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CHANGE  
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April 2020

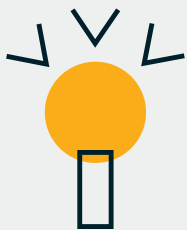
**Making Change**  
*with Government*



# Working in Partnership with Government - Lessons for Philanthropy

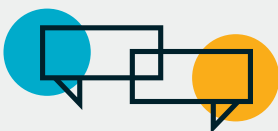
Atlantic Philanthropies ([www.atlanticphilanthropies.org](http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org)) is a global philanthropic foundation focused on advancing opportunity and tackling the root causes of inequity. Among its final investments in Northern Ireland was a large collaborative funding initiative with the region's devolved government that aimed to improve dementia services and outcomes for children and young people, increase the levels of shared education in Northern Ireland's divided school system, and develop more effective ways of working.

The programme resulted in real service delivery improvements and built knowledge, skills and models for transforming public services. What follows are some of the key lessons from this government/philanthropy partnership. We hope that they will be useful for others involved in such partnerships or contemplating them. A full report and other analyses of the partnership can be found at <https://www.socialchangeinitiative.com/making-change-with-government-page>.



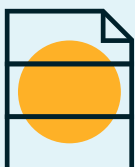
## Lesson 1. Choosing your Moment

Carefully analyse whether the time is right for a partnership with government, assessing the specific policy, delivery and financial context for each of your areas of interest. Be realistic about the transformative prospects that a shared programme (even a large-scale one by philanthropic standards) may have on the vast and complex public services system. Relationship development can begin in advance of any commitment, perhaps involving some collaborative activity to gain insight into how partnership is likely to work in practice.



## Lesson 2. Defining a Joint Programme

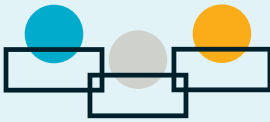
As an external partner to government, philanthropy's role in programme development is best focused on defining the end goals it expects in terms of system-change and sustained outcomes, and the key principles that should underpin joint activity. While it is tempting to 'lock in' programme deliverables before making grant decisions, this approach may fail to secure ownership of stakeholders across the system and result in less effective projects.



## Lesson 3. Contracting and Approvals

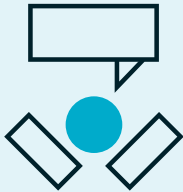
Crafting a deal with government is likely to require considerable time and effort but it is vital to give assurances to all parties involved. It is an uncomfortable fact that government bodies cannot commit financial resources beyond their current budget cycle, so grant makers should seek the security of a publicly stated commitment to the collaboration and governance arrangements that allow it to keep satisfying itself as to the continued bone fides of partners.

## Lesson 4. Involving the Right People



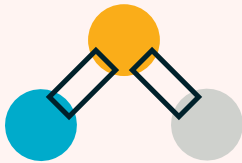
Consider carefully how all affected parties will be involved in the development, implementation and oversight of your joint programme. Don't assume that political commitment will translate into commitment at delivery level or conversely that plans developed with implementation bodies will automatically garner support from policy makers. Map out the relationships and levers for change within the system you hope to influence, and pursue a participative process that ensures those most affected by transformation are involved from the outset.

## Lesson 5. Deciding What Role you Will Play



Grantmakers entering a partnership with government have a choice to make about their role. Active management facilitates outcome guardianship but is resource intensive. A more arm's length role requires less resource but relies more on effective reporting and means to intervene if things drift off-course. Aside from the required assurances on programme delivery, consider how well the foundation's role will enable it to act as a positive disruptor of traditional ways of working.

## Lesson 6. Learning to Work Together



It is worth spending time on relationship development upfront. This is not just about people getting along – in complex systems personal goodwill is not enough – but an opportunity to understand the motivations, intentions and perspectives of each partner. Having explicit conversations about the role, time commitment and priorities of individuals involved could help lay the groundwork for more effective joint working.

## Lesson 7. Managing Timescales



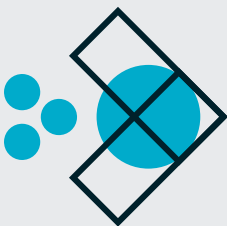
Establishing a philanthropy / government partnership takes time, be prepared to invest in the process of securing finances, establishing governance and recruiting essential staff. Build in time for the things that are often compromised - evidence reviews, formative learning and collaborative design. Understand that the government machine can move slowly but keep pressing for timely implementation and look for ways to mitigate delays. Consider keeping some funding outside the system to enable access to external expertise and technical support.

## Lesson 8. Operating Inside and Outside the System



Entering into partnership with government can impact on a foundation's advocacy approach. As well as taking advantage of the new opportunities it brings for influence within the system, work with existing partners and think about how governance and advisory arrangements can best help to sustain an independent, external voice.

## Lesson 9. Making Transformation Stick



The government partnership met Atlantic's aim to enhance the impact of its work. Although the investment was large in philanthropic terms it was small by public sector standards. However, it had a catalytic impact, leveraging public resources into previously under-supported areas, reaching more people and improving mainstream services.

Realising lasting change in public services is a messy, slow and difficult process. The active involvement of philanthropy as partners with government can help move that process forward by providing the space to transform existing services and develop new ways of working, outside of the pressures of day to day service delivery. In doing so it must instil an early and persistent focus on long-term change, even when implementation crises might serve to distract.

An approach that prioritises systems change over individual policies or short-term interventions is likely to reap most rewards. As one government official involved in the partnership put it:

**“The quickest way to waste philanthropic money is to fund ‘good works’ and not go for transformation. The multiplier for philanthropic money is transformation, hence sustainability must be judged against this single criterion”.**