



RECARGA – Recharging Education Civil Society in Guatemala and Honduras

Phase I Final Report 2025

I. Summary

What began in 2021 as an exploration of the impacts of COVID-19 on children's education in Central America blossomed into a collaborative of funders committing \$1.4 million to support dynamic grassroots organizations in Guatemala and Honduras working to ensure the accessibility of quality education for all children. In the past three years, local partners have been resourced to stand strong despite government's retreat from education, meeting children where they are in their learning journeys, and preparing to speak up with a stronger collective voice representing local community-based organizations as spaces for constructive government engagement emerge.

"This initiative has directly contributed to creating a more inspiring and motivating environment for the educational community; likewise, the young people of our program now have the opportunity to study within much better circumstances, which not only impacts their education today, but also lays the foundation for a more promising future." -RECARGA Partner

The goal of RECARGA is to weave a stronger foundation of resources, networks, mutual support and collective action within education civil society, while also investing today in the community-based programs that enhance children's learning – whether during COVID-19 shutdowns or in response to persistent gaps and weaknesses in the public education system. The progress of each grassroots partner and of the networks in both countries after three years of programming is compelling, as are the effects we observe on children, communities, educators, and partners' engagement with their governments at various levels. As this first phase of RECARGA draws to a close, we reflect on the changes partners have influenced – alongside a changing context – and the strengthening of organizing capacities, both within, between and beyond the partners.

II. An Evolving Context: The Changes We Have Seen

In the years since the start of the pandemic we witnessed not only the catastrophic interruption of learning for children across Central America but the crumbling of the very foundations of entire education systems. Since returning to school, civil society organizations working in education, school governing bodies, teachers and educators have been striving to rebuild together, navigating changing political systems and reduced funding in both countries.

Guatemala

Despite efforts to provide universal education and return to the classroom post-pandemic, numerous barriers still impede access and quality of schooling for many children and youth. Privatization of education is increasingly common with dwindling resources in place to support state schools to thrive. Guatemalan civil society, including teachers and educators, joined Indigenous-led nation-wide protests and blockades; to demand democratic processes be upheld after the elections in 2023 and that the new government keep its commitment to ending corruption. With the new government in place, there is significant hope for a political opening both across government and within the Ministry of Education, though there is a long and uncertain road ahead. The government is taking steps to work with civil society, creating open dialogues to share ideas and recommendations, including making updates to the National Education Agreement, to which RECARGA partners were invited to join. While a clear path has yet to emerge, there is hope that ongoing dialogue will evolve into meaningful action and genuine commitment.

Honduras

Post-pandemic, there has been much motivation at the local level to reopen schools in Honduras, but this has been met with little interest from the government in reimagining a more progressive education system. As such, schools have had to be creative with minimal funds. The new United States administration has also had an impact with increased rates of people returning to Honduras with the need to reintegrate, along with many still planning to travel to the US, which is ever changing the makeup of local communities. Promising policy developments have been put on the table including

Comprehensive Sexuality Education, but with elections coming in November, nothing is certain, and the country has yet to see the education reform sought by civil society, including much needed modernization of education approaches, improved infrastructure and increased teachers' salaries.

The Shifting Funding Context

Shifts in the funding context globally are already being felt locally in Guatemala and Honduras, both top recipients of USAID funding efforts to tackle drivers of migration and climate resilience¹ and with expected annual losses of approximately \$12,000,000 in each country for education programming specifically². The UK, France, Sweden and the Netherlands made similar moves, slashing international development budgets in recent months. The closing of USAID overnight has had severe repercussions already, and the long-term impact of reduced development and humanitarian assistance in the region is yet to be known. In the meantime, civil society is working to fill the funding gaps while often already working grant to grant. The US administration's immigration policies have further fractured the familial and community remittance flows with the promise of mass deportations, already underway, and a proposal to tax remittances gaining traction in Washington. The effects would be felt acutely in Guatemala and Honduras where remittances make up 20% and 18% of GDP respectively³, and are likely to affect the poorest families.

While this time of upheaval is just starting, there is the possibility for civil society actors to come together in a concerted and cohesive solidarity effort, working with and supporting the resilience of local communities. We have seen just this with the RECARGA network in both Guatemala and Honduras.

III. REGARGA's Evolving Goal

The RECARGA initiative's goal has been to **support local education civil society in Honduras and Guatemala to fulfill its potential by ensuring a return to school for children in their communities, addressing academic gaps, creating complementary learning spaces, innovating and advocating for all children's rights to education in the post-COVID-19 world**. We posit that this manifests itself in a variety of ways, but most importantly, in the form of *creativity, collaboration and collective advocacy* that generates shared accountability with community and government for all children's access to quality education. We have seen this as a collective contribution to moving towards a world where *Guatemalan and Honduran children from diverse backgrounds and identities have equitable access to an inclusive and quality education, which allows them to expand their opportunities and exercise their rights*.

We also humbly left space for RECARGA partners to articulate their own definition of success and their own "guiding star" to lead them there. They discussed a transformative education system that goes beyond fundamental skills, building consciousness, liberation and civic responsibility. They celebrated education experiences that are intrinsically rooted in Indigenous culture and identity, contextualized to each territory, where children and young people are active participants in shaping their education and where partners work closely with parents, teachers, communities and the government to put this into practice. They dreamed of teachers refining their craft, incorporating children's voices and participation as well as gender transformative approaches, being equipped to support children's full development in a more holistic way. During this third year, the cohort coalesced around a shared vision which is not only an aspiration for their work in the years to come but also reflects their direction and achievements in the years since the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ <https://www.wola.org/analysis/trumps-pause-of-u-s-foreign-assistance-to-latin-america-an-america-last-policy/>

² <https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025-04/USAID%20doc%20%282%29.pdf>

³ <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/trumps-comeback-could-disrupt-latin-americas-remittances/>



CIRCULA discusses political and collective self-care at Wellbeing Retreat

RECARGA's shared vision now is for: **A transformative, liberating, humanizing education capable of shifting paradigms and generating a vision of and social commitment to a dignified life for all.** We assert that this looks like children and young people developing their full potential through education systems that employ a diversity of inclusive, holistic, contextualized and liberating pedagogies, enabled by both community support and the active commitment of the government guarantors of their right to education. And we remain convinced that this is made possible by a coordinated and strengthened educational civil society, through sustainable networks based on trust and collective care that share, evolve and promote a wide diversity of transformative pedagogies that help young people to thrive.

Through the third year of the program, partners have deepened their collaboration with one another and with other civil society actors, strengthening the pedagogies they use and investing in their organizations. We are seeing positive impacts across multiple and intersecting levels, from the experience of individual students and teachers to the perceptions and engagement of their families and communities. Partners are investing in new education infrastructure and inclusive education services, as well as their own organizations, which are more efficient, effective and resilient to funding changes and challenges. Partners' stories demonstrate how they are challenging the dominant paradigm, bringing collective energy to learn from one another, to collaborate together for a stronger civil society and to reimagine an education system together that is working towards the liberation of diverse communities.

In an effort to capture the breadth and depth of experiences, we begin with the personal, journeying through the environmental spheres of family, community, and educational spaces, then looking further outward, exploring the impact on partners' own institutions, broader civil society and government. We offer case studies to illustrate the depth and interconnectedness of these examples.

1. Young people, families and communities (personal development, challenging perceptions and stereotypes, reaching the whole student and their community)
2. Educators and learning spaces (teachers/educators, infrastructure and educational supplies)
3. Partners' institutions (organizational strengthening, wellbeing and care and fundraising)
4. Networking and civil society (partner collaborations and other convenings)
5. Advocacy and acknowledgement (government engagement and awards)

Year 3 Key Accomplishments and Activities	
RECARGA's Footprint in Year 3	Funding Metrics ⁴
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners reached 45,245 children and youth in 2024, an increase of almost 130% in two years (the baseline was 19,700⁵). Partners collectively were at gender parity, reaching 22,839 girls and 22,406 boys. Parity was strongest for children ages 6-12 years old, which represented 58% of all participants, while the gender balance tilted slightly toward greater participation of adolescent girls and young women from ages 13 to 24 (5,294, relative to 4,942 adolescent boys and young men). Partners also had a notable influence in early childhood, reaching 8,582 infants and children from birth to age 5. A total of \$307,578 was awarded in grants from May 2024 to April 2025, with an additional \$89,500 in additional grantmaking is anticipated in May and June 2025. Over three years, RECARGA has disbursed and allocated almost \$800,000 to local education organizations. GFC organized 26 activities this year and directly supported another 10 to support networking and capacity development, including 2 convenings, 14 organizational development workshops, and 17 virtual gatherings and workshops. Partners reported that they were able to sustain 43 ongoing activities and undertake 61 new activities this year, crediting GFC's support contributing to the sustaining of 38 activities and facilitating of 47 new activities and substantial programmatic changes. While flexible funding was the primary channel of support mentioned, around 13% of activities were also supported by direct GFC accompaniment and the connections made through the RECARGA initiative. Partners named 61 different capacity development activities made possible this year by support from GFC, 52% of which were related to GFC's financial support, both flexible funding and targeted organizational development grants, while another 25% were credited to connections made through the initiative and 31% related to GFC's direct accompaniment. Partners external networks grew by almost 43% since April 2024 to 330 organizations, with the Honduran cohort's network density catching up to that of the Guatemala cohort. In their reports, partners described 54 distinct collaborations, to strengthen their capacities and advocate together, both within the cohort and with their external networks, crediting the RECARGA initiative with contributing to 41 of them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The total amount of funds raised for Phase 1 of RECARGA (year 1-3) comes to \$1,402,323, 93% of the initial 3-year fundraising goal. Despite falling short of the initial budget by over \$100,000, GFC disbursed only \$25,000 less than originally intended in partner grants, absorbing the remaining gap through lower than anticipated staffing and convening costs. Current projections for spending for Year 3 (July 2024 – Jun 2025) are an estimated \$570,000; a small balance of less than \$10,000 is expected to remain, which will be rolled into the budget for the next phase. A financial report will be circulated to donors in August, after the accounts are officially closed. This year's grantmaking includes \$249,000 in annual core operating support grants - \$15,000 each in May 2024 to the 3 partners joining RECARGA last year, and \$17,000 each in December 2024 to 12 partners. An additional \$51,000 will be disbursed to the 3 partners on the May 2025 renewal cycle. Partners also have received or will soon receive a \$3,500 organizational development grants, with \$15,500 already disbursed and \$38,500 in process. An additional \$17,078 was disbursed in 4 emergency grants and \$20,500 disbursed in 6 opportunity grants, which included collaboration grants. Though we can't attribute this exclusively to RECARGA, nearly half of all RECARGA partners saw their organizational budgets more than double over the past 2 years. Outside of their contributions to the RECARGA initiative, RECARGA donors also gave out over \$334,000 in additional direct grants to RECARGA partners over the past 2 years. In almost all cases, RECARGA donors met these organizations first through the RECARGA initiative, as GFC has sought to cultivate direct donor-partner relationships.

⁴ A full financial report will be available by August 2025 after we have closed our accounts for the current fiscal year.

⁵ This revised baseline includes the baseline reach of the 3 partners who joined the initiative in year 2.

I. Young people, families, and communities

Across both countries, partners implemented a diversity of music, art and play-based learning approaches, and saw the incredible impact this can have on **students' personal leadership skills, self-esteem and creativity, while also tackling issues of gender inequality and violence**. Several have used **tech-based learning to bridge the digital divide** in rural areas.

In **Guatemala**, **EPRODEP** introduced an individual support process in their 'Community of Life' program, which allowed for more individualized psychological care for students who had experienced violence. The psychologist is an educational facilitator at EPRODEP who already knew the programs and participants. They noticed the need for psychological support for participants and teachers but there was a financial gap to cover it. With a supplemental grant from GFC, the psychologist is now supporting approximately 50 students and 15 teachers/facilitators through weekly sessions and a monthly group support session. **ConnectED** employed a collaborative game-based program with **Asociación Dejando Una Sonrisa (ADUS)**. They also ran the KIOO photography project, equipping 49 students from two schools with training and equipment to practice their photography skills, while challenging gender norms and promoting positive masculinities. The team reported that: "The experience empowered the girls, strengthening their confidence and leadership skills, while the boys learned to value [the girls] as equals and leaders. With cameras in hand, the students explored their creativity, celebrated their individuality, and challenged gender stereotypes, marking a significant step toward equity in their communities." **ConnectED** also undertook a tech analysis of 34 schools to understand the state of technology and based on this assessment, developed two new digital platforms to support children based in rural areas: AnGo, a reading support application designed for children aged 4-10 in rural areas with low connectivity which also engages parents as active stakeholders in their children's education and Explorax, a low connectivity platform which combined play-based learning with high quality educational content in STEM. As a result of their interventions, ConnectED witnessed increased interest among families in education in their communities.

In **Honduras**, **Acción Honduras** launched the Celestia Initiative, in the communities of Emituca, El Chaparral, El Jicaral, Managuara, Oropule, and El Suyatillo. A pilot approach, it aims to reduce the digital divide in rural communities by providing educational content through accessible technology that does not require an internet connection. Teachers report feeling better prepared to integrate technology into their classes and students have improved their access to quality educational materials. This initiative has strengthened the connection between schools and communities, promoting inclusive and participatory education. This year, Acción Honduras will focus on learning and iteration, with the aim of consolidating the program approach in 2025.

UREMU: Music as a Tool for Solidarity, Learning and Advocacy

The **UREMU Project in Honduras** uses music to develop creative, safe spaces for children and young people, and tackle the root causes of violence. This year they had an enrollment of 299 students, almost 50% larger than they estimated their capacity would be without RECARGA support. The organization opened a new unit in Chamelecón Norte in partnership with Warriors Zulu Nation, another GFC partner, and opened the Sparrow Academy, which supports children and adolescents in the Bordo de Rancho el Coco neighborhood.

As the program grew and introduced new students, the team saw the very real impact musical education has on children's **individual confidence and the development of lifeskills**: "Social change is something we all clearly understand, and we're aware that UREMU isn't just about music, but also about the change seen in young people...At each concert, we can see great results at the end of the events. Young people share life stories at the concerts. Thanks to UREMU, new experiences have been expanded for young people by participating in new places, where they receive validation in their lives and gain new life experiences. And at the end of the concerts, it's a validation of what they do."

Collaborating with RECARGA partner, CICAÍ, created space for collective learning and solidarity with other communities. In August, the partners came together in Intibucá for a cultural knowledge exchange to promote understanding and appreciation for the rich cultural heritage of the Intibucá people through a series of educational and recreational activities. The aim was to share knowledge and experiences with one another through music: “In addition to bringing music to the organization's educational spaces, students from both organizations reinforced essential values and learned the importance of solidarity through cultural exchange.”

To close the year, the team organized a **community concert and recital** with sister organization, Barrios Orquestados, which works with young people at risk of violence. With the support of collaboration grants from GFC, they held a concert dedicated to Latin American music, attended by nearly 1,000 people. The event not only spotlighted the individual and collective achievements of the young people but promoted UREMU as an organization at the municipal level: “The impact of this presentation was immediate: we established a **relationship with the Cortés Chamber of Commerce and Industry**, which expressed interest in supporting our project, along with other local stakeholders committed to our vision.”

Several partners reported how their educational programming is **shifting perceptions and making education more accessible** while also centering education on the learner.

In **Honduras** this year, **CICAÍ** has opened an entrepreneurial school, improved their facilities, purchased new educational materials and provided scholarships to Indigenous students. Not only has this opened educational opportunities to students who otherwise would be left behind, but it “planted hope in our students, their families, and coworkers.” They noted that this was only possible with the flexible funding and trust they received being part of RECARGA.



In **Guatemala**, **ADUS'** newly implemented reading and math competitions have improved concentration and sparked a new reading culture. **Yo'o's** "Discovering the World" lecture series helped fifth and sixth grade students imagine different career possibilities through a series of weekly lectures given by professionals from different careers around the world. **Futuro Vivo'** student-centered approach to learning turns accountability on its head and recognizes student assessments as a two-way street between students and teachers. As opposed to just the teachers undertaking the assessment process, students and teachers reflect together: “This model promotes transparency in the assessment process and fosters a sense of shared responsibility for learning.”

ConnectED opens of an inclusive class- Inclusive education for children with disabilities

Partners across both countries described activities that engaged the **diverse communities** they are part of.

In **Guatemala** this year, **Yo'o** planted a communal organic garden, engaging students and their families, with the aim of recovering ancestral practices and promoting collective environmental education.

In **Honduras**, **Paso a Paso** embraced the cultural and political history of the communities it works in, by organizing Student Day, recognizing the importance of the struggle to defend students' rights and a commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the coup d'état to remember the country's history. In September, a memorial service was held in memory of the great popular educator Paulo Freire, and a training activity was held at the school with the teachers. Anti-Military Day and the commemoration of Indigenous Resistance Day were planned as an alternative to the celebration of Armed Forces Day. **Paso a Paso** also implemented “Yo Si Puedo, a national popular education project to support the literacy of 80 women in the community. **CICAÍ** connected young people to spiritual leaders in the Lenca communities through a generational training process and also engaged in several commemoration days, supporting great community connection and transmission of cultural values.

In **Guatemala**, one partner described their holistic approach, which recognized **the whole student** - with differing psychological needs and family environments. **Peronia Adolescente** provided 18 educational scholarships, with the aim of supporting students at risk of dropping out, through an individualized process as opposed to isolated activities. The program combines comprehensive care, a deep understanding of the family context, peer tutoring and psychological support which translates into "an education for life," as it generates critical thinking by allowing students to be protagonists in problem-solving in the school environment. In addition, it reinforces positive thinking regarding their areas of strength and opportunity. The psychologist works with the family and staff as well as the students.

2. Educators and learning spaces

Throughout the past year, partners have invested in teacher training, building capacities in psychological needs, learning difficulties, gender and technology, and illustrated how this is already translating into stronger educational programming and more individualized student care. Creating new or improved infrastructure and new school supplies have helped partners in both countries to improve their place in the community and support more inclusive educational spaces.

In **Honduras**, **Chispa Project** created 10 new school libraries, delivered 12,264 books and trained 272 teachers and educators in reading programs. **CICAI** used part of their funding to repair classrooms, purchase equipment for technology classrooms and the teachers' kitchens and trained educators in entrepreneurship, life skills, and safety measures. Teachers also played a critical role in providing feedback as part of **Accion Honduras'** Celestia Initiative - part of their training included the use of technological resources in developing pedagogical strategies. In August 2024, **Paso a Paso** held a virtual workshop for partners Educate to Transform Liberating pedagogy, which is based on the teachings of Paulo Freire.

In **Guatemala**, **ConnectED's** fellowship initiative is an approach to build the capacity of teachers in the communities. One 2024 Fellow, Wilfredo Yac, described what being a Fellow means to him: "It's the privilege of being heard. Like many other teachers, I've had ideas that were overlooked or never implemented. As a Fellow, I gained the skills to implement a project seamlessly. It's both a great privilege and a great responsibility to do something meaningful for our communities." **ConnectED** integrated a gender equality component into the program approach to promote greater awareness and sensitivity to girls and women's rights. This was co-designed with a council of women fellows. **EPRODEP** provided training on psychosocial support with the guidance of an inclusive education facilitator. **Yo'o** provided training which focused on the "detection, diagnosis, and implementation of the pedagogical journal of learning difficulties." **Tierra Nueva** trained 12 teachers for children aged 6-14 in the use of technology-based learning through the Safe Digital Education project. **Yo'o**, **Peronia Adolescente** and **Nueva Esperanza** all invested in new or improved office spaces and cultural centers to deliver their educational programming.

3. Organizational Strengthening

The third year of the program has been a time for deep organizational reflection for partners, collective learning and intentional internal capacity development. Partners across Guatemala and Honduras spent flexible funding and supplemental grant funding on **systematizing programing, creating shared goals, documenting learning and creating stronger HR, MEL and financial systems.**

With a supplementary grant, the Tierra Nueva team were able to hire external consultants to review all HR processes and propose a more efficient model, which has been operationalized. The process also identified the need for a monitoring and evaluation model, which has been developed and is accompanied by a guiding document to support its implementation.

"The main achievement this year for Tierra Nueva has been its self-assessment and a pause to identify strengths and challenges. Part of GFC's support with the institutional assessment has allowed us to advance the construction of our Human Resources and Monitoring and Evaluation models, which provides greater clarity to institutional processes."

In **Guatemala**, **Yo'o**, together with Population Council, facilitated a rich participatory process with young people to document the organization's story. **Peronia Adolescente** and **Tierra Nueva** collaborated in a knowledge sharing space and migration-focused play, through which they learned new approaches to programming and strengthened the technical knowledge of the teams. **Peronia Adolescente** undertook a branding and communications project to document good practice case studies, resulting in clearer branding identity and a more professional organizational manual. **Tierra Nueva** and **Nueva Esperanza** both invested in assessing and updating systems. **Futuro Vivo** developed organizational goals to guide its work and **ADUS** developed a 5-year strategic plan: "This plan represents a significant advancement for our association, since it establishes clear objectives and the way to achieve them. This plan is a strength for the development of the organization."

In **Honduras**, **Paso a Paso** worked to systematize and document their socio-educational program approach, which will help to communicate their work with communities and families: "This has been a dream of many years, and it is now becoming a reality so that future member families can learn about and understand the life process and essence of our program." Paso a Paso partnered with **Acción Honduras** to develop new communications materials and creative resources including a brand manual and other digital and printed resources: "This type of alliance positions Acción Honduras as a benchmark in the production of high-quality materials, opening up new possibilities for collaboration in the future." **CICAI** developed a range of internal materials including a risk prevention manual, communications strategy and capacity strengthening approach. **Chispa** conducted a reflection and learning process for staff to identify successes and challenges over the year. **UREMU** developed an organizational Theory of Change. The organizational development activities of Paso a Paso, UREMU, and CICAI were carried out with the support of CIPE consultants. This coordinated approach allowed partners to systematize achievements and strategic plans, learning from each other while maintaining ownership.

Self and collective care was a prominent thread for partners who worked to embed care practices with their teams and through their educational programs, recognizing the importance of care as a thread throughout all aspects of their work.

In **Guatemala**, **Peronia Adolescente's** technical team participated in training and capacity building on restorative approaches and self-care, the learnings of which were integrated into organizational self-care policies during annual planning. In the second half of the year, several restorative circles were held with adolescent and young adult beneficiaries, creating spaces for listening and assertive communication. **Tierra Nueva** has developed a self-care plan for the year ahead, which includes a Comprehensive Development Policy for the technical team, an 8-session self-care process, and the establishment of the psychological care clinic for staff and program participants who are referred, demonstrating the importance of weaving self-care approaches and principles through the institution itself as well as the programs it delivers.

In **Honduras**, **Paso a Paso** coordinates a spirituality group, which is geared toward students and young people, but also includes team members to reflect and work on emotional care together. **CICAI** promotes outdoor recreational activities, recognizing the importance of nature for students' wellbeing.

Cross-Regional Care: The Wellbeing and Restorative Leadership Convening

At the RECARGA convening in April 2024, the partners identified the critical need for shared learning and space on care and wellbeing, an area that GFC encourages prioritizing through all aspects of work and programming. A second in-person gathering was not actually in the plans for the year, but the GFC team was able to rework the budget and support partners' wish for an in-person Wellbeing and Restorative Leadership convening in August 2024. Partners from both countries took part in the wellbeing convening, which was led by peer organization CIRCULA. The convening was an opportunity for reflection and relationship building while undergoing training on self-care and wellbeing approaches. The objectives of the convening were to:

- Understand the importance of self-care and how to avoid burnout, learn simple practices that are easy to remember, do and share with others.
- To learn about different components of self-care, including the political, community, personal and practical.
- To encourage the implementation of small changes in their organizations that contribute to the wellbeing of their colleagues and therefore have an impact on the quality of service to the communities they work with.

Throughout the program, specific spaces were created for individual and collective reflection, including space to apply the knowledge they had acquired to their professional environments as well as their personal realities. Testimonies from the participants demonstrate the importance of rest and care as social justice leaders and human rights defenders, often working within highly restrictive and stressful political contexts.

“From the moment we arrived, we connected with nature and the environment, feeling connected and relaxed. We were also able to find a stronger connection with our fellow RECARGA members. The speaker provided a very clear approach to self-care.”

“It was a magnificent meeting; I dare say I experienced catharsis.”

It is increasingly clear that RECARGA has been pivotal in supporting partners to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their fundraising this year, sharpening fundraising approaches and connecting partners to new and diverse donors.

In **Honduras, Chispa** implemented a streamlining process for their financial management, which improved transparency and resulted in the organization exceeding its fundraising goal: “The new financial oversight processes allow us to maximize the impact of each donation and grant, meeting the accountability standards required by our donors and stakeholders.”

In **Guatemala, Yo’o, Peronia Adolescente and Tierra Nueva** have all been working to connect with new donors and diversify their funding streams. **Peronia Adolescente** reflected on this: “An important achievement is the diversification of donors for Peronia Adolescente, thanks to participation in various events such as the CADF, FOCUS meetings, and RECARGA. New foundations have confirmed their support for this year, and some have confirmed their support for 2025. There is also a special award from FOCUS, which is donating \$2,000 for the institution's activities.”

RECARGA opened new doors and presented opportunities that did not exist before, demonstrating the power of a networked approach in shifting the funding ecosystem itself. RECARGA’s own donors have also expressed interest in taking on RECARGA partners as direct grantee partners, including receiving emergency funding. As well as creating new opportunities such as these, RECARGA has been helpful in leveraging other funding sources for partners, sparking new partnerships and deepening fundraising expertise.

Caring for Our Hive: The Colmena Approach

In Mesoamerica, bees and their honey are historically sacred, particularly for indigenous Maya communities, within which many GFC partners are founded and engaging today. Colmena means “hive” in Spanish, and how bees communicate to organize their hives and societies is an inspiring metaphor for reflecting on the health, strength, and potential of any community-rooted organization. Just as bees come together to care for their hive and surrounding community, swarming to where work most needs to be done, the broader team that makes up the organization can gather to reflect and take action on what requires extra care and where it is time to focus greater attention, whether internally or externally.

In the first year of RECARGA, the GFC team facilitated two-day participatory self-assessment workshops with each partner using its Organizational Capacity Index (OCI) tool and methodology, which informed and motivated partners to build organizational development plans together with their whole teams. The Colmena methodology builds on the OCI approach, using the same 6 core capacity areas: Results, Work, Team, Structure, Connections, and Adapting, but, shaping the conversation around this new metaphor of the hive and introducing new games and activities to keep things dynamic and fresh.⁶

⁶ GFC originally created La Colmena in mid-2024 for use with in-coming partners to the U Muuk’il Xch’úupalo’ob - Strength of Girls Initiative in Yucatán, Mexico.

As always, GFC's capacity development approach is to support partners to decide what they feel is most important to address and how to best use their valuable and limited time. Following the Colmena workshops, GFC has offered organizational development grants to remove financial obstacles that could slow the momentum that is generated and support the resulting action plans with additional resources. Starting in January 2025 in Honduras, GFC has facilitated 14 Colmena workshops in Guatemala and Honduras (with one more expected later this year) and disbursed 6 organizational development grants, with \$38,500 in funding set aside for the remaining grants to be disbursed by June.

4. Networking and civil society engagement

Throughout the year, GFC has worked to support the deepening and strengthening of partners' collaborations with one another and the expanding of their outside networks. This has included convening space with donors and funders in the region through a meeting with the RECARGA Donor Collaborative as well as other civil society actors through the Central America Donors Forum.

In their third year together, RECARGA **partners have truly deepened the connection with one another**, leaning on each other for guidance, and entering spaces of learning and exchange with a vulnerability only possible where there is mutual trust and respect. Through the network measurement process we can quantify how networks in each country have further developed, but what is beautiful are the stories that accompany the numbers.

In **Honduras, UREMU and CICA** came together in August 2024 to take part in a cultural exchange in Intibucá. The event aimed to promote understanding and appreciation for the rich cultural heritage of the Intibucá people through a series of educational and recreational activities. Participants had the opportunity to learn about each other's unique artisanal practices, cultural traditions, and technical skills, such as weaving, pan flute making and music. During the cultural exchange, music stood out as a powerful bridge for students to share personal stories and experiences. The event not only strengthened the ties between the two institutions but also fostered greater respect and appreciation for diverse cultural traditions. **Acción Honduras and Paso a Paso's** knowledge exchange on brand and digital communications positioned Acción Honduras as a leader in the production of high-quality materials, while strengthening the Paso a Paso team's brand identity and communications approach.

In **Guatemala, EPRODEP and Yo'o** conducted a knowledge exchange visit, which coincided with an annual cultural week that EPRODEP organizes. The Yo'o team learned about different inclusive education methodologies used to tackle violence, while also exchanging practices and knowledge on fundraising and family engagement: "We were able to observe how the entire educational community (teachers, students, and administrative team) actively participates in the preparation of a variety of recreational and educational activities to raise awareness. We shared various resources such as fundraising tools, a guide for implementing family gardens, and contacts with whom they can explore other partnerships for their programs." **Tierra Nueva** engaged in knowledge exchanges with both **Puerta de Esperanza and Peronia Adolescente** in playful methodologies and psychological first aid. The team reported that: "without a doubt, RECARGA has enabled inter-institutional exchanges to learn about methodologies and educational materials that promote community-based education."

At the regional level, in June 2024, RECARGA partners facilitated a regional call about education with 30+ grassroots organizations who are partners of GFC's across Latin America, giving them broader peer visibility. Looking ahead to 2025, GFC paid for the membership of all GFC partners to be part of El Directorio Guatemala, a networking space with peers and funders, which also gives them access to participate in the *Mesa del Tercer Sector* (Third Sector Roundtable), of which there is one specifically for education.

3rd Regional RECARGA Meeting & Focus Central America

In March 2025, partners came together in Panama for the third regional partner gathering across Guatemala and Honduras and to participate in Focus Central America's annual partner appreciation summit. The objective of the regional partner meeting was to create a safe space of connection between RECARGA partners, to spark collective energy and foster collaboration. RECARGA partners had the chance to visit an alumni partner from GFC, Fundación Espacio Creativo, which seeks to create opportunities for children and adolescents through dance, education and culture. This was an opportunity for partners to share knowledge and educational approaches in different contexts. The group also visited the Museo de la Mola to learn about the indigenous arts cultures of Panama, and the Panama Canal to learn about the history of this key regional commercial hub and the history of US intervention in the region. At the summit, partners were able to connect across country contexts and find connections with other organizations working on health, democracy, education and other areas. It was also an opportunity to meet with donors.

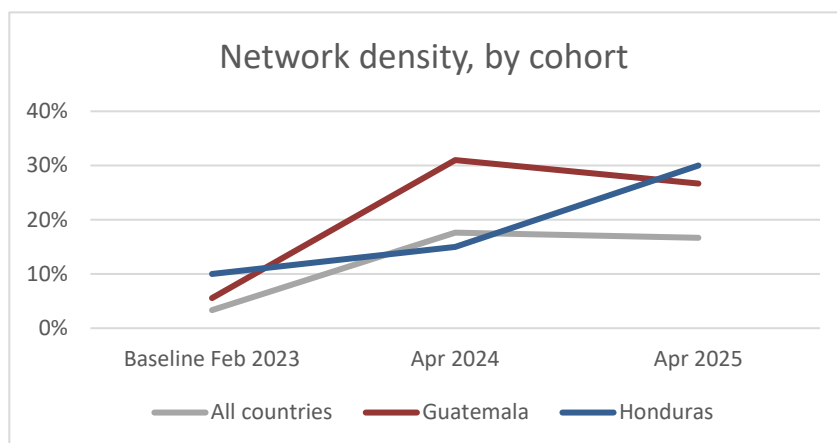
The value of in-person connection cannot be understated and has been pivotal in deepening the trusting relationships which form the foundation of RECARGA.



RECARGA partners practice dance with alumni partner, Fundación Espacio Creativo

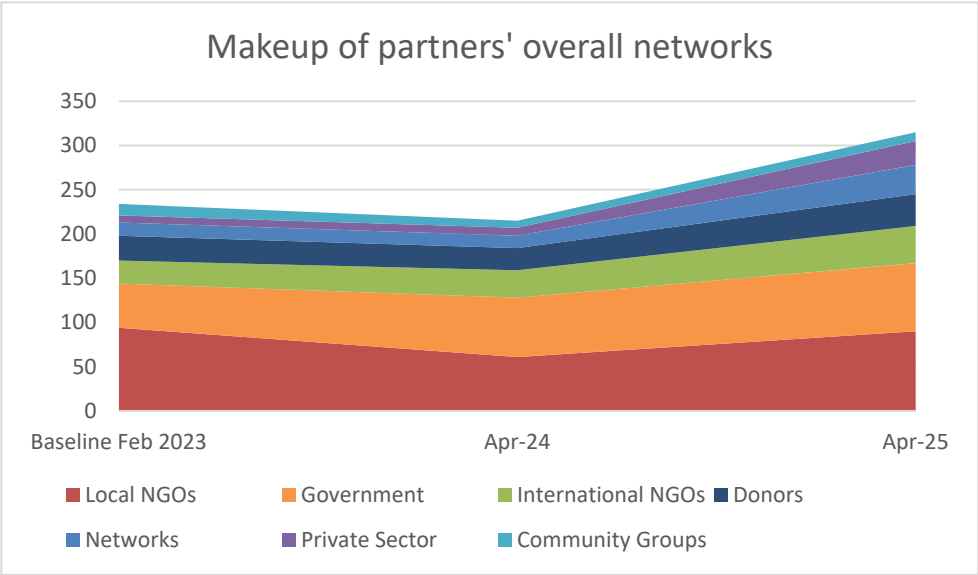
Organizational Network Analysis

Since RECARGA began, GFC has used organizational network analysis to measure and visualize the complex networks partners leverage to achieve their missions, and to track how these may change over time. Over the first two years of engagement with RECARGA partners, we were already able to see a deepening of their connections with each other. Now in its third year, we are seeing both a shift in the Guatemala cohort towards external networking, and the delayed, but no less powerful deepening of connections within the Honduras cohort. While the overall network density for the RECARGA cohort dropped just slightly to 27.8% (from 28.1% in Year 2), a more nuanced analysis illustrates a few dynamics.

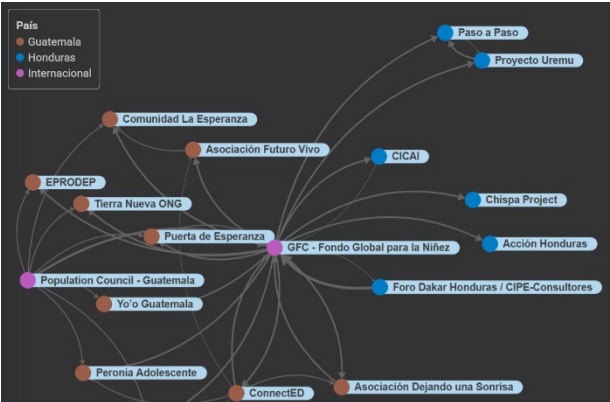


When we eliminate from the analysis GFC and the two resource partners who accompanied the country cohorts, but were not themselves members, we can see that the Guatemala partners jumped quickly to build internal connections the first year (see first graph), even if each of their connections were not particularly deep (see second graph). The Honduras partners, however, took longer to build relationships within the RECARGA cohort, but have now caught up with their Guatemalan peers. The Honduran partners, while starting off with fewer connections each, engaged with each connected organization in 3 different ways⁷, on average (compared to Guatemala partners’ less than 2), at baseline, suggesting they may be more selective in networking and take time to engage, but once they have built trusting relationships, they do so more deeply.

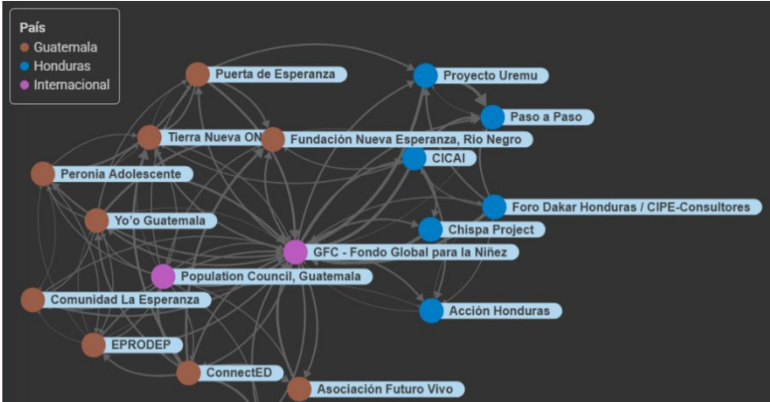
Partners across both cohorts have seen an increase in the average number of connections they each hold, though it’s interesting to note a slightly larger expansion of Honduras partners’ networks (likely facilitated by a greater openness to “looser ties” which allow organizations to leverage more discrete points of mutual benefit without needing to establish broad alignment or deep connection.



Partners overall networks have shifted in makeup over time, primarily through a growing number of connections with government, the private sector, and other networks. It appears that the foundations of trust for collective resilience and learning are now supporting the beginning of shared influencing and advocacy efforts where possible and strategic in two challenging contexts. While social and political systems change is a long-term project, we are witnessing the strengthening of a civil society network that will be well formed and strategically placed to continue this work of advocating for a more holistic education system in both Guatemala and Honduras.



Network map baseline Feb 2023



Network map April 2025

⁷ Partners were asked to identify how they engaged with each organization mentioned in their network, selecting as many types of engagement as applied: “We share program information,” “We learn together in spaces for exchange,” “We implement education programs together,” “We support each other’s advocacy” and “We receive or give funds or volunteer time.”

5. Advocacy and Acknowledgement

Advocacy, with long term political goals such as policy changes or system transformation, is a long game and can take generations. Partners undertook advocacy at the municipal, regional and national levels, with more activity in Guatemala where the environment is less restrictive and reported promising initial signs of recognition and government interest. This year, partners in both countries were rewarded and recognized for their tireless human rights work.

In **Guatemala**, **Yo'o and Fututo Vivo** focused efforts on the Ministry of Education, with Futuro Vivo welcoming the Minister for an in-person visit. This resulted in certification of both organization's programs, an important validation for education organizations in Guatemala. As well as participating in the Ministry activities, **Yo'o** presented the results of their work at the National Congress on Early Childhood Care and were offered an agreement to register as a non-school center. **Tierra Nueva** applied a networked approach to target the Ministry, working with the "Voices for Education" network, an initiative that brings together 10 organizations from the Western Highlands to put forward a proposal to make visible good education practices. Together they called for improved educational conditions.

At the regional level, Gloria Gonzalez from **Nueva Esperanza** was appointed the NGO representative for both the Regional Development Council of the Northern Region (Alta and Baja Verapaz) and the Departmental Development Council of Baja Verapaz. Both entities act as a bridge between the national government and local municipalities, fostering citizen engagement, coordinating development efforts, and managing public resources.

In **Honduras**, while the context is less hospitable for advocacy than Guatemala, partners shared significant examples of ministerial engagement and recognition. **Paso a Paso** received the 2023-2024 Human Rights Award granted by Operation Daywork, which recognizes their work to tackle violence and their commitment to children and their families. They also implemented a literacy program in partnership with the Ministry of Education. **Accion Honduras** extended the memorandum of understanding with the municipal education departments of Lepaterique, Curaren, and Reitoca for the implementation of methodologies that promote inclusive and participatory education and reduce the digital divide. **CICAI** participated in the local development committee to manage and coordinate the local government's commitment to Lenca youth.

Partners in Honduras reflected on the difficulties they face in advocating in any overt or political way. One partner compared the context with Guatemala: "Guatemala and Honduras are very different contexts – community organizing provides a strength there that isn't here." Another shared that: "Resistance is in our DNA, but we have to remain silent."

The Story of Petronila: From Student to Ambassador of Peace

Petronila is a young woman who began her journey at Puerta de Esperanza as a participant of the tutoring program. Since she joined, Petronila stood out for her dedication and commitment, which led to her volunteering as a Big Sister, where she mentored other children and young people in her community. After completing her training, she began working as a preschool educator and on the street team, where she found her true calling, supporting children and adolescents who, for various reasons, are unable to attend our programs. Petronila became a symbol of hope for them, as well as supporting them with their homework. The dedication to her community, the same community where she herself is from, has never wavered. The impact of her work has been so significant that she was nominated for the Peace Rose Exchange at the National Palace, in commemoration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. During the event, Petronila was named an Ambassador of Peace, well-deserved for her effort, dedication, and embodied examples of personal and community transformation.

"For Puerta de Esperanza, accompanying Petronila's journey and witnessing her evolution has been a source of profound joy. Seeing how she has managed to transform her life and that of her family, while positively impacting her surroundings, inspires us to continue believing in the power of community and the opportunities we can create together.

IV. Looking ahead

As the third year of RECARGA comes to an end the team is actively seeking additional funding to support the momentum for the next phase of the initiative and continue to deepen the network relationships and capacity for shared learning and advocacy, while continually developing and promoting a wide diversity of transformative pedagogies that educate young people to thrive. In October 2024, partners validated the RECARGA model in a series of co-design workshops which affirmed that the basic elements of the initiative should continue. In the years ahead, with support from the donor collaborative, GFC will continue to provide flexible funding and supplemental grants, convene virtual and in-person gatherings, and provide direct accompaniment and organizational development support to partners as a manifestation of the trust-based relationships that have been built over the past three years.

While GFC considers it critical to maintain flexibility for partners, both in their individual programs and in their collective ambitions, we are excited and hopeful about the priorities and plans that partners have voiced for the next 3 years:

- Shared learning and experimentation with pedagogies including the use of gender transformative approaches and Indigenous knowledge and practice
- Participatory approaches including engaging children, youth, parents and communities in shaping and influencing the education system
- Social and community advocacy, including public awareness campaigns and policy dialogues
- Self and collective care, recognizing the importance of positive wellbeing

Partners will continue to push for change at the community and national levels, advocating to the extent that is safe and strategic within their contexts, and with support from GFC. This includes engaging government ministries where possible and engaging strategically with existing education networks, to strengthen connections across the ecosystem. In the fragility of the current funding system, it will also be critical to continue to further diversity funding streams, build relationships with funders across the region and globally and support donor organizing and learning through the collaborative fund model that RECARGA provides. As we heard from RECARGA donors, with new challenges due to the US government's abrupt cessation of funding in the region, it is more important than ever that RECARGA fuel the local groups' innovations to meet this moment:

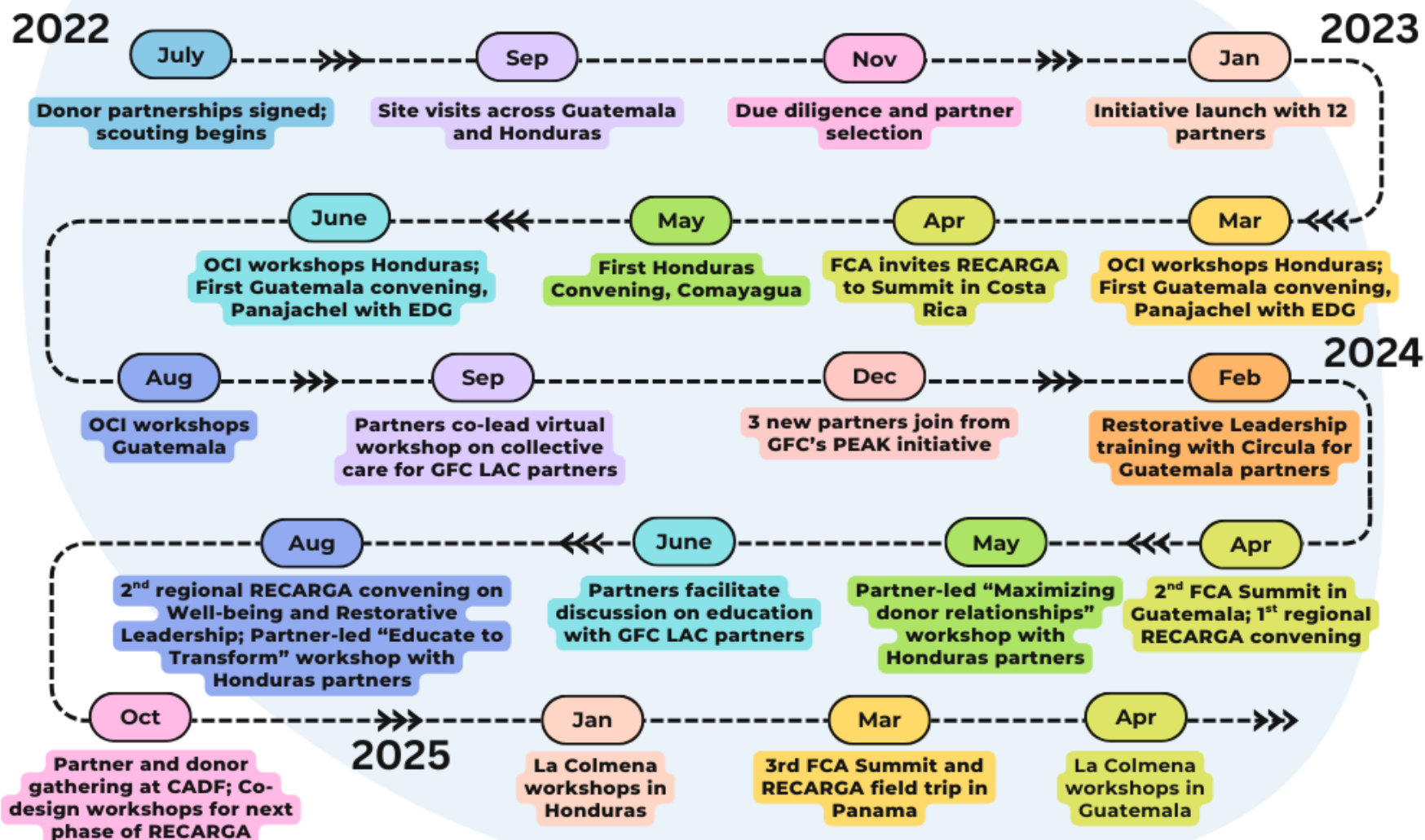
“RECARGA is a standout model in collaborative funding. It focuses on building alliances among the partners and among donors, maximizing impact while reducing the administrative burden everyone involved.” -RECARGA donor

Based on what we have learned over the past 3 years, RECARGA partners and the initiative itself have the capability and energy to positively influence the quality and inclusive education systems in Guatemala and Honduras for years to come.



Chispa Project works with students to outline story plots from beginning to end

Our Journey with RECARGA





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