EXISTING KNOWLEDGE SUMMARY

NONPROFITS AND GOVERNMENTS:

WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT EMBEDDING INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC SYSTEMS

We know scaling with government matters. We've brought together what's already known to help nonprofits navigate this journey. Our upcoming report in 2026 will address wider unanswered questions on nonprofit-government collaboration.

SPRING IMPACT

LGT Venture Philanthropy

INSTIGLIO TYING FUNDING TO IMPACT

WHAT WE KNOW NOW AND WHAT WE'LL ANSWER NEXT

Embedding solutions into government systems is widely recognised as critical for lasting impact, and is increasingly a priority for nonprofits and funders. Yet how this happens in practice remains poorly understood.

To shed light on how **nonprofits and governments can work together to address problems at scale**, Spring Impact, together with Instiglio and LGT Venture Philanthropy, is launching a new study in 2026.

This study focuses on low- and middle-income contexts

Why: Financing gaps, system capacity limits, and political–administrative realities create unique dynamics

Why not high-income countries: Stronger tax bases, established delivery systems, and different accountability structures require different scaling pathways

WE ARE HERE

THIS PHASE

REVIEW OF EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

Most existing literature focuses on how nonprofits embed solutions within government systems. This includes examples where governments adopted models originally developed by nonprofits, as well as cases where nonprofits co-created solutions with government.

THIS DOCUMENT

A package of existing literature on scaling with government, presented as a **roadmap**, to help nonprofits digest what is known and navigate existing resources.

COMING 2026

NEXT PHASE

ADDRESSING THE EVIDENCE GAPS

What's missing from the current evidence:

- The government perspective – what governments want from nonprofits, what earns trust, and how they judge value.
- Other ways nonprofits support government systems, beyond scaling programmes – for example, sharing technical expertise, strengthening capacity, or improving delivery systems.

UPCOMING 2026 STUDY

Our upcoming study **fills these gaps** and shows how governments themselves view nonprofit partners – what they need, how they engage, and what effective partnership looks like in practice.

A ROADMAP TO SCALING WITH GOVERNMENT

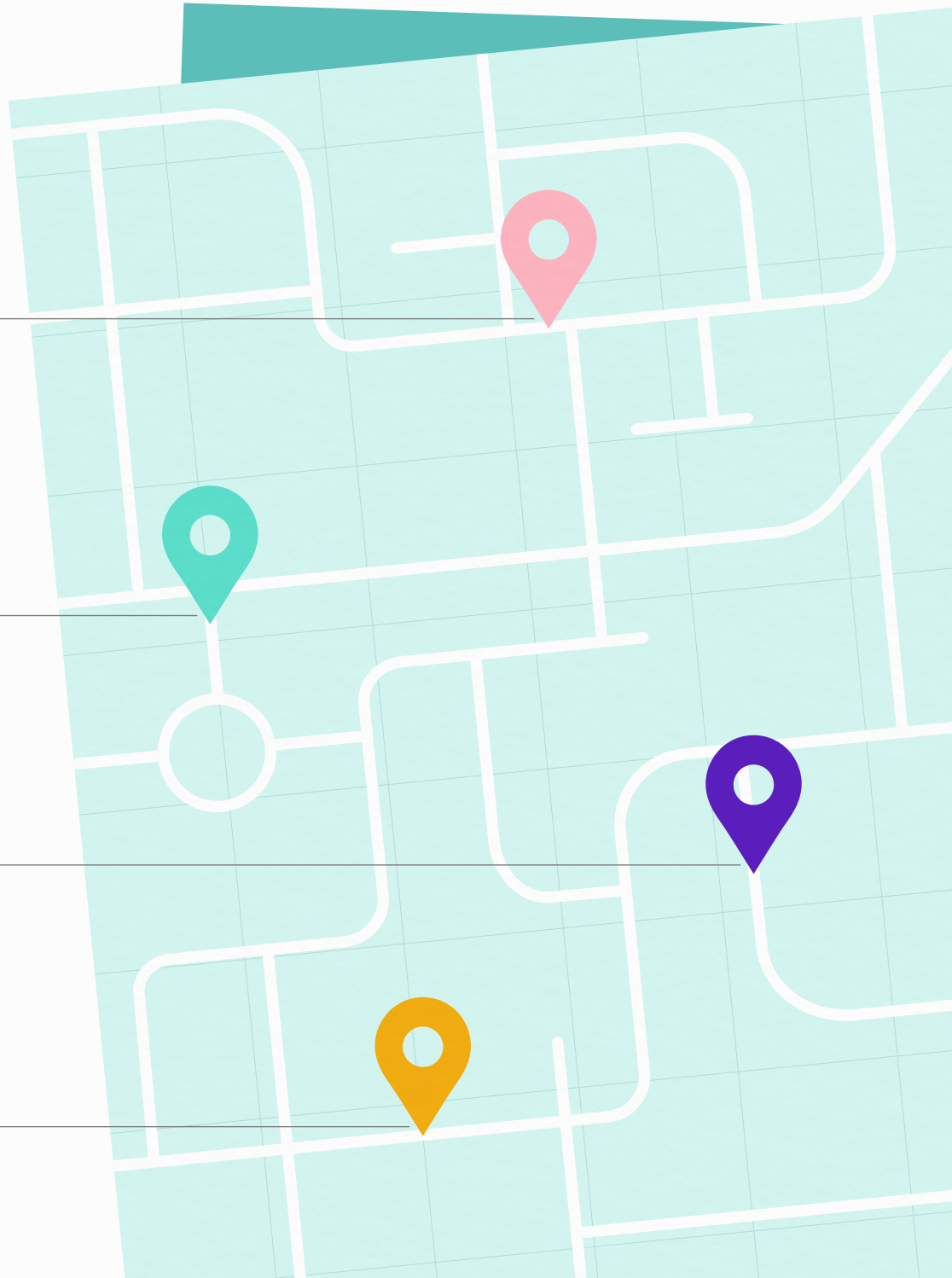
We've distilled these insights into a **roadmap** built around four critical questions nonprofits must ask when navigating the complex, non-linear journey to scale through government systems, bringing together what organisations need to reflect on and what the literature tells us about effective practice.

1. What kinds of solutions can governments adopt?

2. How do we find the right home, and who are the best champions?

3. How do we set ourselves up for success?

4. How do we best support government ownership?



We will fill knowledge gaps in our upcoming 2026 study. **Sign up to read it first**

1. WHAT KINDS OF SOLUTIONS CAN GOVERNMENTS ADOPT?

Not every solution is suited for government adoption. Governments scale what fits. They adopt or co-create solutions that align with national priorities, are simple and affordable to run, adaptable across contexts, and proven to deliver results in practice.

Solutions that align with government priorities

Governments are more likely to adopt solutions that fit squarely within existing national or sectoral priorities.

Simple, scalable, and affordable solutions

Adoption is most feasible when the solution is low-cost, technically sound, and can be delivered within existing government systems. Solutions that can be tailored to fit government capacity are more attractive.

Solutions proven effective in real-world delivery

Evidence (including RCTs in some cases) helps, but what matters most is demonstrating the solution can reliably deliver results in real-world contexts.

Solutions that are adaptable to diverse settings

Governments need solutions that work in low-resource, variable settings (rural, remote, low-capacity). If a solution only addresses a very niche setting, it lends itself poorly to government adoption.

Solutions in sectors where government can realistically scale

Education and health, followed by agriculture and livelihoods, are the sectors where government adoption is most feasible. These sectors are not only dominated by government delivery systems but also consistently prioritised in national plans and budgets, making alignment and financing more achievable.

We will fill knowledge gaps in our upcoming 2026 study. **Sign up to read it first**

Want to dig deeper?

1. Collective Impact Forum, How to Foster Effective Partnerships with Government, 2024
2. Isabel Guerrero, Siddhant Gokhale, Jossie Fahsbender, Scaling Up Development Impact, 2023
3. Kevin Starr, Big Enough. Simple Enough. Cheap Enough, SSIR, 2019

CASE EXAMPLE

THE ANANYA PROJECT, BIHAR, INDIA

ABOUT THE ANANYA PROJECT

The Ananya Project was launched in 2011 by a partnership of the Government of Bihar, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, BBC Media Action, PCI, and CARE India. It set out to improve maternal and child health outcomes in one of India's poorest states.

THE SOLUTION

The solution comprised a set of integrated, low-cost health interventions, including mobile training for frontline workers and audio health messages for mothers with the aim to improve maternal and child health outcomes in Bihar.

WHAT FEATURES OF THE SOLUTION MADE GOVERNMENT ADOPTION POSSIBLE?

Aligned with national priorities

The solution focused squarely on maternal and child health – a central government priority – making it easy to justify public investment and integration.

Built on existing infrastructure

The model used government data systems, public health networks, and community structures (such as self-help groups) rather than creating new delivery mechanisms.

Simple, low-cost, and scalable

The solution used accessible technologies such as mobile phones and audio content, enabling replication across states without heavy financial or technical burden.

Adapted to real-world constraints

It was designed for low-literacy users and variable resource settings, ensuring usability and impact even in remote, rural areas.

Read more here

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2. HOW DO WE FIND THE RIGHT HOME, AND WHO ARE THE BEST CHAMPIONS?

The most successful transitions share four conditions: **champions at every level, balanced engagement, a clear institutional home, and a stable, well-resourced system.**

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Assess political and institutional readiness for scale

Scaling is more feasible when governments have the political will, stability, resources, and long-term incentives to invest – as BRAC does by targeting countries moving toward middle-income status, as well as VillageReach which identifies an "enabling context" for scale.

Choose the right entry point (where momentum starts)

Many nonprofits start by demonstrating success at the local or district level and gradually build national relationships – a bottom-up approach well suited to large, decentralised systems. Others begin by engaging national ministries or policy units – a top-down approach often used when legal or policy change is central to scale.

Have a primary partner

Securing one government entity to champion a solution helps anchor it within public systems. For example **Educate!** reports more success working with technical agencies as their "home" for scaling.

Champions at every level of government

To scale, nonprofits benefit from cultivating champions within government – across frontline workers, civil servants, and politicians. Civil servants in particular can provide stability through election cycles. Champions at different levels play distinct roles: local actors often drive implementation and learning, while senior officials provide political legitimacy and access to resources.

Intermediaries and influencers

Beyond ministries and departments, intermediaries and respected institutions, such as UN bodies, can bring credibility, open doors, and create the political cover needed for adoption.

Want to dig deeper?

1. Bvudzai Magadzire, Melissa West, Emily Lawrence, Julia Guerette & Barbara Jones-Singer, **How to Transition Social Solutions to Government**, SSIR, 2019
2. Global School Leaders, **How to Scale with the Government**, 2024
3. Rakesh Rajani & Tim Hanstad, **Helping NGOs and Funders Make the 'Big Shift' to Working With Government**, SSIR, 2025

CASE EXAMPLE

BRAC, GLOBAL



ABOUT BRAC

BRAC is one of the world's largest nonprofits, known for scaling poverty-reduction programmes across Asia and Africa.

THEIR APPROACH

BRAC is deliberate and strategic in choosing where to work with government, prioritising political feasibility and state capacity over need alone.

WHAT ARE BRAC'S CORE CONSIDERATIONS WHEN SCALING WITH GOVERNMENT?

Political staying power

BRAC opts for countries with relative stability and a clear national commitment to reducing extreme poverty. Governments navigating conflict, political volatility, or lacking sustained focus on the poorest are deprioritised, as large-scale poverty programmes require continuity across electoral cycles. BRAC seeks to work with administrations moving towards middle-income status, where poverty reduction is a political priority and domestic financing is increasingly realistic.

Operational capacity to execute

BRAC looks for bureaucracies that, while not perfect, show functional administrative foundations, willingness to innovate, and ability to absorb new systems.

Simple solutions

The model must be "simple enough to scale," enabling governments to take ownership without excessive complexity. BRAC emphasises clear, intuitive delivery components so policymakers and civil servants can understand, implement, and champion the solution.

By selecting contexts with both political commitment and operational capacity, BRAC increases the likelihood that programmes can be nationally owned, financed, and sustained at scale.

Read more here

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3. HOW DO WE SET OURSELVES UP FOR SUCCESS?

Impact alone isn't enough. Successful transitions depend on **co-designing early, creating political wins, aligning nonprofit teams with government systems, and balancing fidelity with flexibility.**

Evidence opens doors – trust keeps them open.

We will fill knowledge gaps in our upcoming 2026 study. **Sign up to read it first**

Start with government

Most literature urges nonprofits to stop "saving the transition for later." Successful organisations co-design with government from the beginning, or at least design with government systems, costs, and constraints in mind.

Use quick wins and credibility builders

Early results that politicians can claim credit for help attract attention and reinforce trust. These can be paired with strong evidence from RCTs where feasible, or with new data that fills gaps in what governments already know (for example, service quality, citizen feedback, or last-mile outcomes).

Build trust, not just evidence

While evidence is necessary to demonstrate value and relevance, it is not a silver bullet. Scaling a solution with government depends as much on building trusted relationships and co-design as on generating data.

Be patient

Building trust, embedding solutions, and working effectively within government systems takes time.

Balance standards with flexibility

Nonprofits should define the non-negotiables of their solution but adapt technical design when needed to secure government buy-in. Flexibility is often the difference between adoption and rejection.

Align teams with government systems

Strong alignment between NGO and government structures improves coordination. Nonprofits that embed staff within government offices or mirror government hierarchies are better able to support innovation while officials gradually adapt.

Want to dig deeper?

1. Changengine, The Playbook for Non-profit Unicorns, 2025
2. Daniel Stein, Rupika Singh & Madhav Seth, Making the Government Adoption of Social Innovations Work, SSIR, 2021
3. Global School Leaders, How to Scale with the Government, 2024
4. Innovations for Poverty Action, Embedding Interventions Within Government Systems Works Well as a Starting Point, Not the Last Step, 2025

CASE EXAMPLE

VILLAGEREACH, MALAWI



ABOUT CCPF

Chipatala cha pa Foni (CCPF) is a free health hotline providing information on maternal, child, and adolescent health. It was developed by VillageReach and later transitioned to Malawi's Ministry of Health.

THE JOURNEY TO SCALE

From the outset, VillageReach planned for government ownership, starting small at the district level but with a shared goal of national adoption. It created a transition framework to guide the process – assessing both external factors (political stability, resources, and government capacity) and internal ones such as solution design and financial management.

HOW DID VILLAGEREACH ENABLE A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO GOVERNMENT?

Reducing costs

VillageReach reduced costs through a memorandum of understanding with Airtel, which covered all incoming call and text costs – an agreement now managed by the government.

Aligning with public systems

The hotline was aligned with public systems, ensuring the service fit into Malawi's health strategy, staffing protocols, and legal regulations, and produced detailed operating procedures, job descriptions, and management toolkits to support government operation.

Phased and risk-aware transition

The hotline moved to government property before full budgeting was in place, supported by a steering committee for coordination and a government liaison to manage activities. VillageReach continually assessed readiness and risk, addressing capacity and financial management gaps before exit.

Read more here

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4. HOW DO WE BEST SUPPORT GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP?

Ownership isn't a clean hand-off. Evidence so far shows that sustainable government ownership depends on **visibility, institutional anchoring, and shared financing** – and that **full exits are the exception, not the norm.** Most lasting transitions involve evolving partnerships where nonprofits continue to provide technical or strategic support.

We will fill knowledge gaps in our upcoming 2026 study. **Sign up to read it first**

Plan for partnership, not just exit

A few examples – such as BBC Media Action in Bihar and VillageReach in Malawi – show governments running nonprofit-originated solutions independently. However, most cases involve nonprofits continuing to play an ongoing role to support quality.

Continuously assess government readiness for autonomous delivery

Organisations such as Digital Green and VillageReach use explicit benchmarks to track government ownership, capacity, and risk over time, adjusting their role as transition progresses.

Embed responsibilities into existing roles and routines

Securing inclusion in government review meetings, embedding responsibilities into existing job functions, and integrating key metrics into staff performance management help prevent solutions from fading.

Build adaptive capacity, not dependency

Transition succeeds when governments can evolve and manage the solution dynamically, guided by clear, co-designed "minimum viable" standards that protect the core model. Co-creating these standards with government helps secure buy-in – though maintaining quality in practice remains a common challenge.

Co-finance to sustain commitment

Programmes are more likely to endure when governments contribute funding or operational resources, for example, by allocating budgets or linking delivery to staff performance goals. Government co-financing signals real commitment, and reduces long-term reliance on nonprofit or donor funding.

Want to dig deeper?

1. Changengine, The Playbook for Non-profit Unicorns, 2025
2. Kimberly Lemme & Kelly Latham, How to Create a Checklist for Nonprofit Exit, SSIR, 2018
3. Precision Development, PxD Ama Krushi Transition Insights, 2025

CASE EXAMPLE

DIGITAL GREEN, INDIA



ABOUT DIGITAL GREEN

Digital Green partners with governments to improve agricultural extension services through community-led, video-based training. The approach was developed with India's Department of Agriculture and first piloted in Andhra Pradesh to demonstrate feasibility and build confidence among officials.

THE JOURNEY TO SCALE

From the outset, Digital Green worked with government staff to shape content, delivery, and monitoring systems, embedding the model within established public structures. Rooting the approach in existing roles and administrative systems enabled government departments to expand and manage the programme independently.

HOW DID DIGITAL GREEN BUILD GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP FROM THE START?

Identifying internal champions

Digital Green cultivated champions with the authority and influence needed to legitimise the model and move it through the system.

Integrating responsibilities into public roles

Tasks such as equipment upkeep, troubleshooting, and supervising dissemination were assigned to government staff and absorbed into their routine functions, ensuring the model was rooted in existing workflows.

Creating system-level accountability

Accountability was reinforced through performance management. Digital Green worked with the department to integrate key metrics into staff performance reviews. Progress was reviewed in regular government meetings, creating senior-level oversight and peer accountability across districts.

Read more here

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INTO THE UNKNOWN:

WHAT IT REALLY TAKES TO BUILD EFFECTIVE NONPROFIT-GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS

Few examples show governments fully funding or sustaining solutions. Plus, most of what is written about scaling with government comes from nonprofits. Our upcoming study flips the lens, asking governments how they view and engage with nonprofit partners.

THE BIG
UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

1. Is full government ownership of their solution a realistic ambition for many nonprofits? When should they focus on strengthening government systems – e.g. through sharing of knowledge and technical assistance – instead?

2. Is scaling with government mostly a matter of design, or of being in the right place at the right political moment?

3. How and when does the funding responsibility shift to government?

4. How can quality be maintained at scale through government systems?

5. What role do nonprofits play once government leads, and to what extent is complete nonprofit withdrawal feasible?

6. What do governments actually want from nonprofits?

The biggest gap in the evidence?

The government's point of view. Our upcoming study reveals how governments see nonprofits, what they need, and what real partnership looks like.

Sign up to be first to read it

HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR READING

1/2

We've combed through dozens of studies, reports, and reflections from across the sector to surface the most useful insights for anyone working to scale with government.

Rather than list everything we read, these highlights point to the ideas, examples, and frameworks that genuinely shaped our thinking. Each one offers a practical perspective on how nonprofits can design for public institutionalisation.

We will fill knowledge gaps in our upcoming 2026 study. **Sign up to read it first**

	TYPES OF SOLUTIONS	RIGHT HOME AND CHAMPIONS	SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS	SUPPORTING GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP
BRAC, Scaling in a more Frugal World? Foundations to Tackle Extreme Poverty through Government, 2025		●	●	
Bvudzai Magadzire, Melissa West, Emily Lawrence, Julia Guerette & Barbara Jones-Singer, How to Transition Social Solutions to Government, SSIR, 2019		●	●	●
Centre for Universal Education at Brookings, Institutionalization Tracker, 2021				●
Changengine, The Playbook for Non-profit Unicorns, 2025		●	●	
Collective Impact Forum, How to Foster Effective Partnerships with Government, 2024	●	●	●	
Daniel Stein, Rupika Singh & Madhav Seth, Making the Government Adoption of Social Innovations Work, SSIR, 2021		●	●	●
Dianne Calvi & Taddeo Muriuki, Laying the Groundwork for Government-Led Poverty Reduction, SSIR, 2025				●
Global School Leaders, How to Scale with the Government, 2024		●	●	
Innovation Investment Alliance, Skoll Foundation, and CASE at Duke, Leveraging Government Partnerships for Scaled Impact, 2018			●	●
Innovations for Poverty Action, Embedding Interventions Within Government Systems Works Well as a Starting Point, Not the Last Step, 2025	●	●	●	●

HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR READING

2/2

	TYPES OF SOLUTIONS	RIGHT HOME AND CHAMPIONS	SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS	SUPPORTING GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP
Instiglio, **Strategic Plays for Philanthropy to Build Scaling Pathways**, 2025			●	●
Isabel Guerrero, Siddhant Gokhale, Jossie Fahsbender, **Scaling Up Development Impact**, 2023	●	●		
Kevin Starr, **Big Aid is Over**, SSIR, 2025		●	●	
Kevin Starr, **Big Enough. Simple Enough. Cheap Enough**, SSIR, 2019	●			
Kevin T. Pepper, Janine Schooley, Sara Chamberlain, Indrajit Chaudhuri, Sridhar Srikantiah & Gary L. Darmstadt, **Scaling Health Coverage, Quality, and Innovation Through the Public Sector**, SSIR, 2019	●		●	
Kimberly Lemme & Kelly Latham, **How to Create a Checklist for Nonprofit Exit**, SSIR, 2018			●	●
Precision Development, **PxD Ama Krushi Transition Insights**, 2025			●	●
Puneet Luthra, **Government Relations 101**, 2020			●	
Rakesh Rajani & Tim Hanstad, **Helping NGOs and Funders Make the 'Big Shift' to Working With Government**, SSIR, 2025	●	●	●	●
Vikas Birhma & Abdulhamid Haidar, **Nonprofits and Governments Are Looking for Love**, SSIR, 2024		●		
VillageReach and Spring Impact, **Transitioning Solutions to Government**, 2020			●	

We will fill knowledge gaps in our upcoming 2026 study. **Sign up to read it first**