



Soroptimist is a global volunteer organization that provides women and girls with access to the education and training they need to achieve economic empowerment.

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF THE AMERICAS, INC.®

Frequently Asked Questions about Our Dream Programs Strategy

A. Area of Responsibility

Soroptimist International of the Americas® (SIA) has a long and proud history of improving the lives of women and girls. Our common mission of providing women and girls with access to the education and training they need to achieve economic empowerment is the number one reason why women join our organization.

Throughout our nearly 100 years, clubs, regions and federation have developed and executed myriad projects to achieve this mission. But, as we prepare for our second century, we need to take stock of the changing environment, the needs of women and girls and the need to ensure Soroptimist will survive and thrive for another 100 years. For several years, our SIA board of directors has been preparing for our future – studying the landscape, listening to members, plotting our course, developing new strategy. They envision a future where:

- We meet the needs of more women and girls through our Dream Programs
- We are well known for the impact we have on women and girls
- We attract financial support for our programs
- We engage more people in our mission through our clubs and LiveYourDream.org

The board identified the strategy of increasing our collective impact as our first step. This strategy has begun to produce results: an increase in our Dream programs impact; 80,000 supporters engaged in LiveYourDream.org; more and diverse funders; and a slowdown in our membership decline. In order to continue these improvements, we need to continue the strategic direction identified by our board of directors.

We have developed this FAQ to answer questions that have arisen about our strategy of focusing on building the collective impact of our Dream Programs.

We have identified education as the key tool to improve the lives of women and girls. But the word education is defined in multiple ways. What

does SIA mean by the word education?

SIA defines education by providing access to formal schooling, knowledge, information and resources to the women and girls we reach. For the Live Your Dream Awards®, access to formal education through schooling or training is provided. For Dream It, Be It®, education is provided through the Dream It, Be It curriculum in conferences or small group mentoring.

Global agencies, both governmental and non-governmental alike, agree that a quality education, more than any other intervention, holds the greatest potential to transform the lives of women and girls. Education is the tool that can address all of the issues important to us, including domestic violence, trafficking, teen dating violence, homelessness, teen pregnancy and sexual assault. Education serves as a catalyst lifting women and girls out of poverty, decreasing mortality rates, increasing overall health, decreasing incidences of violence, and increasing the chances that their own children earn an education...breaking the downward cycle for their family.

Our mission states “women and girls,” but are there particular women and girls our Dream Programs are trying to reach?

Women, simply because they are born female, face myriad obstacles to their success. Both men and women and girls and boys live in poverty, face discrimination and have to overcome obstacles. But, throughout history, in every country in the world, women and girls face additional obstacles and discrimination because of their gender.

However, some women and girls have even less chance at living their dreams than others. These are women and girls who are disadvantaged, marginalized and underserved. They were, for example, born into poverty. Trafficked into prostitution. Mistreated as children. Addicted to drugs and alcohol. Abused by an intimate partner.

Live Your Dream Awards – For this award, we seek applicants who have overcome obstacles and are trying to get their lives back on track, build a better life for themselves and their families and lift themselves and their families out of poverty through education and skills training. They have overcome violence, addiction, health issues, the death of a spouse or parent, or mental health. And, they are women with dependents.

Around the world, households headed by women have the highest poverty rates. Helping these women improve their education offers them the best chance of improving their lives and the lives of their children – ensuring more positive outcomes for generations to come. Specifically, these women:

- Have had their dreams derailed
- Are getting their lives back on track
- Are the heads of their household
- Care for their dependents
- Want to increase their standard of living

- Lack the financial resources to access quality education

Dream It, Be It – For this program, we seek to reach girls who do not have access to the resources or information to live their dreams. We focus on girls in secondary school who, in most cases, are between the ages of 14 and 18. Girls of other ages might benefit from the program but we identified this need for these girls in the yearlong research done to create the program. Although all girls face barrier because of their gender, we are trying to reach girls that have additional obstacles including poverty, unstable home lives, living in foster care, or are teen mothers. Helping these girls identify their career goals and path to success will help them to overcome the barriers and obstacles they face in their future. Specifically, these girls:

- Face obstacles to their success
- Are at risk for having their dreams derailed
- Lack access to professional role models
- Do not have access to career education
- Do not know what steps to take to accomplish their goals

How does the Big Goal fit into this strategy?

Our efforts to define our next big goal are building on the efforts of our current strategy and big goal of increasing our collective impact. We have already heard from clubs that they want to continue to invest in the dreams of women and girls through access to education. We are now in the process of gathering input from clubs on how many women and girls we can reach and what we will have to do as an organization to reach our big goal.

Why is it important that we focus on impact through our Dream Programs?

To secure our future – and the impact we have on women and girls – we need to be better known for our work. This increased recognition will bring us more members, supporters and funders. And this will allow us to reach more women and girls. To do this, we must be clear about our impact so others can understand how we are improving the lives of women and girls.

Traditionally, clubs and regions have identified projects to help women and girls in their local communities. But with myriad projects – few with measured or reported impact – we cannot define or publicize our work. Our evidence-based Dream Programs help specific populations of women and girls and have measurable impact. For us to have a collective impact and for others to understand how our global efforts improve the lives of women and girls, we need to be working toward the same goals and investing our resources in the same impact to strengthen our story of greater impact.

In order for this strategy to continue to be successful, we must continue to change the way we think and the way that we approach our work. We need to align our resources at every level – club, region and federation – to focus on the Dream Programs. We know our Dream Programs:

- Are evidence-based
- Create a measurable impact on women and girls
- Address a need in all of our communities
- Support the work that matters to us including ending violence against women and girls and lifting them out of poverty
- Define our impact to a larger audience
- Appeal to potential members and supporters
- Attract funders

Working together, following the same strategy, reaching for the same goals, focusing on our common mission and programs, we can do everything that is important to us including securing the future of Soroptimist for generations to come.

Are your club and region programs aligned to support the Soroptimist Dream Programs to strengthen our story of greater impact?