



# Let's Answer Your Questions!

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## **WHO WE ARE**

We are **MAIA**, an organization designed and led by Indigenous women for **Indigenous girls**. Our name comes from Maia, one of the brightest stars in the night sky, a symbol of knowledge and wisdom that holds meaning in all three languages we work in (Kaqchikel, Spanish, English).

## **What is our vision and mission?**

Our mission is to **unlock and maximize the power of young women to lead transformational change**. Our vision is that **we believe in empowerment, equality, and opportunity for all**.

## **What is our impact model?**

**We are redefining education in rural Guatemala through a model that combines academics, culture, health and well-being, socioemotional education, family engagement, and personal development.** Our model includes pre-secondary school academic leveling, a rigorous secondary education, program mentors who provide one-on-one mentorship and monthly home visits to engage the family, comprehensive health and nutrition services, and a post-secondary school program that provides university access coaching, vocational orientation, workplace skills training, and formal internships.

## **How long is our impact model?**

Girl Pioneers (what we call our students) and their families commit to **7 years** of programming.

## **Why do we prioritize Indigenous girls?**

In Guatemala, young Indigenous women confront highly challenging social and structural obstacles. **Statistics show that 57% of Indigenous girls become mothers before they are 20 years of age. Three out of 10 are forced into early marriage and only 2 out of 10 graduates from high school.** Conventional thinking in rural Guatemala is often ruled by machismo and the notion that girls should remain at home.

## **Who is a Girl Pioneer?**

We call our students **Girl Pioneers** because many are the first in their families to continue their education and begin to break cycles of generational poverty.

## **Where do Girl Pioneers come from?**

Girl Pioneers and their families come from **40+ rural highland villages in the department of Sololá, Guatemala**.

### Why do we focus our work on Sololá?

Sololá is 98% Indigenous Maya and has **the second-highest poverty level in Guatemala.**

### How many beneficiaries does MAIA serve?

Each year, we serve nearly **2,000 people, including 250-300 Girl Pioneers** and their families.

### How many Girl Pioneers enter MAIA each year?

Approximately 40-60.

### How does a girl become a Girl Pioneer?

To select future Girl Pioneers, **we consider economic needs, academic achievement, motivation, and the proximity of their location to the MAIA Impact School.** This one-year selection process includes community mapping and engagement, interviews, socioeconomic studies, written applications, and academic assessments.

### What do we look for when selecting Girl Pioneers?

Girl Pioneers are often the first females in their families to continue their education beyond primary school. When they apply to the Impact School, **they are currently studying in primary school, live within a 90-minute distance from the Impact School, and come from families whose parents average 3 years of formal education.**

### WHAT IS OUR IMPACT MODEL?

- **The MAIA Impact School** was launched in 2017 and is **Central America's first secondary school designed for Indigenous young women from rural communities**, known as Girl Pioneers, to connect them with 21st-century opportunities. We serve approximately 250 Girl Pioneers in grades 7-11, redefining education in rural Guatemala by prioritizing academics, culture, well-being, reproductive health, socioemotional intelligence, and personal development. Every Girl Pioneer receives a full scholarship, two daily meals, books, supplies, uniforms, and hygiene kits.
- **The Socioemotional and Family Engagement Program** addresses personal development and empowerment, which are critical to the success of Girl Pioneers. **MAIA mentors offer individual and group sessions that cover non-academic topics such as goal setting, sexual and reproductive health, emotional well-being, and leadership skills.** This mentorship empowers them to use their voices and feel secure in expressing themselves. Monthly home visits and family engagement contribute to building a strong support system for Girl Pioneers.
- **The Launch Year Program** offers graduates from the MAIA Impact School **vocational orientation, university preparation, workplace readiness training, and internship experiences in the formal economy.** A central component of the Launch Program is a paid internship to gain workplace skills, experience, and greater access to opportunities.

### What is the academic leveling year?

Prior to the pandemic, Girl Pioneers entered secondary school (7th grade) at the MAIA Impact School with average 4th-grade math and reading comprehension levels. This dropped even further during the pandemic. To ensure Girl Pioneers are academically prepared for secondary school, they enter a year-long academic leveling program (**Project Impulso**) while still in their final year of primary school (6th grade) in the public school system. Depending on their academic need, Girl Pioneers attend 2-5 days of Project Impulso each week in the afternoons after completing their school day in primary school to **receive intensive academic leveling in math, reading comprehension, writing, technology, and more.**

### What else do Girl Pioneers receive?

Girl Pioneers receive **two nutritious meals daily, books, supplies, uniforms, and personal hygiene kits.**

### Do Girl Pioneers and their families pay any fees for MAIA's programming?

**Girl Pioneers receive a full scholarship for all of MAIA's services and programs.**

Families commit to covering only their transportation to and from the Impact School, however, families who live further from the school receive travel stipends.

### Is the MAIA Impact School a boarding school?

**The Impact School is not a boarding school.** Girl Pioneers travel to and from the Impact School to attend full-day classes Monday to Friday.

### Do we provide scholarships for Girl Pioneers to attend university?

We do not provide university scholarships, nevertheless, during Launch Year, Girl Pioneers **receive vocational orientation and university and scholarship access coaching** to ensure they can build the support needed to attend university and succeed.

### Where do our educators and mentors come from?

We are firmly committed to our philosophy: "If she can see it, she can be it." When a Girl Pioneer sees that her math educator, English educator, or mentor is an Indigenous woman from a community she knows, she believes in herself. She knows that she, too, can achieve this. For this reason, our educators and mentors come from the same communities as Girl Pioneers. Our team is 87% Indigenous, and 37% are graduates of MAIA.

### Do we accept volunteers?

Because of our focus on local talent, **we do not often accept volunteers.** However, we have collaborated with volunteers in the past in coaching and other specialized activities.

**If program educators and mentors come from the same communities as Girl Pioneers and went through the underdeveloped public school system that MAIA seeks to change, how do we ensure educators and mentors are prepared to provide quality services?**

We often do not find staff with the skills and professional level we seek. Consequently, **we invest heavily in our staff's professional development and capacity building.** All educators and mentors have content coaches and receive weekly capacity-building in innovative best practices, classroom management, leadership development, and more. By developing our local staff, we ensure staff retention and that Girl Pioneers and their families receive high-quality services. Likewise, if a MAIA educator or mentor moves on to new opportunities, we know their growth and development will positively change systems beyond MAIA and demonstrate the talent of rural Indigenous women.

### **HOW DO WE KNOW OUR IMPACT MODEL WORKS?**

- In Guatemala, fewer than 20% of Indigenous girls complete secondary school. **MAIA has a 96% historical retention rate.**
- In Guatemala, fewer than 2% of Indigenous girls enter university. **61% of Girl Pioneers from our first cohort of graduates are currently studying at university.**
- In Guatemala, fewer than 10% of Indigenous women work in the formal economy. **61% of Girl Pioneers from our first cohorts of graduates are formally employed, and 37% report being economically independent within 6 months of completing our program.**
- In 2021, we were named **one of the top innovations in Latin America** by [HundrED](#).
- We have been **featured partners** of the [Obama Foundation's Girls Opportunity Alliance](#) to increase girls' participation in education and society.
- In 2023, MAIA entered [T4's list of the top 10 schools in the world in overcoming adversity.](#)

**If you want more information about MAIA and our impact, please [read our organization summary](#) or [qualitative impact study](#).**

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