

Public Sector Practice

Enabling at-scale government transformations through partner support

Many governments are working with philanthropic organizations on transformation efforts. Both sides can take steps to assure they get the most out of the relationship.

by Chirag Adatia, Michael Conway, Hemant Joshi, and Priyanka Ravishankar

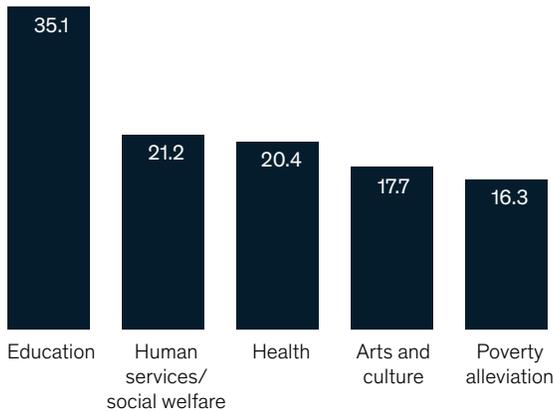


Philanthropic organizations globally have an asset base valued at more than \$1.5 trillion, which is primarily funding built through endowments and the financial returns they generate through investments. These organizations spend more than \$150 billion annually to support philanthropic activities across sectors, with education and healthcare as top priorities (Exhibit 1). To spur impact in these sectors, a growing proportion (around 60 percent) of multilaterals, bilaterals, and corporate foundations actively partner with governments to plan and implement projects¹—especially in developing economies, such as those in Africa, India, and Latin America (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 1

Education and health are among the top priorities for philanthropic organizations.

Top 5 areas of global focus, % of foundations



>\$1.5 trillion
Value of assets for foundations across the world

>\$150 billion
Charitable funds deployed annually

Source: Paula D. Johnson, *Global Philanthropy Report: Perspectives on the global foundation sector*, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, April 2018, cpl.hks.harvard.edu

External partners play an increasingly important role in leading these changes as more governments seek to transform themselves to improve the delivery of public services to citizens.² Indeed, governments are more and more open to partnering with external organizations for funds, strategy, and implementation. While these external organizations typically have solid relationships and credibility with governments, partnering with governments to carry out large-scale transformations can be challenging.

Government transformations often involve new ways of thinking, large-scale planning, multi-stakeholder coordination, and rigorous execution. But many governments lack the required resources, infrastructure, or capabilities to power them. In those cases, external partners can add immense value to the transformation process. For example, an education-transformation program in Pakistan, undertaken with a foundation partner, led to a 35 percent reduction in teacher absenteeism overall and one million additional primary-age children in school every day. In India, six external partners joined with the local Mumbai government to carry out an education-transformation program that resulted in improved learning outcomes and student attendance within just four to five years.

In this article, we look at how external partners can work best with governments on large-scale transformation programs. The insights are based on our experience with philanthropic organizations and with government agencies and ministries in projects ranging from public health to economic development.

Key success factors for working well with government

We have identified eight factors that contribute to the kind of relationship between external partners and governments necessary for the development of effective and sustainable transformation programs.

¹ Li-Kai Chen, Sathya Sriram, and Ramya Venkataraman, "Partnering for outcomes: Public-private partnership for school education in Asia," McKinsey Center for Government, October 2014, McKinsey.com.

² Tera Allas, Martin Checinski, Roland Dillon, Richard Dobbs, Solveigh Hieronimus, and Navjot Singh, "Delivering for citizens: How to triple the success rate of government transformations," McKinsey Center for Government, May 2018, McKinsey.com.

Philanthropic foundations are increasingly partnering with governments in developing countries.

60%

Foundations have government partnerships¹

>75%

Partnerships between governments and foundations are for project planning and execution¹

Example cases

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

- Supports government programs across majority of >50 developing countries in Africa and Asia (eg, agriculture-development program in Africa; public-health programs in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, India)
- Committed >\$22 billion in developing nations over past 10 years

Michael & Susan Dell Foundation

- Partners with central and state governments in India and South Africa on education and health projects
 - Invested >\$200 million in education, livelihood, and microfinance in India
 - Partners with Indian government on education and family economic stability; has worked with Digital India and Skill India initiatives

Rockefeller Foundation

- Partners with governments in Africa, Latin American, and South Asia
 - Works with Co-Impact collaborative in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia
 - Shaping implementation of Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
 - Helped develop Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa; launched a 2017–21 strategy for 11 countries across Africa

Ford Foundation

- Provided >3,500 grants totaling >\$500 million in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka
- Provides support to African governments through a development program

¹Mostly in developing countries, such as Argentina, Colombia, India, Ireland, Nigeria, and United Arab Emirates.

Source: Paula D. Johnson, *Global Philanthropy Report: Perspectives on the global foundation sector*, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, April 2018, cpl.hks.harvard.edu; press search

Have government leaders sponsor the program and communicate targets to create an environment of motivation and accountability

An external partner must engage extensively with senior administrative and political leaders to ensure commitment to the program’s vision and critical aspects of the delivery plan. The leaders should support the vision and goals publicly and transparently, formally communicating the program targets in written and video formats. That can be done in kickoff workshops for all key stakeholders—perhaps ones orchestrated by an external partner. Top political leaders should conduct structured reviews of the transformation program at least once monthly, focusing on progress and important decisions. The meetings require extensive preparation to ensure they are fruitful.

For example, in one education-transformation program, a key minister in a province in Pakistan had monthly stocktaking meetings and carried out additional actions as needed. He publicly asserted the importance of the program, helping to ensure continued progress and increased accountability.

Focus on a few important metrics or initiatives that can quickly yield high impact before transitioning to longer-term solutions

In collaboration with government officials, external partners should identify the top five to ten metrics that program leaders should track regularly, as well as supporting metrics for root-cause analyses. This approach can focus on what really matters to the program.

They should also concentrate initially on quick, high-impact initiatives that directly address the gaps identified by diagnostics; demonstrating rapid success improves motivation and the performance of the entire system.

For example, in a public-health program in Nigeria, ten metrics (a combination of outcome, output, and input) were selected from a list of more than 300 and tracked by top officials. This lens helped the officials hone their monitoring efforts, eventually contributing to program impact.

Cocreate and align programs with government officials and key independent organizations to buttress accountability and reduce conflict

While designing the program and implementation plans, external partners should gather input from various government stakeholders and seek alignment with them on the implementation plans. All key funding and implementation partners—such as other philanthropic foundations—should be brought on board, as they are often the backbone for future program expansion.

Three methods of cocreation and alignment could be used: one-on-one or small-group conversations with each key government official to understand his or her perspectives; group workshops to align on the program vision, construction, and plan; and specially convened sessions to create detailed implementation plans and seek written sign-offs from all stakeholders.

For example, in a public-health program in Nigeria, the government and two key independent organizations cocreated and signed a memorandum of understanding outlining scope, roles, responsibilities, operational details, and timelines.

Rigorously manage the program through a team of representatives from the external partner and government to accelerate progress

A program-management unit should typically consist of government representatives, partner organizations, and experts from within or outside the government. They are responsible for pushing the program ahead, tracking progress, and helping with regular problem solving and debottlenecking.

The partner organization should ensure that enough members from its group have clearly defined program-management roles so that the planned agenda can be rigorously pursued.

Detailed project implementation plans with clearly defined metrics, milestones, and workstreams must be created, with clarity on ownership of each workstream. Progress should be tracked against implementation milestones and metrics (including input, output, and outcome), and reliable dashboards (ideally, real-time) should be available to important stakeholders. The external partner should work across various levels of the government to ensure implementation.

For example, in an education transformation in Pakistan, real-time digitized data dashboards captured indicators such as district-performance summaries and school-level functioning of facilities. This information helped the central analytics and program-management teams analyze and relay action-oriented strategies back to the districts.

Have external partners focus on sustainability from the beginning of the program

External partners may be inclined to own and drive the program at a rapid pace. However, in our experience, the process will work more smoothly if government officials are equally involved. That will help ensure the program is sustainable.

In addition, we identified three areas that can lead to a more sustainable program: capability building of key officials (for example, leadership and management training) should be included in the transformation plan and budget, goals should be balanced between strengthening systems and achieving quick wins and innovation, and program details should be explicitly included in the government budget and official planning documents (as well as in the contingent budget if innovation pilots are successful).

Customized capability building for key officials through training, guides, digital tools, and best-practice dissemination are imperative for sustainability. It is important that this continues even after the transformation program is in a steady state.

For example, in one government ministry in the Middle East, a customized capability-building approach was developed for all leadership segments, with one-to-one coaching for top officials.

Focus on specific geographic priority areas to help demonstrate quick impact first—especially in situations that are skeptically received

Innovative initiatives typically need to be demonstrated in smaller units (geographic areas or specific modules) to convince stakeholders of their potential impact. What is learned can be analyzed and documented, improving the chances of an effective scale-up. External partners can facilitate or sponsor these efforts to aid proof of concept and promote cross-learning.

For example, in a school-transformation program in one Indian city, a quick demonstration of success in selected schools helped convince stakeholders of the approach's benefits, eventually leading to the program's expansion to many more schools.

Design subinitiatives to be user- and front-line-centric to improve program execution and adoption and have a grassroots impact

Input on important challenges and solution feasibility should be collected from the frontline service-delivery network and users of products that may have to be designed as part of the program. This can be done through field visits, focus-group discussions, and surveys. In addition, it is important to study the journey and work flow of the user or frontline worker to identify their unmet needs. If a product is designed for the program, a beta test with the users will be necessary before a scale-up (similar to what is done for technology products in the private sector).

For example, in a public-health program in an Indian state, inputs from the front line were used to shortlist and validate key recommendations. This approach improved government buy-in and the probability of success.

Assemble an ecosystem of content, functional, and management partners to help carry out the project and promote a culture of innovation

Before a government embarks on a transformation program, an analysis of its capabilities is required to identify areas where external support could be helpful. In our experience, the areas that typically require external support include technology, capability building, and demand generation. For instance, a build-operate-transfer model with IT vendors for digital initiatives can accelerate implementation while ensuring sustainability of the program. A dedicated team should identify, screen, and integrate partners into the program.

For example, in a school-transformation program with the governing body of one of India's largest cities, officials worked with partners on data analytics, content, teacher and headmaster capability building, and systemwide performance management to successfully complete the project.

Governments around the world are pursuing transformation initiatives to better serve their citizens. Many are working with external partners to carry out the transformations. But a good working relationship between government and partners is not a given. As we note above, both sides can take steps to assure that their partnership leads to positive, sustainable outcomes.

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