

# Where Tech Meets Philanthropy

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The nexus between high-tech wealth and philanthropy has been expanding, and a nonprofit that builds libraries in developing countries has found particular success in tapping it.

Room to Read, founded by a former Microsoft executive, has raised more than \$33 million in cash and gifts in kind, much of it from donors connected to the technology industry. Among them are Dell founder Michael Dell and onetime Microsoft nemesis Marc Andreessen of Netscape fame. Others include Donald Valentine, founder of venture-capital firm Sequoia, which has backed many tech start-ups, and investment banker Herbert Allen. The San Francisco group also has received corporate money from Microsoft and Google, among others.



A library being built in Nepal, one of 3,600 schools and libraries Room to Read has helped construct.

Now, the nonprofit is getting \$1 million from Goldman Sachs Group, an investment bank that has numerous high-tech clients. The Goldman grant, to be made in three installments, will fund about 450 libraries in India that will be set up in existing schools, community centers and other places "where kids are already congregating," says John Wood, chief executive of Room to Read.

The Goldman money comes as Room to Read's profile has been rising, spurred by Mr. Wood's book last year about how he started the nonprofit after becoming disenchanted with his work at Microsoft. The Goldman funds are another step toward Room to Read's goal to set up 1,400 libraries and schools in developing countries this year. To date, the seven-year-old group has helped establish about 3,600 libraries and schools in countries including Nepal, Vietnam, Cambodia, India, Laos and South Africa.

The Goldman-funded libraries will augment the 980 libraries Room to Read already has set up in India. The gift also will pay for teacher training and more than a million books, according to the nonprofit. As with all of the group's libraries, it picks communities that are willing to combine their own labor and other resources with Room to Read funds. Teachers and parents, for instance, are called in to paint, set up desks and build shelves. "We kind of go with the attitude of you can only help people if they want to help themselves," Mr. Wood says.

Such community support is also critical for the libraries to last, Mr. Wood says. Room to Read aspires to make each library self-sufficient -- locally funded and managed -- within three years of its founding. That's a way to contend with the fact that most nonprofits find it far easier to raise money for new projects than for ongoing maintenance and support. Among the things Mr. Wood would like to fund if he were given more such unrestricted money are upgraded Internet connections at its libraries and better training for the librarians.

Of course, that doesn't mean he wants the flow of donations for new libraries to stop. Just this week, Room to Read's staff met with representatives from Brazil, Sudan, Ethiopia and Guatemala, all angling for new libraries, Mr. Wood says. Despite the thousands of libraries he has spurred, "That's just so minor compared to what we could be doing."