same-sex intimacy.

#### **WE INITIATE**

Once we verify a case, we work with individuals at-risk to identify the best outcome for safety. Through our comprehensive case management process, we research possible routes to safety and connect with local contacts who provide logistical support. This includes providing support to the individual in-country, through safehouses, shelter assistance, cash assistance, and complementary forms of support.



#### WE TRAVEL

Once a safe route has been identified, we facilitate travel. This is often to a country that accepts refugees and upholds the human rights of LGTBQI+ persons. What "safety" looks like depends on the unique individual's needs – and is not limited to high-income countries. Travel may also mean relocation within the country of origin. If an individual crosses international borders, upon arrival, we provide limited, short-term support to help them settle and connect to resources in their new country.

#### **WE ADVOCATE**

Due to barriers for LGBTQI+ people seeking asylum and accessing traditional resettlement, we have needed to advocate for expanded and flexible pathways to safety for at-risk LGBTQI+ persons, working in collaboration with governments, academics, local partners, affected populations, and civil society. Advocacy has been especially necessary when there have been state crackdowns on LGBTQI+ persons that require an immediate response from the Government.

#### WE LEARN

It is important that we continue to learn, being the only organization of this size and scope engaged in this type of work. We monitor and evaluate our programs to enhance service delivery and impact, implementing insights gained from case individuals into concrete action. We also serve as thought leaders, sharing emerging trends, recommendations, and situational analyses with the global humanitarian community, governments, and grassroots actors to fill the gaps in knowledge regarding LGBTQI+ forced displacement and to generate new protection solutions.



Rainbow Railroad carries out its life-saving work through emergency travel support and five complementary programs:

#### **EMERGENCY TRAVEL SUPPORT (ETS)**

Providing emergency travel across international borders to LGBTQI+ people facing imminent danger is our core method of work. In addition to emergency travel, Rainbow Railroad provides safety to LGBTQI+ people around the world through five programs:

#### **PROGRAM 1: CASH ASSISTANCE**

A person's relative safety can be improved by enabling access to cash. Cash assistance can be used to pay for shelter, food, medical care, access to essential medicines such as hormone replacement therapy, or internal relocation.

#### PROGRAM 2: PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Rainbow Railroad works with hundreds of activists and organizations around the world that support the LGBTQI+ community through direct services, advocacy and movement building. Our program grants partners with flexible, responsive funding which also allows them to help us identify and verify cases for support. Rainbow Railroad's trust-based approach to partnership ensures mutual benefit and limits bureaucracy.





#### **PROGRAM 3: CRISIS RESPONSE**

Rainbow Railroad is frequently the first LGBTQI+ organization called on by the international community to respond in the face of crises. Rainbow Railroad monitors global trends and occurrences of violence against the LGBTQI+ community independently and in collaboration with our wide network of international partners. When a crisis requires our response, we may respond through any of our programs.

#### PROGRAM 4: INFORMATION SERVICES AND REFERRALS

Not everyone that requests our support will be able to receive it. And as an organization, Rainbow Railroad is not always best positioned to support the unique needs of individuals who reach out for help. Through this program, we provide up-to-date information and/or services relevant to individuals requesting help. This can mean connecting an individual to legal counsel after making an asylum claim, introducing them to a local LGBTQI+ organization, or referring them to a mental health professional.

#### PROGRAM 5: COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS

In addition to ETS, Rainbow Railroad pursues complementary pathways – safe channels or mechanisms through which refugees can find protection and durable solutions beyond traditional resettlement programs. Rainbow Railroad explores all available options for LGBTQI+ refugees to find safety through various complementary pathways, including community sponsorship programs in Canada and the United States, a pathway for human rights defenders to Canada, and humanitarian visas to France and Argentina.



We serve as community builders, protectors, and facilitators through our coalition of staff, partners, supporters, and case individuals. We are disruptors for good who commit to striving for fairness, equity, and justice throughout our work. We do whatever it takes to achieve our mission, exhibiting radical responsiveness, resourcefulness and responsibility. Rainbow Railroad will always work in solidarity alongside the greater movement for LGBTQI+ liberation. And yet we realize, until full liberation is possible, we are uniquely positioned to help LGBTQI+ persons at risk here and now. Our ultimate goal is for governments to recognize the need for nimble and flexible pathways for resettlement and relocation dedicated to LGBTQI+ persons, and to partner with Rainbow Railroad to develop them. Rainbow Railroad in turn will create the systems, partnerships and programs to help as many people as possible, acutely understanding the inequities in these various pathways. We will do that while strengthening the capacity of our partners to continue to fight for LGBTQI+ rights at home.



We will also continue to facilitate the journey of LGBTQI+ persons looking for safety through all possible pathways – government partnerships do not replace the right to seek asylum. Our new three-year strategy focuses on strengthening the organization by further expanding what it means to bring LGBTQI+ people at risk to safety. Through our Strategic Plan, we will commit to the following:

- 1. We will continue to refine our programs and continue to think critically about the impact of our work. This means centering the voices and lived experiences of LGBTQI+ people who have been forced to flee violence, persecution, and discrimination.
- We will enhance our entire case management process, from our intake, to travel, and post-arrival support. This means continuously evaluating and refining how we work.
- 3. We will use a queer lens to interrogate systems that aim to support people who are forcibly displaced, in order to ensure that they do not perpetuate the exclusion and marginalization of LGBTQI+ people in refugee protection.
- 4. We will continue to advocate to secure more pathways to safety for the growing number of people at risk. However, we will always insist that the right to seek asylum must be upheld. Engaging in partnerships with governments will not prevent us from using all mechanisms legally possible to help people find safety.
- 5. We will think critically about the role we play in humanitarian crises and work collaboratively with partners on the ground to create sustainable solutions.
- 6. We will aspire to be a model for ethical and effective humanitarian action. This means not only centering our work on those we help, but also fostering a culture of compassion and care within our organization, recognizing that the well-being of our staff is crucial to our work supporting LGBTQI+ people at risk.
- 7. We will cultivate and nurture relationships with our core stakeholders, including those we help, those who support our work, and partners across the broader movement for LGBTQI+ rights.
- 8. We will widen our reach by engaging new audiences, increasing our influence, and securing long-term, sustainable funding. This means building meaningful partnerships with organizations and individuals who share our values and mission, and working collaboratively to create lasting change.

### THEPLAN

### WE WILL BUILD, REFINE, & STABILIZE OUR ORGANIZATION.

#### **OUR KEY INITIATIVES:**

- Create more pathways; enhance support in transit countries; and build more non-visa routes.
- 2. Revolutionize our case management system to accommodate increased volume and diversity.
- 3. Lead as advocates for LGBTQI+ justice.
- 4. Partner globally to create an International Network on LGBTQI+ Forced Displacement.
- 5. Secure more formal referral partnerships with governments.
- 6. Build solidarity with grassroots organizations and support leaders in the movement.
- 7. Evaluate and refine our programs.
- 8. Strengthen core organizational systems to make our work more efficient and productive.
- Foster a sustainable place to work, including through securing sustainable funding, attracting talent, and building a strong organizational culture.
- 10. Build and promote the Rainbow Railroad identity.

#### **HOW WE WILL REACH OUR GOALS**

**BULD** partnerships, pathways & advocacy

**REFINE** programs, processes & service delivery

**STABILIZE & STRENGTHEN** internal systems & human resources

To accomplish this, Rainbow Railroad's 2023-2025 plan consists of 10 initiatives over three strategic priorities that will drive our work.

#### **OUR THREE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

1 GET MORE TO SAFETY NOW
2 QUEER THE SYSTEM
3 STRENGTHEN OUR FOUNDATION

#### STRATEGIC PRIORITY #1

# GET MORE TO SAFETY NOW.



Rainbow Railroad's primary goal is to assist LGBTQI+ individuals to move to safer locations as quickly as possible, and the individuals seeking our assistance must be centered in all aspects of our work. This requires a multifaceted approach that involves identifying and creating new opportunities for mobility while refining existing pathways to safety. While we continue to provide emergency travel to safe(r) countries, we are committed to exploring new and innovative ways to expand transit country engagement and routes to safety.

We recognize that our work is complex and nuanced, and we are dedicated to centering the experiences of the LGBTQI+ individuals we aim to help. As a result, we must also continue to drive complementary support programs that provide immediate and flexible support to meet individuals' needs. We must continue to examine what it means to make somebody safer, and what it means to achieve safety for an individual.

Our advocacy work focuses on persuading governments to open more pathways for LGBTQI+ individuals in need to move to safer countries. We will continue to provide emergency travel support while also refining our complementary supports, expanding pathways and routes to safety, and developing additional resources for those in need.

We will engage in a comprehensive review of our requests for help, our intake systems, and case management systems, and develop the tools and processes necessary to meet and sustain the increasing demand for our services.

We are proud to be activists working both inside and outside of global refugee and asylum systems. Crucially, we must strive to revolutionize howwe manage the continued influx of requests for assistance while effectively communicating with those awaiting our support as we navigate the complexities of these systems.

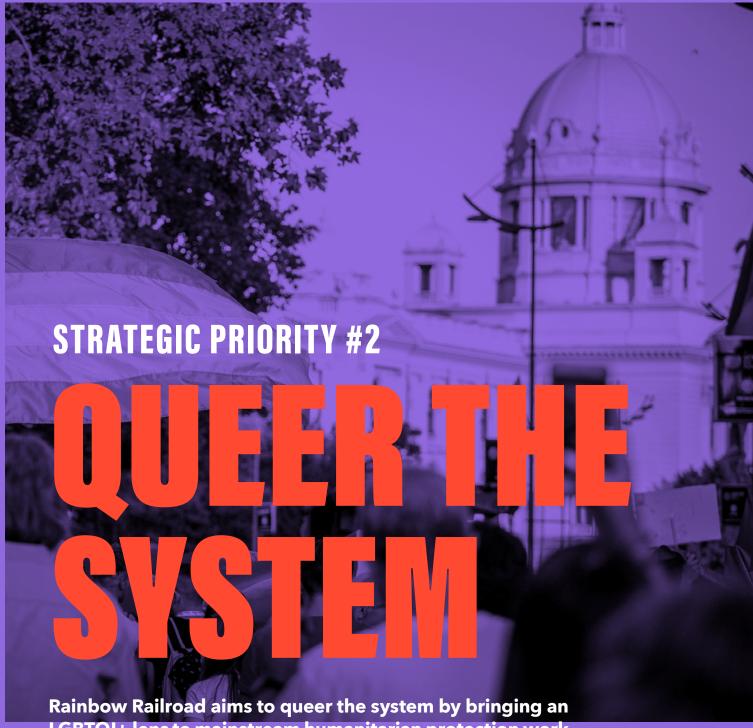


#### KEY INITIATIVES TO GET MORE TO SAFETY NOW

- Create more pathways; enhance support in transit countries; and build more non-visa routes.
- Revolutionize our case management system to accommodate increased volume and diversity.

#### WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- 1. We have established formal referral partnerships with at least the governments in Canada and the United States, where Rainbow Railroad operates.
- 2. We have updated our case management system to be more transparent and responsive to the needs of those we help.
- 3. We have increased the number of people we help.



LGBTQI+ lens to mainstream humanitarian protection work and multilateral bodies. While we recognize the bureaucratic and legal complexities of the refugee sector that make navigating these systems challenging, we will be leaders by advocating for the inclusion and protection of forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ persons at every level of the global asylum system. Advocacy is a core aspect of our work.



We recognize that our work cannot be done without the partnerships we have built with LGBTQI+ organizations and allies worldwide. Through these partnerships, we strive to create a global network to assist LGBTQI+ individuals seeking safety. However, we acknowledge that our efforts must be centered on the experiences and perspectives of those most affected by violence and discrimination, and we are committed to elevating their voices. We will conduct research and present recommendations to policymakers with the power and influence to affect meaningful change, and we will also transparently share this research with stakeholders to deepen their understanding of and commitment to our work.

To continue to grow, Rainbow Railroad needs more formal referral partnerships with governments, to build solidarity with LGBTQI+ grassroots organizations, and to continue to support leaders within the movement. We will propose new ways of implementing humanitarian programming that is more inclusive and safer for queer individuals, such as working through grassroots and underground collectives. We also believe that LGBTQI+-led organizations, and in particular those led by persons with lived experiences of forced displacement, should be leading discussions with governments and in multilateral spaces.

We must call on mainstream organizations to be accountable for their actions and do more to reach out to LGBTQI+ people and support queer organizations. Unfortunately, there is still a culture of doubt and disbelief when it comes to the needs and experiences of LGBTQI+ asylum seekers, who are often interrogated about the veracity of their identities as a way to deny them refugee status. We are committed to challenging these assumptions and elevating and amplifying the work of queer liberation, while celebrating queer joy and the inherent beauty of each person that we support at every stage of their journey.



Secure more formal referral partnerships with governments.

Build solidarity with grassroots organizations and support leaders in the movement.

#### WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- 1. A multilateral LGBTQI+ forced displacement network is formed, with support and recognition from and participation by governments, civil society, and UNHCR. Funding is committed to its establishment and growth.
- 2. We have increased the capacity of our partners on the ground to respond to the needs of LGBTQI+ persons who are displaced.
- 3. We have increased LGBTQI+ inclusion in humanitarian spaces.

Rainbow Railroad is facing a crucial moment in our history that requires both continued development and the creation of a strong foundation to carry future growth. Over the past 17 years, we have evolved from a small group of volunteers into a recognized global leader successfully supporting LGBTQI+ people to get to safety, while advocating for systemic change globally. With an ever-increasing demand for our services, we must find new ways to adapt to a constantly changing landscape while doing everything possible to meet this demand.



**STRATEGIC PRIORITY #3:** 

## STRENGTHEN OUR FOUNDATIONS





We recognize that building and promoting Rainbow Railroad's identity is crucial to attracting new funding and drawing in new supporters to our work. We remain committed to raising awareness of the issues facing LGBTQI+ people internationally, the global impact we are making, and the advocacy and support we need to achieve our goals. We must be mindful of our messaging, accessible in our communication, and transparent in how we operate. Our goal is to center the lived experiences of the LGBTQI+ people we seek to help and provide nuance and context about the nature of our complex work in the refugee sector.

## & OPTIMIZE THE FOUNDATION OF THE ORGANIZATION

- Evaluate and refine our programs.
- Strengthen core organizational systems to make our work more efficient and productive.
- Foster a sustainable place to work, including through securing sustainable funding, attracting talent, and building a strong organizational culture.
- Build and promote the Rainbow Railroad identity.

#### WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- 1. We have developed a monitoring and evaluation framework.
- 2. We have established more reliable, recurring revenue streams.
- 3. We have a diverse staff team and Board of Directors with more persons with lived experiences leading our work.
- 4. We have shared necessary research and other communications that effectively educate and advocate to advance our core mission.



