

Special Edition



An Edelweiss Initiative

Best Practices for Building Strong Foundations

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Introduction to the Best Practices Series

NGOs often emerge as a response to community needs. They typically begin with a vision to be realised, and efforts are driven by passion and commitment. Program implementation and direction is ever-evolving as the NGO faces and works through ground realities.

It has been EdelGive's endeavour to support these visionaries and emerging NGOs and help them develop solid programs. EdelGive Foundation believes that 360-degree support is critical for these visions to translate into reality. It is thus committed to contributing towards the philanthropic ecosystem of donors, government, civil society, academia and researchers, media, and others. Besides providing funds to an NGO, EdelGive links NGOs to relevant and effective capacity building efforts, to aid its progress and growth.

This series of '**Documentation of Best Practices**' is born out of EdelGive's commitment to enhancing the knowledge and skills of its partners within this philanthropic ecosystem. The findings from this series will be used to aid capacity building of EdelGive partner NGOs (through cross learning); inform donors about existing best practices in the sector, thereby enabling them to optimise funding decisions; and to contribute to the existing knowledge on the development sector in India.

This series explains selected Best Practices that directly help NGOs scale, in size and reach. The papers are a mix of secondary research and interviews with representatives of NGOs, which are recognised for being mature and effective players in the development sector. The Documentation of Best Practices series is a set of five papers:

- a. Paper 1: Best Practices for Building Strong Foundations
- b. Paper 2: Best Practices for Building Sustainability of NGOs for Social Impact and Change
- c. Paper 3: Growing at Scale: Best practices in Scalability
- d. Paper 4: Skilled Futures: Best Practices in Capacity Building and Community Engagement
- e. Paper 5: Convergence to a Coalition: Best Practices in Outreach and Advocacy

The Best Practices identified throughout the series are overarching practices that can be adopted and applied to achieve scale, reach and impact, by any NGO irrespective of sector focus. Each paper outlines a different set of Best Practices relevant to a broader goal. The figure below shows the methodology followed.

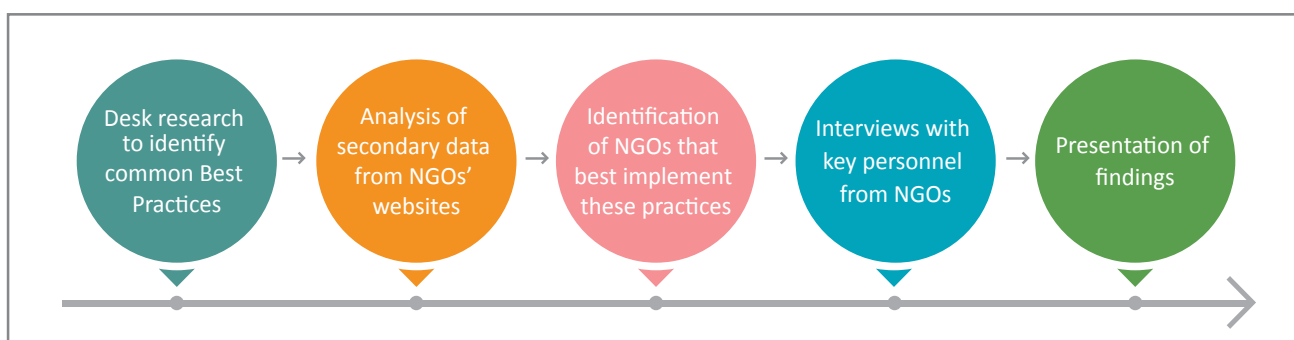


Figure 1: Mapping the Methodology



Role of NGOs in Education Sector in India

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the need for Quality Education and has listed it as one of its goals.¹ Specifically, the Sustainable Development targets for 2030 include ensuring the completion of primary and secondary education by all boys and girls, and guaranteeing equal access to opportunities that provide quality technical and vocational education for all. In India, there has been a significant progress in universalising primary education, with improvement in the enrolment and completion rates of girls in both primary and elementary school. The net enrolment ratio in primary education for boys and girls was 88%, while at the national level, the youth literacy rate was 94% for males and 92% for females in 2013-14. Recent policy initiatives such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Right to Education (RTE) have been focused on further ameliorating these figures.

In India, one of the major milestones in the Education sector has been the passage of the RTE Bill in 2009. However, there are several obstacles to achieving the goal of universal education. For India to achieve this goal, mass mobilization on an unprecedented scale and collaboration between the government, public, businesses, and social organisations is required. The role of NGOs is paramount as they seek to supplement, complement, or substitute the formal education system in the country and reach out to the marginalised sections of society.² In India, as per official government statistics, there are nearly 22,605 NGOs involved in education activities. By their sheer strength and presence across several states, NGOs have a critical role in bridging the gap in access to quality education, and positively impacting education outcomes.

Traditionally, social development work in India was concentrated in the areas of Education and Health, with work on Livelihoods and Women's empowerment starting much later.³ Consequently, there are a larger number of established and mature NGOs working in the Education space. This paper discusses Best Practices in relation to NGOs working on Education, who have been around for a number of years and have slowly and steadily evolved into the strong organisations they are today. NGOs that work with multiple systems including the government, applying culturally sensitive pedagogies, having scale and reach, were identified and interviewed in relation to the 4 Best Practices featured in this paper.

In addition, it is necessary to understand the current crises that the education sector faces so that we may overcome them. The World Development Report 2018⁴ explores three dimensions of the education learning crisis in terms of learning outcomes, immediate causes, and deeper causes, as follows:

| Outcomes | Immediate Causes | Deeper Causes |
|--|--|---|
| Even though most enrolment gaps in basic education are closing between high and low-income countries, schooling does not ensure learning. Even after several years of receiving education in schools, children learn very little in terms of basic literacy and numeracy skills. | Struggling educational systems lack one or more of the four key school-level ingredients for learning: prepared learners, effective teaching, learning focused inputs and the skilled management and governance that brings them all together. Devoting enough resources to education is crucial and resources have not kept up with the rapid growth of enrolment in basic education. | Technical complexities and political focus constantly cause educational systems and practices to be out of sync with learning. There are many stakeholders that govern the action of educational systems such as bureaucrats, politicians, employers, NGOs, donors and the suppliers of educational inputs (infrastructure, school supplies, etc.). |

Source: World Development Report 2018

Table 1: World Development Report Dimensions of Learning

Defining Best Practices for Building Foundations

In order to understand the role of NGOs in contributing to the education sector in India, it is important to document and showcase their operations, the ways in which they measure their impact, and the methods they employ to tackle the above-mentioned learning crises.

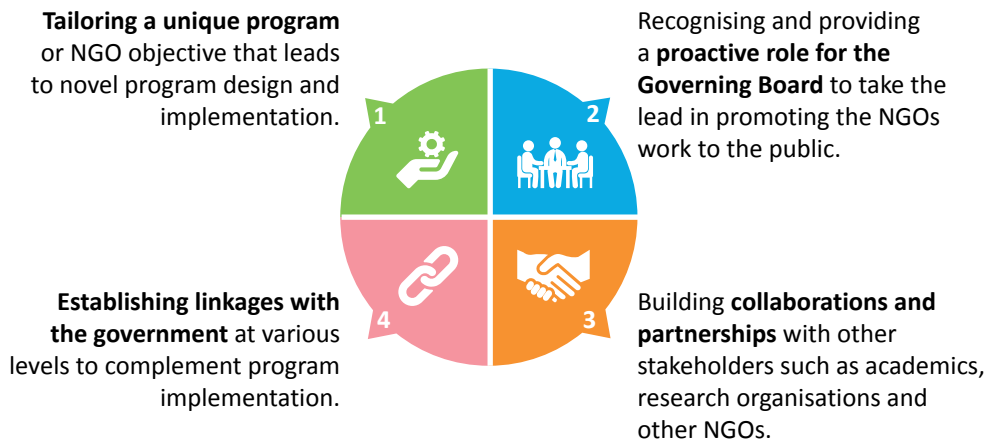
¹Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations, 2016

²Confederation of Indian Industry. (2013). A report: Urgent needs of NGOs in the education sector.

³Asian Development Bank (2009). Overview of Civil Society Organisations: India, Civil Society Briefs. Retrieved from <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/28966/csb-ind.pdf>

⁴World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realise Education's Promise. (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1096-1>

It is also critical to learn about the ecosystem in which the NGOs operate and thrive. This learning is aided by the four best practices identified in this paper: the NGO's program design, the role of a governing board, collaborations and partnerships that the NGO enters in, and the NGO's linkages with the government. These best practices are aimed at helping build robust foundations for NGOs in education and across the board. Our focus is on four practices in particular:



Methodology: How we measure 'best' practices

Across NGOs, best practices have emerged which help in building strong foundations. These practices represent the cornerstones of impactful NGOs, and are illustrated using case studies of select NGOs in the Education space.

a. Secondary research

Several studies that document and highlight successful NGOs and the processes that they follow to achieve their goals were reviewed. One such study is the handbook⁵ by The Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University. Specifically, we use four yardsticks to measure the quality of a NGO from this resource due to their applicability to the objectives of the best practices series:

- Is the problem the NGO tackling **relevant**? Does it really address the problem? Does the NGO have a credible "entry point"?
- Is the NGO likely to achieve its **objectives**? What risks does it face? What resources – financial and human - does it have?
- Is the intervention proposed by the NGO cost-effective? What is the relationship between the cost of implementing the intervention and its expected benefits? **Is there a strategy** that would have achieved the same results at lower costs?
- Is the overall **goal and mission of the NGO** sustainable? Can it go on delivering its benefits after external assistance has come to an end? For example, will there be teachers for the school, money to pay them, parental support, good educational policies from the government – long after the school has been built, and the intervention has stopped?

We then consulted context-specific resources to triangulate a definition to identify best practices:

- **The NITI Aayog resource book on good practices (2015)⁶** to define 'good' practice as one "with various special characteristics such as innovativeness, ability to lead to an actual change, having an impact on policy environment, replicability and sustainability (ability to self-support)."
- **Avolio-Toly, in her 2010 research paper⁷ titled 'Successful Models of Non-Governmental Organisations in Consultative Status: Best Practices in Education'** identifies best practices in education through effective models. The models observed were: a specific focus on incorporating the community in planning and implementing projects, forming partnerships with local civil society and government, adopting innovative approaches to providing services, and building up the capacity of the community and local institutions.

⁵Institute for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University. 'Project and organisational development for NGOs and CBOs'

⁶NITI Aayog (2015). Resource Book on Good Practices in Social Sector Service Delivery 2015. Retrieved from http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/human-development/Resource_Book_on_Good_Practices.pdf

⁷Avolio-Toly, R. (2010). Successful Models of Non-Governmental Organisations in Consultative Status: Best Practices in Education. Retrieved from <http://csonet.org/content/documents/Education.pdf>

What makes a 'best' practice?

In Table 2, the parameters for best practices have been operationalised. On the basis of these parameters, secondary data was analysed to create a shortlist of education sector NGOs. These data were collated from the NGO's website and subsequently verified using secondary data sources.





| Best Practice | Why? |
|---|--|
|  <p>Efficacious and strategic program design</p> | <p>A good program design can convince a donor that the NGO is going to use their money wisely. But a well-designed program is not just a fundraising tool. It also helps the NGO once they have obtained funding, to plan project activities, identify what is important, find out whether the program is achieving its objectives, deal with challenges more easily, and maintain transparency.⁸ Past experience and evidence underscores the importance of having clear objectives, and data-driven framework for optimising program design, which leads to strong foundations for an NGO.⁹</p> |
|  <p>Role of governing board</p> | <p>For an NGO, being accountable means demonstrating regularly that it uses its resources well. An explicit governance structure is the first step toward establishing a framework for accountability in the NGO. The board is the principal governing body and its main value is that it is a collective leadership body. The board represents the interests of the NGO's multiple stakeholders, and its combined leadership helps an NGO stay focused on the mission and resist the special agenda of particular individuals or groups.¹⁰ Having an active governing board helps in enabling strategic funding from donors and helps the NGO to stick to their core mission and vision.¹¹</p> |
|  <p>Partnerships and collaborations</p> | <p>An NGO cannot achieve its vision and mission on its own. Community needs are varied and society's problems are too complex. The NGO needs to work with other NGOs, academic institutions, private foundations, active citizens and the government to accomplish their goals. Through these numerous partnerships, the NGO gains access to new resources, including funding and in-kind support as well as information, expertise, and skills. For instance, when an NGO is just starting, it might find rent-free space for its activities through relationships with other NGOs, a local government office or a university. Partnerships with other NGOs opens up possibilities to reach new target populations with the NGO's messages and broaden its base of popular support for mobilisation efforts. In short, partnerships can be an important vehicle for young NGOs to build visibility and capacity.¹²</p> |
|  <p>Linkages with the government</p> | <p>NGOs need to build relationships with the government to accomplish their mission. They also need to cooperate with governments in providing outreach, education or services. NGOs and governments can work together to develop solutions to community needs, run joint projects, or carry out public awareness campaigns¹³. The government has resources available, which non-profits can help leverage for the benefit of the community. NGOs have the capacity to innovate and adapt more quickly with government support.¹⁴</p> |

Table 2: Operationalising parameters for Best Practices

b. Identifying NGOs in the Education space in India

We then consolidated information from several sources (academic papers, sector reports, initial conversations with multiple stakeholders) from a long-list of 44 NGOs. One of the first inclusion criteria was to focus on NGOs in the education space in India. We then mapped and identified key criteria for including an NGO in our study. This list was reviewed for NGOs who could be interviewed and consulted to illustrate and explore these best practices. These were:

- **Program reach** (State-level or Pan-India): Capturing NGOs with a localised presence, state-level presence, or have a pan-India presence.
- **Maturity of NGO** (Time since incorporation): NGOs that were at least a decade old were included; a larger, older NGO in the education space was also included to bring about representativeness.

⁸Institute for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University. 'Project and organisational development for NGOs and CBOs'

⁹Guerra-López, I., & Hicks, K. (2015). The participatory design of a performance-oriented monitoring and evaluation system in an international development environment. *Evaluation and program planning*, 48, 21-30.

¹⁰Wyatt, M. (2004). *A Handbook of NGO Governance*. European Center for Not-for-profit Law.

¹¹Patterson, S. (2006). *Generating Buzz: Strategic Communications for Nonprofit Boards*. Washington DC: BoardSource.

¹²Binder-Aviles, H. *The NGO Handbook*. United States Department of State.

¹³ibid.

¹⁴Ulleberg, I. (2009). *The role and impact of NGOs in capacity development: From replacing the state to reinvigorating education*. International Institute for Educational Planning.

- **Focus area** (Urban, rural, or both): To contrast best practices between NGOs with a rural focus and those with urban or both, two NGOs have a strong rural presence, while two with a predominantly urban focus were included.
- **Common goals** (in achieving educational outcomes): NGOs selected had common missions, each through innovative and unique models of their own. Some focused on improving access to education, while others aimed to build leadership capacity.

Though this paper focuses on NGOs in the education sector, it is important to remember that these best practices are applicable to NGOs across all sectors. Based on the above best practices, the following NGOs were shortlisted:

| NGO \ Parameter | Program Reach | Time since incorporation | Focus Area | Primary Goals |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|--|
| Kaivalya Education Foundation (KEF) | Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra | 10 years | Rural | System transformation through leadership and capacity building |
| Pratham | 21 States | 23 years | Rural & Urban | Universalising education across India |
| Educate Girls | Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh | 11 years | Rural | Facilitating girls' education with community empowerment |
| Masoom | Maharashtra | 10 years | Urban | Building leadership and capacity in Night schools |

Table 3: Shortlisted NGOs

c. Structured interviews with stakeholders and formulation of case studies

Through this combination of NGOs, we identify and explain best practices through case studies of the NGOs. Subsequently, in-depth interviews with key personnel guide our understanding of best practices associated with education sector NGOs. We completed five interviews with chief functionaries, COOs, and heads of liaisons/partnerships from these selected NGOs in March-April 2018. These included interviews with the following:¹⁵

- Mr. Suresh Subramanian (COO, Educate Girls)
- Mr. Manmohan Singh (Program Director Government, PR and Mumbai Operations, KEF)
- Mr. Brij Kaul (Program Manager, Pratham)
- Ms. Usha Rane (Director, Content and Training, Pratham)
- Ms. Nikita Ketkar (Founder, Masoom)
- Ms. Safeena Hussain (Founder, Educate Girls): This interview was sourced from the EdelGive EDGE Panel Discussion, and transcribed for the purposes of this paper.

Limitations:

- Due to limited time and absence of secondary data on some NGOs, our study may have excluded several best practices adopted by NGOs that do not precisely fit the criteria for shortlisting NGOs.
- Our paper is a first look at specific best practices, illustrated using select education NGOs in India. It may not be representative of other best practices across sectors and countries.

Best Practices for Building Strong Foundations

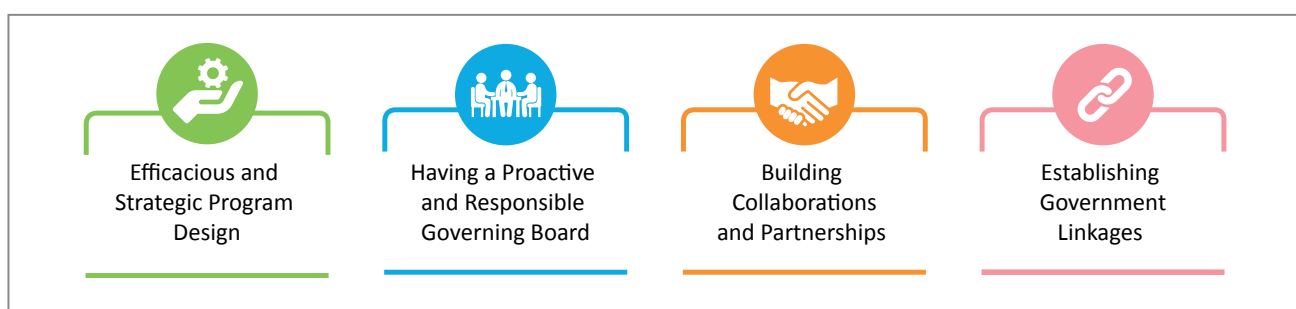


Figure 2: Identifying Best Practices

¹⁵ We are grateful for the valuable information obtained through these interviews.

Efficacious and Strategic Program Design

What is efficacious program design?

- Program design involves how organisations plan to ensure the continuance of the interventions they run within communities.
- It consists of having clear and focused objectives, being data-driven, having in-built measurement, and planning to effectively scale.

How does efficacious program design help?

An efficacious program design works in a mutually reinforcing manner. It starts with a need assessment on the basis of which the objectives of the program are formulated. These need-based objectives help the organisation in strategically planning the program. The process of formulating objectives is iterative in the context of program implementation, as this stage comes with newer challenges in the field. Moreover, often the NGO will be able to identify related problem areas where programs can be extended, to enable a holistic design. Outcomes at each stage of a program must be measured, and data gathered can be used to understand the progress in terms of meeting objectives set at the very start. This evidence not only helps in understanding the impact of the program but also helps in understanding the potential of a program to scale.

“...these programs need to be cost-effective and must be easily replicated. If it’s costly then it is not accessible for others. Creating an excellent model is great, but creating impact from that is important.”

- Usha Rane (Director for Content and Training at Pratham) when asked about the challenges that Pratham faced when developing their models.

Case Study

Read India Program, Pratham

What is the Read India Program?

- Pratham Educational Foundation has been a revolution in the Indian education space. Established in 1995, Pratham has grown both in scope and geographical coverage since then.
- Read India is one of the flagship programs that aimed at developing foundational skills of children in primary schools.
- The Read India campaign has reached out to more than 30 million children and continues to do so with its presence in 18 states across India.

How did the Read India Program incorporate efficacious program design?

Clear Vision and Objective:

- The Read India Program started with a clear objective of improving the quality of primary education in India. In their objective Pratham has clearly defined the particular demographic they wish to work with: school children in government schools.
- It worked to develop an institutional approach in which children were grouped according to their existing level of learning achievement; this was the Learning Camp model. Implementing these camps was no easy task – Pratham needed to constantly negotiate with schools at the local level.
- After overcoming these challenges, the model was scaled up to approximately 5000 government primary schools reaching close to 3 lakh children.

Strategic Planning and In-built Measurement tools:

- With increasing scale of the program, the management at Pratham felt the need to measure the impact of the Read India program.
- This resulted in the administration of the first ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) as an in-built impact assessment measure that assesses improvement in learning outcomes and feeds back data on infrastructure in primary schools to governments as well.

Data availability and Scaling:

- Programs such as Read India have been the result of constant engagement with data that provides feedback and evidence for future implementation efforts.
- This has even extended to other data-driven program designs, such as 'Second Chance.' The focused objective of this program is to increase the employability of female school dropouts by facilitating the completion of their secondary education.

Identifying other problem areas:

- While working in primary schools, the management at Pratham realised the need to reach out to and engage mothers in supporting children's readiness for school, as well as in developing a comprehensive understanding of what the child needs for growing up well.
- Thus, efficacious program design gives rise to other programs that complement it, and is continually evolving.

Key Tips and Considerations for Efficacious and Strategic Program Design

Key Tip A: For NGOs to set up their programs

If the NGO is new and does not have experience managing projects or funding or cannot demonstrate a record of results yet, they can adopt the following to build their track-record:

- Officially **document the need/rationale** for the NGO and its proposed projects.
- Present a **clear, well-thought-out plan** for addressing the needs with measurable outcomes of success.
- Record and present the qualifications of the founders, board members, and staff — even if the NGO is new, the people who founded it have experience. This must be utilised to the fullest capacity.
- Even if you have a lot of good ideas, start small. **Pick one or two projects that your organisation can do well.** If improving night schools is the focus, try working with the nearest night school first and understanding its needs and solutions that can be useful.
- By doing one or two projects well the **NGO builds a track record** of success and learns what it takes to be effective.

Key Tip B: On Program Evaluation and its Importance

Program Evaluation is the systematic review and assessment of the benefits, quality and value of a program, activity or organisation as a whole. An evaluation asks:

- *What worked?*
- *What could have worked better?*
- *Why did certain things work or not work?*
- *What difference did the work make for our community?*
- *What did we learn and how do we use that knowledge?*

In-built program evaluation can help in immediate course-correction during implementation.

Key Tip C: How a Needs Assessment benefits the Program Design

- An NGO can carry out a **systematic assessment of the needs** of its target community (example: neighbourhood or village) or target population (example: school-going children).
- The NGO is advised to form a team that includes both staff and community members to lead the assessment. A typical assessment involves **surveying a sample of community residents** or the target population.

- Also, to **avoid replication**, it is important for the NGO to find out if the data that they seek has already been collected by government agencies, international NGOs, or universities.
- NGOs can also consider **partnering with a university** to conduct the survey. Once the NGO has the results, the team should review them to **identify priorities for new programs and to improve program design**.¹⁶

Challenges and Considerations

Program Design Assumptions

When designing the program, a number of factors are considered, such as demographic data (including population size, age distribution, and prevalence rates); social and cultural factors (such as language, cultural appropriateness, and acceptance); and/or program effectiveness estimates (such as estimates of the number of people who will change their behaviour or will be open to accepting your services).

However, for new programs, or programs expanding into new areas, the underlying demographic data and the social and cultural assumptions may not be as reliable as those for established programs. Therefore, there would be discrepancies that arise between targets and actual results. To account for such discrepancies certain implementation adjustments are necessary, such as:

- Testing your changes on a small scale first before applying the change to your entire program whenever possible. Give changes a few months to work before trying to speed things up to compensate for discrepancies in meeting targets.
- Documenting any adjustments, so that mistakes are not repeated.¹⁷

¹⁶Binder-Aviles, H. The NGO Handbook. United States Department of State.

¹⁷The Essential NGO Guide to Managing Your USAID Award (2010). U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and FHI 360.

Having a Proactive and Responsible Governing Board

“...wavelength needs to match with the founder and the members of the board.”

- Nikita Ketkar (Founder of Masoom) when asked about the role of the Governing Board in an organisation

What is the role of a governing board (GB)?

The Governing Board (GB) plays a significant role in establishing an NGO: It “acts as the point of final accountability for the organisation...formulate(s) and develop(s) the organisation’s policy in terms of its overall mission and purposes, and...represent(s) the organisation to outside actors.”¹⁸

How does having a proactive and responsible GB help?

A strong, proactive GB links the NGO to opportunities for collaboration and partnership with both the public and private sectors. This understanding is further spelled out by Safeena Hussain, founder of Educate Girls¹⁹ when speaking on the role of the Governing Board in four key areas:

- The GB anchors an NGO to stand strong and stick to their ideals and core mission; a strong board that **aligns with the vision and mission** of the organisation is crucial.
- The GB provides a **backbone** to the NGO for compliance, resources and strategy.
- The GB serves as a custodian and protector of the NGO from donors, **strengthens organisational capacity**, and helps build the NGO.
- The relationship between the donors and board is important; it leads to **strategic funding** as well as a range of other activities that ensures the NGO has a better impact.

Case Study

Masoom

With the objective of working in one of the most neglected areas in the education sector, that is night schools, Masoom took up the Herculean task of improving the quality of education in these schools.

How did Masoom put together their Governing Board?

- Masoom was aided and led by mentors who shared this vision from a very early stage. These mentors who nurtured Masoom in its initial years were invited to be on its GB.
- Masoom understood early-on that having like-minded individuals on its GB was pivotal for the future directions it would pursue.
- However, finding the “right” GB is often a time-consuming process, which requires careful deliberation.

While speaking to Ms. Nikita Ketkar, the founder of Masoom, she said, “I invited people to be GB members only after interacting with them over a long period of time and establishing that they were comfortable with the model of the NGO, and the space within which it aimed to function”.

As the board generally comprises of people from diverse backgrounds who have immense experience in organisational development, they play an important role in understanding and overcoming challenges and in giving valuable inputs periodically.

- Various members of Masoom’s GB help in contributing to several different aspects of its functioning.
- This includes specific board members contributing to strategic direction, while another focuses on building accounting systems.
- Masoom’s other specialist board members contribute to specific program challenges, for example addressing health challenges in the course of their interventions.
- Through its well-connected GB members, Masoom’s work is promoted to different circles and potential funders and partner organisations.

Overall, the GB has aided in creating networks and collaborations, and provided solutions to funding challenges periodically.

¹⁸Lewis, D. (2004). The management of non-governmental development organisations: An introduction. Routledge, p168.

¹⁹EdelGive Edge Panel Discussion 2018.

Key Tips and Considerations for a Proactive and Responsible GB

Key Tip A: How to recruit a Board Member?

Here are some tips that might lead to better success in putting together a good GB:

1. **Recruit for skills as well as prestige:** Apart from recruiting people based on how well-connected and famous they are, also bear in mind the person's professional skills and how it can contribute to the GB and the organisation.
2. **Define the role of your board** before you recruit rather than after: Make sure board members are clear about the mission-vision and values of the organisation before they are recruited. This avoids conflict later on.
3. **Attracting talent for the GB:** The NGO needs a creative strategy to attract good GB members. Creative strategies can range from unusual events showcasing the NGO's unique approach to tackling a problem and its impact, or a short newsletter circulated to a circle of potential board candidates. By using new approaches, the NGO can tap into untested pools of talent that may be right for the board.

Key Tip B: Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the GB

Providing a checklist can help board members understand how to function on the board and prioritize their activities. It's also a good tool for letting new board members know what's expected of them. Items to include:

1. *Know and support the mission of the organisation.*
2. *Attend board meetings regularly.*
3. *Prepare for meetings in advance.*
4. *Maintain confidentiality.*
5. *Offer informed and impartial guidance.*
6. *Avoid special agendas and conflicts of interest.*
7. *Participate in committees and special events.*
8. *Support the chief executive.*
9. *Take part in resource development.*
10. *Promote the organisation in the community²⁰*

Considerations for a proactive and responsible GB:

- Sometimes board members **disagree with each other on a decision**, a policy or the best course of action. When this happens, take time to discuss why. Try to understand the perspectives and reasoning behind the different points of view.
- **Conflict of interest** exists when an individual faces competing choices that cloud or influence decision-making.
- Common examples of conflict of interest include:
 - When a board member of a grant-making NGO is also the executive director of a grantee organisation.
 - When a board member is also the executive director of an NGO that competes against the first NGO for funds.
 - When a board member obtains an interest free loan from the organisation.
 - When a board member's spouse is hired to provide professional services to the NGO.
 - When a board member is related to a member of the staff.²¹

²⁰Wyatt, M. (2004). A Handbook of NGO Governance. European Center for Not-for-profit Law.

²¹ibid.

Building Collaborations and Partnerships

“Building alliances are important to ensure better work.”

- Suresh Subramanian
(Educate Girls, COO)
when asked about the importance of partnerships and collaborations

What are partnerships and collaborations?

- NGOs need to engage in collaborations and partnerships since a synergy between stakeholders is required to overcome the sheer size and complexity of the problems being addressed.
- A partnership or collaboration is marked by coordinated effort by multiple actors (such as corporates, government, funders, and academia) across multiple sectors to address a systemic social problem.²² This social problem is one which is a shared agenda among all the actors.

How do partnerships and collaborations help?

- Collaborations engage with multiple stakeholders to meet specific goals such as fundraising, marketing and impact assessment.
- As opposed to specific goal-oriented collaborations, two or multiple parties come together to explore newer forms of collective working towards a common goal. This exploration pushes the boundaries of what collaborations and partnerships mean to include better and novel forms of working together.
- These collaborations are mutually beneficial and mutually reinforcing since they improve the quality of the program feedback the NGOs receives.
- With partners in governments, industry, the local community, academia, and civil society a powerful coalition of actors is created to improve outreach and visibility.
- Establishing a systematic process within the partnership is a key challenge early on and is crucial for a coordinated approach to the problem being addressed.
- One example of an effective collaboration is Strive, a non-profit based in the USA, which has made a great breakthrough in educational programs by working together with local leaders to improve the education outcomes in parts of USA. They have succeeded because they realised that working in favour of a collective approach rather than for individual agendas yields better results.²³
- In India, the Government has developed the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model which is essentially a manifestation of this best practice. The Government envisages a substantive role for PPPs as a means for harnessing private sector investment and operational efficiencies in the provision of public assets and services.²⁴

Case Study

Educate Girls (EG)²⁵

What is Educate Girls?

Educate Girls is an example of a successful young NGO that is continually working to achieve its objective of empowering communities by facilitating girls' education. One of the ways in which EG has accomplished its goals is by collaborating with multiple partners.

How did EG build partnerships and collaborations?

- Starting in 2011, Educate Girls partnered with University of Michigan on a 3-year Randomized Control Trial to check whether its programs were in fact generating intended and desired effects around enrolment, retention, and learning outcomes.
- This study showed that in comparison to 113 control schools, the 117 treatment schools had 20-30% greater learning improvement, with 5.5% girls in these schools having a higher likelihood to continue in school after 1 year.

²²Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective impact.

²³Ibid.

²⁴India: National Public Private Partnership Policy. Public Private Partnership in Infrastructure Resource Center, World Bank Group. Retrieved from: <https://ppp.worldbank.org/public-private-partnership/library/india-national-public-private-partnership-policy>

²⁵ Educate Girls Website 2014. Educate Girls- Impact @ Scale Case study: Educate Girls' Measurement Journey

Gathering program feedback

- EG incorporated this additional data collection into its ongoing monitoring and continues to use this data to ***gather program feedback***.
- The data analysis done at the end of two years showed that EG's interventions were significantly improving girls' enrolment, retention, and learning outcomes for girls and boys.

Helping raise funds

- This partnership gave EG the confidence it needed to ***plan and fundraise for scaling*** to new districts.
- EG is structuring a ***Development Impact Bond (DIB)***, one among the first in India to help channel the allocation of funds to social programs and to increase efficiency in program implementation.
- Educate Girls had the challenge of sustaining quality through the scale-up of their program, and was interested in participating in the DIB as a proof of concept of the mechanism. After the first year of the intervention, 44 percent of girls out of school at the baseline had been enrolled.²⁶

Improving outreach and visibility

- EG has adopted a multi-pronged model of partnerships and collaborations, involving partners in Academia (University of Michigan, USA); social sector organisations (Dasra, EdelGive Foundation); and Multilateral development organisations (The World Bank, IFC).
- This has considerably enhanced their outreach and program visibility globally.
- EG is also conducting a study with University of Columbia to understand factors that can be used to motivate volunteers. This collaboration helps EG recruit volunteers more effectively and allows University of Columbia to expand their knowledge base in this specific area.

Key Tips and Considerations for Collaborations and Partnerships

Key Tips: *How NGOs can collaborate and partner more efficiently*

- **Joining an Advocacy Coalition²⁷**

An advocacy coalition is a group of NGOs, sometimes joined by other civil society groups, who come together to advocate for changes in laws, government policies, or regulations. Coalitions can come together for a very specific objective or to work together on a range of advocacy strategies. Forming or joining Advocacy Coalitions can help NGOs collaborate and partner more efficiently and effectively.

- **Identify the Community's Natural Leaders**

All communities have "natural leaders" — individuals whom others seek out for advice, look up to, and listen to. They might be young people or the village elders. They can be identified by asking the community members when you conduct a needs and assets assessment. The NGO can then involve these leaders in their programs and use their support to fulfill the mission of the program.

- **Create a Coalition Map of NGOs**

To find partner NGOs, it is important to know the other NGOs that work in the same community or on the same issue. It can help to draw a map of the community and mark the locations of other NGOs. Identify what they do and the type of relationships you would like to build with them. This exercise will highlight knowledge gaps that you need to fill.²⁸

²⁶Boggild-Jones, I. & Gustafsson-Wright, E. Thursday, July 13, 2017. Two years in: How's the world's first development impact bond for education doing?

²⁷WHO (2012). Building Advocacy Coalitions for Greater Action and Accountability - Note for Discussion. Asia-Pacific Leadership and Policy Dialogue for Women's and Children's Health, November 2012.

²⁸Binder-Aviles, H. The NGO Handbook. United States Department of State.

Considerations when entering into partnerships and collaborations:

While collaborations and partnerships are effective and can be mutually beneficial, they are not without their share of challenges:

- **Loss of autonomy:** Sometimes conflicts arise when the two parties are unable to reach a point of consensus in the decision-making process. This conflict also affects the implementation of the project and has implications of wider accountability (to other partners and to wider beneficiaries).
- **Conflicts of interest:** A decision or action that is right for the interests of the partnership but may be at odds with the individual organisation's interests is a possible challenge.
- **Drain on resources:** Often the estimated commitment to a partnership and the actual commitment may be at odds resulting in a significant loss of time and energy of key staff. This also affects the project development and is a strain on financial resources.
- **Implementation challenges:** Partnership programs entail additional management, tracking, reporting and evaluation that is an added burden on resources. The demands of a collaborative venture might result in strained relations between partners.
- **Negative reputation impact:** When partnerships go wrong they end up causing damage to the reputation or track record of individual partners by association.²⁹ That said, it is definitely worthwhile to collaborate and partner with NGOs as this is a foundational step towards achieving greater and long-lasting impact.

²⁹'The Benefits and Risks of Partnering'. The Partnering Initiative. Retrieved from: <https://thepartneringinitiative.org/about-us/philosophy-and-approach/the-benefits-and-risks-of-partnering/>

Establishing Government Linkages

What is a government linkage?

- Governments play a primary role in ensuring the development of a village, city, state, or the entire country; for instance, by providing infrastructure.
- As development actors, NGOs complement the government's role in delivering vital services.
- Many NGOs (especially within the education space) are now focussing on building capacity of government functionaries as part of these complementary efforts.

How does an NGO work with the government?

- It is critical for NGOs to work with the government as the government has scope and resources available which NGOs (when working with the government) can help leverage for the benefit of the community.
- There are various government policies of which community members may be unaware. The role of the NGO is to build capacity and raise awareness of such policies, so that citizens' overall welfare is improved.
- NGOs that work with governments leverage much higher returns (for the community) on the investment of combined resources.³⁰

"...we believe very strongly that Pratham would work as a support system rather than a parallel system to the government... we spread across 21 states. Now we are leveraging for different kinds of partnerships with various levels of state and national governments."

- Usha Rane (Director for Content and Training at Pratham) when asked about the origin of Pratham

Case Study

Kaivalya Education Foundation (KEF)³¹

Since its inception in 2008, KEF's focus was to enable systemic changes by creating large-scale impact at the grassroots level in the field of education leadership.

How did KEF establish linkages with the government?

KEF started working closely with the government to achieve its primary aim, and to increase reach, scale, and sustainability of its interventions.

Building leadership and capacity

- **The School Leadership Development Program (SLDP)** aims to train and support government school leaders (headmasters) to become outstanding and inspiring role models of their school and community;
- KEF **collaborates with experts from other fields** to impart knowledge and also build capacity of leaders by sharing their existing knowledge and expertise.
- KEF has trained **650 government officials across 14 states** in partnership with National University for Education Planning and Administration – a national level government institution.³²

Raising awareness on government programmes

- KEF's **District Transformation Program (DTP)** in Rajasthan and Gujarat involves a partnership with the district level government.
- KEF, through its DTP program, has reached more than **600 government schools** by directly working with education officers.
- Along with these programs, KEF has government linkages with the Government of **Rajasthan Council for Elementary Education (RCEE)**, the **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan** (flagship program of the Government of India for universalizing elementary education), the **Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM)**, and the **Surat Municipal Corporation**.

³⁰Ulleberg, I. (2009). The role and impact of NGOs in capacity development: From replacing the state to reinvigorating education. International Institute for Educational Planning

³¹Kaivalya Education Foundation 2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.kefindia.org/>

³²EdelGive Coalition for transforming Education: Annual Report 2017

Building Capacity of School Management Committees

- As per Right to Education guidelines, it is mandatory to have adequate infrastructure in government schools which is supposed to be managed and monitored by the **School Management Committee (SMC)**.
- However, most SMCs are nominal and do not have the awareness to monitor the functioning of a school. KEF while building capacity of the government school principals, also **empowers the SMCs to monitor** the working of the school.
- This capacity building of the community and the **strengthening of existing government provisions** allows for a better exit strategy for the NGO and is also more sustainable in the long run.

Key Tips and Considerations for establishing Linkages with the Government

Key Tip A: *How to deal with the Government as an NGO*

For NGOs, it is important to remember that civic engagement serves the public good and helps the government do its job better by creating a system of checks and balances. In dealing with appointed and elected officials, NGOs need to stress on the message that citizen input and oversight will ultimately result in better government services and help the officials fulfil their mandate. Further, this will show the government officials that broad civic engagement is a way to tap into citizens' own resources to improve communities, thus complementing the government's efforts.³³

Key Tip B: *Engaging with CMO Fellows*

The Chief Minister's Fellowship across state governments enables the youth to get involved with various programs. NGOs seeking to connect with the state government can also seek to leverage partnerships via CMO Fellows, particularly in areas that align with the government's flagship programs. For instance, CMO Fellows in Maharashtra have worked with Arpan, Tata Trusts, and other stakeholders to expand coverage of POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) in Chandrapur district. Such engagements usually involve organising stakeholder workshops to highlight how to deal with the issue at hand.

Considerations for establishing government linkages:

When linking with the government there are possible challenges that an NGO might face:

- **Difference in ideology** between the NGO and the government officials: Often there is a difference of opinion that stems from differing ideologies which affects the implementation strategy of a program.
- **Red-Tapism:** While the government has scope and resources in terms of creating lasting impact on society, there are many bureaucratic procedures that often stall or lengthen the duration of the implementation of a program. This could result in a rift between the NGO and the government officials.
- **Transparency:** Often the government has set procedures of functioning that it needs to follow for its documentation and data-collection. Due to these set procedures, often government officials may not readily provide information that is necessary for the functioning of the partnership between the NGO and the government.
- **Cost Sharing:** Cost sharing methods between NGOs and governments require a thorough analysis of all stakeholders. It is important to clearly define the financial and operational responsibilities of all stakeholders prior to the linkage,³⁴ and this will have to be carefully determined on a case-to-case basis.

³³ Binder-Aviles, H. The NGO Handbook. United States Department of State.

³⁴ https://www.sswm.info/planning-and-programming/implementation/financing/cost-sharing#Things_to_Consider

Key Lessons from Best Practices

This study spells out four best practices that can help establish strong foundations of an NGO, both in the programmatic dimension as well as in the overall working of an NGO. The key takeaways for other NGOs as well as for donors are summarised in Table 4.





| Best Practice | Key Lessons |
|---|--|
|  <p data-bbox="209 600 379 689">Efficacious and Strategic Program Design</p> | <ul data-bbox="411 389 1489 786" style="list-style-type: none"> • A data-driven approach to program design aids in strategic program planning and optimising use of resources. • Clarity about the problem, clearly defined strategies, and specific objectives allow a program to review progress on achievements and challenges. Thus, it can effectively modify the program (if needed). • To attain set goals NGOs need to have focused objectives and clarity about the problem area to have longer-lasting impact on the community. • In-built measurement tools enable the program to incorporate evidence-based assessments and evolve based on needs identified. • Efficacious program design is crucial for NGOs to achieve greater scale, far-reaching and long term impact. |
|  <p data-bbox="220 1003 368 1151">Having a Proactive and Responsible Governing Board</p> | <ul data-bbox="411 815 1489 1200" style="list-style-type: none"> • Board members play a vital role in guiding and influencing NGO strategy and functioning. • Board members are the public face of the organisation and play a key role in sourcing relevant and appropriate funding. • Board members aligned with the mission and vision of the NGO are better able to meet objectives in a streamlined and specific manner. • A proactive governing board is key to providing direction to the NGO and strengthening relationships with donors. • An active board steps up as an ambassador for the NGO, helping communicate the work of the NGO to a larger audience. • A responsible board plans for the future and works to build second level management. |
|  <p data-bbox="213 1473 376 1563">Building Collaborations & Partnerships</p> | <ul data-bbox="411 1229 1489 1626" style="list-style-type: none"> • NGOs need to engage in collaborations and partnerships since they require large grants and multiple partners who can work on different aspects simultaneously to bring about system transformation. • System transformation is a large, long term effort and requires a pooling of various kinds of resources and needs multiple partners (from different sectors) to commit to stay the course. • It is important for NGOs to determine collaborations on the basis of the scale of their program, and seek partners to pool in and optimise available resources, like funds, personnel, etc. • These include collaborations with research or academic organisations that can help evaluate programme impacts and provide crucial and rigorous feedback to NGOs. • There is much to learn from other NGOs who are operating in a similar space or in allied areas, to avoid duplication of efforts and improve their outreach. |
|  <p data-bbox="225 1877 363 1966">Establishing Government Linkages</p> | <ul data-bbox="411 1662 1489 2018" style="list-style-type: none"> • It is crucial for NGOs to support government efforts rather than build a parallel system, since only with the government is long-term systemic change possible and sustainable. • Government and NGOs working together lead to optimisation of resources, with the government providing infrastructure and policy level support and the NGOs enhancing implementation and quality of services. • The level at which one engages with the government is also critical: often having local level governments as implementation partners helps in aligning NGO and programme impact with localised goals. • NGOs should ideally work in tandem with the government to ensure sustainable impact on beneficiaries, effective scale up of program, and wider impact. |

Table 4: Key Lessons from Best Practices

Abbreviations

| | |
|------------|--|
| ASER | Annual Status of Education Report |
| CBO | Community Based Organisation |
| COO | Chief Operating Officer |
| DIB | Development Impact Bond |
| DTP | District Transformation Programme |
| EG | Educate Girls |
| GB | Governing Board |
| IFC | International Finance Corporation |
| J-PAL | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab |
| KEF | Kaivalya Education Foundation |
| MCGM | Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai |
| NGO | Non-Government Organisation |
| NITI Aayog | National Institute for Transforming India |
| RCEE | Rajasthan Council for Elementary Education |
| RCT | Randomised Control Trial |
| RTE | Right to Education Act |
| SMC | School Management Committee |
| SSA | Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan |
| SLDP | School Leadership Development Program |

ABOUT EDELGIVE FOUNDATION



EdelGive Foundation is the philanthropic arm of the Edelweiss Group and was established in 2008. Since its inception, almost a decade ago, EdelGive is steadily evolving a philanthropic ecosystem in India. EdelGive works to develop a symbiotic relationship between the different members of the ecosystem viz. investors (donor corporate agencies, partner CSR agencies, and individual donors), investees (NGOs and other sub sets of the NGO sector), and collaborating partners like the government, like-minded agencies, capacity building organisations, and policy experts. EdelGive has fostered the growth of the synergies inherent to an ecosystem, to leverage gains over and beyond its investment, both financial and non-financial

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Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, the foundation is led by CEO Sue Desmond-Hellmann and co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

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ABOUT MONK PRAYOGSHALA



Monk Prayogshala is a not-for-profit academic research organisation that undertakes projects spanning the entire research life cycle, from conceptualising research problems to data analysis through to publication and feedback integration. Prayogshala consists of a team of highly-trained researchers from the social sciences and aims to further the cause of academic research in and from India, and improve the quality and volume of the nation's research output into the global academic research community. Prayogshala has been working with reputed Non-Government Organisations and NPOs to measure research impact and publish their work in high impact research journals.

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*For corporates who are looking to deploy their CSR Funds with great NGOs, EdelGive is eligible to receive funds u/s 135 of the Companies Act and Foreign Funds under FCRA rules.

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