



# ACSI Research Program Framework

Prepared by the ACSI Research Department

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## HISTORY AND FUTURE OF RESEARCH & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AT ACSI

Since its founding in 1978, the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) has steadily expanded its role from a service-focused and convening body toward becoming a global leader in Christian education research and thought leadership. In the 2010s, ACSI formalized its commitment to research and innovation through work in Thought Leadership. This effort included the publication of biannual “Research in Brief” digests, the creation of a Research Fellowship program, and the development of robust platforms for blogs, podcasts, and professional development. These initiatives provided Christian school leaders with access to timely, evidence-based insights on topics ranging from school culture to spiritual formation. ACSI’s research expanded to include major projects such as the Flourishing School Culture Model (FSCM), the Flourishing Faith Index (FFI), and pandemic-related surveys that gathered critical data on school operations, teacher well-being, and enrollment trends.

In 2019, ACSI adopted a new strategic framework built around three pillars—Advancing, Access, and Advocacy—with thought leadership and innovation as central commitments. These efforts have led to forward-looking initiatives on school sustainability, the role of artificial intelligence in education, and faith-informed educational practices. Collaborations with partners like Cardus have enhanced the validity and reach of ACSI’s research, ensuring its resources are not only practical but also theologically grounded and empirically sound.

Today, ACSI is recognized not only for the quality of its services to schools but also for its role in shaping the broader global conversation about philosophy, efficacy, and trends when educating Christianly in a changing world.

As part of **Vision 2030**, this **Research Program Framework** seeks to focus our research services on Christian school associations and schools around the world. **ACSI** stands as part of a global movement in Christian education, serving alongside others engaged in research to strengthen and advance the cause together. Through validated research and a clear strategic vision, we aim to collaboratively contribute to the growth and flourishing of Christian education—**academically, spiritually, and missionally—for generations to come.**

## ACSI’S BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCH

A theological foundation for research in Christian education begins with recognizing the classical distinction between *natural revelation* and *special revelation*. According to Scripture, God reveals Himself in two ways: through the created world (natural revelation) and through the Bible (special revelation). Nature is sufficient to reveal the existence and majesty of God (Ps. 19:1–6; Rom. 1:20), but it is through the revealed

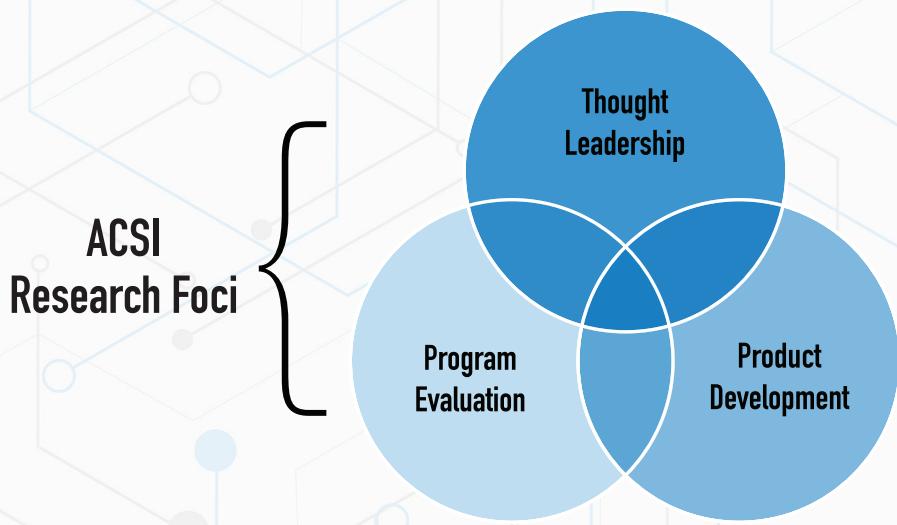
Word—God’s special revelation—that we come to understand His will and how we can be brought into right relationship with Him (Ps. 19:7–14). These two modes of revelation are not in conflict; rather, they originate from the same divine Author.

Christian researchers work primarily in the realm of natural evidence—observing, analyzing, and interpreting the world around us. Yet we do so as people who affirm the authority of Scripture and who seek to understand natural evidence in light of special revelation. Because God authored both the book of nature and the book of Scripture, we should expect that careful, honest inquiry into the created order is illuminated with what has been revealed in God’s Word.

This theological perspective on research has practical implications. For example, Scripture teaches that parents are entrusted with the primary responsibility for the education and formation of their children (e.g., Deut. 6; Ps. 78; Ps. 127). A researcher operating from a biblical worldview might therefore expect to find evidence that parent-led school choice produces positive outcomes. In this way, biblical convictions do not bias the research process but instead inform the questions we ask, the hypotheses we test, and the meaning we assign to our findings. Ultimately, research that is shaped by a biblical worldview is not neutral nor is it biased—it is faithful to research protocols such as validity and reliability and is informed by the reality of God’s creation and intent.

## ACSI’S THREE MAJOR FOCI

1. *Thought Leadership*—Think tanks and research projects should be **generative, proactive in trend-monitoring, and innovative in application**, addressing the needs, challenges, and opportunities of Christian schools worldwide.
2. *Program Development*—Research is used to **create new programs and products** (instruments, offerings) **as well as maintain existing ones** (such as FSCI/FFI and other global offerings) contextualized around the world.
3. *Program Evaluation*—Research is used to **gauge the effectiveness** of ACSI programs and products (e.g., school improvement programs) **and benchmarking** Christian schools in different global contexts as aligned with the ACSI Global Core Standards.



These foci will provide the foundation for a matrix by which research ideas and resources are developed, prioritized, and organized on an annual and multiyear basis. Together, these foci create a dynamic, evidence-based cycle that fuels meaningful and measurable school improvement across diverse Christian education contexts.

- *Thought Leadership* enables and extends research projects by situating school-level insights within the broader landscape of Christian education, offering leaders a wider lens for understanding trends, anticipating challenges, and drawing on research-based practices from around the globe.
- *Program Development* provides schools with research-informed tools and resources that are both practical and theologically grounded, equipping leaders to diagnose needs, strengthen practices, and implement targeted interventions.
- *Program Evaluation* ensures that these tools are not static but continuously refined through data-driven feedback, helping schools—as well as ACSI, for its own programs—identify what is working, where gaps exist, and how to adapt strategies for greater effectiveness.

This integrated approach moves beyond theory to practical action, empowering national associations and schools to make informed decisions, set strategic priorities, and implement sustainable change. In doing so, ACSI’s research framework becomes a powerful engine for school improvement, enabling education leaders to steward their mission with greater clarity, confidence, and competence and to make informed strategic decisions on how to best utilize resources.

## VISION 2030 PROJECT EXAMPLES (EXISTING AND SCOPED) ACROSS GLOBAL DIVISIONS, CATEGORIZED BY FOCUS

### Product Development

ACSI PRODUCT CATEGORIZATION:  
[https://acsiorrg-my.sharepoint.com/:x/g/personal/emily\\_pigott\\_acsi\\_org/EcXHe\\_1GddxGiqls\\_FPg6u0Bsu0\\_3rcBbvklHWYp43NAug?e=aXn8aC](https://acsiorrg-my.sharepoint.com/:x/g/personal/emily_pigott_acsi_org/EcXHe_1GddxGiqls_FPg6u0Bsu0_3rcBbvklHWYp43NAug?e=aXn8aC)

#### MEMBER SERVICES

Surveys: Membership, Tuition and Salaries, Commercial Insurance/Risk, Medical cost management, Global market, etc.

#### EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

#### EDUCATOR EVENTS & STUDENT PROGRAMS

### Program Evaluation

ACSI PRODUCT CATEGORIZATION:  
[https://acsiorrg-my.sharepoint.com/:x/g/personal/emily\\_pigott\\_acsi\\_org/EcXHe\\_1GddxGiqls\\_FPg6u0Bsu0\\_3rcBbvklHWYp43NAug?e=aXn8aC](https://acsiorrg-my.sharepoint.com/:x/g/personal/emily_pigott_acsi_org/EcXHe_1GddxGiqls_FPg6u0Bsu0_3rcBbvklHWYp43NAug?e=aXn8aC)

Christian school sector outcomes research (Alliances such as Cardus)

Benchmarking Tool (enrollment, governance, leadership, finances, demographics)

#### Market Analysis (Competitors' Offerings)

Internal evaluation of quality assurance measures for current programs/ products utilizing ACSI's data directory

### Thought Leadership

Topic-specific (AI, Covid, Future Ready, Mental Health, Teaching Christianly, SPED, Parents, etc.)

Media: Research in Brief; ACSI Blog

Fellow-driven research

Foundational: BWVI, Spiritual Formation, Unity, SOGI, etc.

Working papers & peer-reviewed publications from FSCI/FFI research

Thought Leadership Symposium

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT TEAM

Like all ACSI departments, the Research Department is situated within a larger organizational chart that should be consulted to understand the larger reporting structure and interrelatedness with other ACSI departments and divisions. Within the Research Department, the following individuals play either a direct or supporting role in implementing this framework and individual projects.



### 1. Director of Research

- Defines overall strategy and long-term agenda in alignment with Chief of Strategy and ACSI's mission
- Approves project proposals, ensuring alignment with biblical framework in research
- Manages and directs the execution of projects yearly
- Provides high-level guidance for all research projects, ensuring methodological rigor and theological soundness
- Oversees quality assurance of research projects
- Acts as primary liaison with the Chief Strategy Officer
- Represents ACSI Research department in internal and external meetings
- Disseminates research findings in broader Christian education movement

### 2. Research Associate

- Assists Director of Research on day-to-day management of projects
- Coordinates and liaises between research directors and fellows on project execution and completion
- Provides research support, including conducting literature reviews and data collection efforts
- Provides administrative support, including managing research documentation and records
- Collaborates with the Director of Research and research fellows in writing grants for research projects

### **3. Research Fellows (Senior, Junior, and Global Research Fellows)**

- Lead specific research projects assigned by Director of Research
- Collaborate with other fellows and Research Associate on research projects
- Provide reports and research presentations of the findings from projects
- Actively engage in the relevant academic research conversation through conferences, symposiums, and other ACSI events

### **4. Chief Strategy Officer (in coordination with other members of ACSI Cabinet)**

- Provides overarching strategic direction for ACSI Research department
- Ensures strategic alignment of research framework with ACSI's priorities
- Provides continuous feedback to Director of Research in ensuring the alignment between research framework and ACSI's broader organizational goals
- Provides approval and allocates necessary resources to support the ACSI Research department
- Champions the value of research within and outside ACSI
- Ensures the integrity of ACSI Research in conducting research projects

## **PROJECT WORKFLOW**

ACSI Research has established overarching processes and structures that govern implementation, including regular and strategic meetings, as follows:

### *Regular Meetings for Project Coordination*

- The Director of Research and Research Associate meet once a week to discuss progress of the projects and the day-to-day needs of the department.
- The Director of Research holds a monthly research department meeting among Research Associate, Research Fellows, and Chief Strategy Officer to discuss the progress and updates about the ongoing project in the department.
- The Director of Research and Chief Strategy Officer meet twice a month to discuss research projects and the alignment of the projects with ACSI's strategic plan.

### *Strategic Meetings for Accountability, Communication, and Planning*

- The Chief Strategy Officer updates ACSI cabinet members about the work from the research department on a quarterly basis.
- The Director of Research updates ACSI cabinet members, including the Chief Strategy Officer, about project completion (based on the department's yearly plan) twice a year. The cabinet will provide feedback and guidance for the Director of Research during this meeting.
- The Chief Strategy Officer and Director of Research hold meetings, as needed, with ACSI program staff (e.g., divisional directors and school improvement staff) to enable communication, collaboration, and alignment.
- Once a year, the Director of Research presents a yearly project plan, based on the Research Framework, in an ACSI leadership meeting.



## Research

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