

GUIDELINES

SELECTION PROCESS FOR GRANT AGENTS

February 2024

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1. Principles

A core component of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) operating model is that government and partners should first identify what needs to be done, and that any selection of a grant agent is then a function of how the identified action can be best implemented. **Selection of the grant agent should thus only happen after the partnership compact process has identified education system obstacles and mobilized partners at the country level to make strategic choices to address them;** consideration should be given to the strategic focus to be financed by the GPE system transformation grant or the GPE Multiplier grant, as well as the potential use of the system capacity grant to address weakness related to the enabling factors.

For the system capacity grant, it is possible to select a grant agent for specific urgent actions that need to be financed before the finalization of the partnership compact process, and/or to support the development of an education sector analysis, education sector plan or the organization of a joint sector review. Any other selection of a grant agent for a system transformation grant, Multiplier grant and Girls' Education Accelerator prior to this moment will not be considered as final by GPE. The only exception is when an expression of interest for the Multiplier is submitted before the (draft) partnership compact and the co-financier conditions its resources on the use of a specific grant agent to develop the joint program (see impact of the GPE Multiplier on grant agent selection in section 3.3).

Selection of the grant agent should depend on the availability and capacity to support efficient implementation of an effective program within the focus area defined in the compact through the financing modality determined as part of the enabling factors analysis and compact development process. All agencies have strengths and weaknesses that should be carefully considered. The selection is not about the best agency, but rather about who can offer adequate support within the given circumstances.

It is normally expected that there is one grant agent for the system transformation grant (including the Girls' Education Accelerator and Multiplier grant where available), but it is possible to have more than one grant agent if this would lead to better support.

As the system capacity grant can cover diverse areas, and comparative advantages of agencies could depend on the area of support, a country is allowed to opt for different grant agents, separating applications for different types of support as most appropriate in country context. The country should consider whether the advantages of that choice for the system capacity grant should outweigh the additional transactions that it would require. See section 3.3 for details on multiple grant agents.

The last principle is that the selection process should happen in an efficient and transparent manner. A clear timeline should be set out up front to lead to a swift decision, though providing opportunity for potential grant agents to indicate their interest and present how they can support implementation. Nontransparent or bilateral processes and negotiations between a potential grant agent and the government and/or other members of the local education group would lead to the obligation to restart the process. If one or more development partners in the local education group raises concerns regarding the process, recourse can be made to GPE's conflict resolution procedures.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

The government and the coordinating agency work together to plan, implement and document the grant agent selection process, in consultation with the broader local education group. In situations where the coordinating agency is also a candidate for grant agent, the government and development partners will need to adapt processes to address the **conflict of interest**. The preferred option in this case is that another agency supports the government to organize the selection.

The final selection of the grant agent must be decided by the government, in line with the standard selection process. The selection needs to be endorsed by development partners (referring to public support, rather than a formal decision), including civil society, preferably by consensus.

The Secretariat acts as a facilitator and advisor, ensuring that the government and coordinating agency are informed on the minimum required processes, GPE principles and guidelines, and examples of good practice. The Secretariat also carries out a quality assurance review to assess whether the grant agent selection process has been correctly applied. This will be documented through a quality assurance report, which is normally shared with the local education group within three weeks of the Secretariat's receipt of documentation of the selection, though this timeline may be longer in cases where there is lack of clarity or problems with the process, requiring further consultation.

Agent selection for rapid access to the system capacity grant

When a partner country opts for **rapid access** to the system capacity grant for developing its partnership compact, the government can select the coordinating agency to serve as grant agent, if possible. Partners should examine the potential for **perceived or actual conflicts of interest** in selecting a grant agent to support compact development if that entity is also considering nominating itself as grant agent for the system transformation grant. Consideration of how to mitigate the risk during the compact development process is advised.

3. Process

3.1. Timeline

The selection of a grant agent should only happen after the partnership compact process has identified education system bottlenecks and mobilized partners at the country level to make strategic choices to address them, including the strategic focus to be financed by the system transformation grant and/or the Multiplier grant, as well as the potential use of the system capacity grant to address weakness related to the enabling factors. The GPE operating model sets out that the selection is expected to happen **immediately** after the focus area informed by the partnership compact has been approved.

However, a government, in consultation with the local education group, can decide to start the grant agent selection process when the (draft) partnership compact has been submitted to the Secretariat for its review, as at that time the focus area of the system transformation grant and/or Multiplier grant and actions to be financed through the system capacity grant would have been agreed within the local education group.

As mentioned, for the system capacity grant, it is possible to select a grant agent for specific urgent actions that need to be financed before the finalization of the compact process, and/or to support the development of an education sector analysis, education sector plan or the organization of a joint sector review. When an expression of interest for the Multiplier is submitted before the (draft) partnership compact, and the cofinancier conditions its resources on the use of a specific grant agent to develop the joint program, the submission of the expression of interest would be considered as an acceptance that said agency will serve as grant agent.

If a country is eligible for the regular system transformation grant and the Multiplier grant, the government should still organize the open process for the selection of a grant agent for the regular system transformation grant after the development of the compact. In such a case, different grant agents could be selected for each grant, even when both grants are accessed through a single application (see impact of the GPE Multiplier on grant agent selection in section 3.3).

The selection of a grant agent must be planned through a transparent roadmap. The roadmap should include timing and expectation of key sequenced steps and should be approved by the government and endorsed by the development partners, through the local education group. A good practice is to develop this timeline at least one month before the start of the selection process, as it can help interested agencies to prepare and thus facilitate an efficient process once launched.

The actual process to select the agency—from call for interest to endorsement by the local education group—should only take up to six weeks, with two weeks for agencies to submit their interest, two for selection committee, one week for government decision and a final week for endorsement by the local education group. In case of urgency, the government and the development partners should reduce this timeline as appropriate. The government and the development partners are also encouraged to reduce the timeline as appropriate for the selection of a grant agent for the system capacity grant.

3.2. Criteria and selection committee

As indicated, the development of the partnership compact is the key preparatory step. It will not only set out the strategic focus to be financed by the system transformation grant and/or Multiplier grant but also inform the government and its partners on the most aligned **funding modality** appropriate in the context (as well as opportunities that would be available for further alignment and/or harmonization, in line with the [enabling factors analysis](#) section on coordinated financing and funding). These findings are expected to inform the implementation modality to be used for the system transformation grant and/or Multiplier grant.

When the strategic focus for the system transformation grant and/or Multiplier grant and its preferred modality has thus been defined, the government in consultation with the coordinating agency—if it is not a candidate for the role of the grant agent—will set out the criteria to select the grant agent, as well as set up a selection committee.

It is strongly encouraged to have a balanced and **inclusive selection committee**, representing different constituencies in the local education group. Agencies and persons with a conflict of interest should abstain from membership of the selection committee, and from engaging in the definition of the process and criteria.

For the system transformation grant and/or the Multiplier grant, the criteria include (i) the ability to use the most aligned funding modality available and appropriate in the context; (ii) the capacity to support efficient implementation of the program within the focus area defined in the partnership compact; (iii) the capacity for technical expertise in gender equality and education; (iv) the ability to help the government to develop a program within six months after selection—it is encouraged to request the interested agencies to draft a program development timeline as part of their candidacy; and (v) administrative cost for delivery of the program. This includes costs to cover implementation, support and/or supervision costs for the grant agent, those related to implementing partners as well as program implementation units, or other costs to be borne by the grant agent to comply with implementation, reporting and verification arrangements.

The capacity to support efficient implementation of the program should include both (a) the agility to take action to help activities progress and (b) the ability to provide technical support and capacity building. The government and coordination agency, in consultation with the local education group, either:

- (i) Broadly define the technical and capacity-building support desired from the grant agent and test potential agencies in this regard (as a way to determine what kind of capacity the grant agent would require, for example, in technical expertise, technical resources within the country or accessible to the grant agent, or ability to procure such resources); or
- (ii) Request the agencies to indicate support they could deliver.

With regard to the agility to take action to help activities progress, prospective agencies should indicate which resources they could use should activities not start or progress as expected. The prospective agencies should also reference past programs they have supported in the country, preferably in the education sector.

The government and coordinating agency could, in consultation with the local education group, add other relevant criteria, but they should carefully consider whether those criteria extend the process and/or are biased in favor of or against one or the other agency. The selection process does not have to assess the fiduciary capacity of the prospective grant agents as this is done through the accreditation process (see note on the accreditation process and appendix 2 for minimum criteria to be assessed).

Grant agent accreditation

To be able to exercise their role, all grant agents must be accredited and have a signed Financial Procedures Agreement with the GPE trustee. If a prospective or designated grant agent has not been accredited or does not have a signed agreement, the government and the relevant agency should inquire about its eligibility. If eligible and selected, the agency should initiate action for accreditation, involving its head office to secure this and subsequent signing of the agreement. This process will run in parallel to the development of the system transformation grant or Multiplier grant application, and, if actions are taken in due time, should not delay the application.

3.3. Selection process

Call for expressions of interest through the local education group: Based on the defined criteria, the government will request partners who fulfill the selection criteria to express their interest. This should be announced at a local education group meeting and followed by a written communication to the group members, providing sufficient time for interested partners to submit requested information. Any selection of a grant agent prior to such public call for interest will not be considered as final by GPE.

Candidates will be asked to present their expressions of interest to the selection committee, with the local education group informed in this process, following the defined criteria. They will also need to confirm that they will adhere to GPE's [Terms of Reference for Grant Agents](#), including participating in policy dialogue in the local education group and supporting the government to periodically share with the group policy-related issues regarding grant implementation (or reports directly if responsible for direct implementation of the program).

Selection: On the basis of the expressions of interest, the selection committee will propose the selection of a grant agent for decision by the government. This decision will be presented for endorsement by the development partners, including civil society organizations, and preferably by consensus. If one or more partners raise concerns with the process, recourse can be made to GPE's [Conflict Resolution Procedures](#).

Multiple grant agents: It is normally expected that there is only one grant agent for the regular system transformation grant or Multiplier grant. The decision to have more than one grant agent or divide the system transformation grant or Multiplier between different entities is possible but should be justified. One justification would be that this would lead to better support, as different agencies would have comparative advantages to support different elements of the program. Another would be (cost-) efficiency. For example, implementation arrangements where grant agents use other agencies that are also eligible to be a grant agent as implementing partners (who in turn may further subgrant) can absorb significant amounts of funds as overheads and administration costs and slow down implementation. Where more than one grant agent is used, GPE will provide direct grants to each grant agent, but coordination arrangements between the entities should be clearly described in the proposal(s), including any interdependencies that impact implementation.

System capacity grant: As the system capacity grant may cover quite different activities, governments in consultation with the local education group are encouraged to select a grant agent that can best assist them in a particular area to be supported by the system capacity grant.

As comparative advantages of agencies could depend on the area of support, a country is allowed to opt for different grant agents, separating applications for different types of support as most appropriate in country context. The advantages of that choice should outweigh the additional transactions that it would require. In general, countries are strongly encouraged to streamline the system capacity grant with other existing mechanisms, such as existing joint capacity reinforcement funding. Where relevant, a country can decide to use the program financed by the system transformation grant as the mechanism to implement the system capacity grant.

Impact of the GPE Multiplier: It is expected that the Multiplier and the cofinancing are delivered through the same modality in a single program or a common funding mechanism such as a pooled fund, typically with the same grant agent. Moreover, after partnership compact development, it is expected that both sources of funding will complement the regular system transformation grant, again preferably through the same program.

However, the co-financier may limit the agencies who can serve as grant agent for its financing. In those cases, the grant agent selection process for the Multiplier may be limited to agencies that can serve within the constraint of the co-financier.

The government and local education group will be requested to assess whether this allows for the selection of an agency that can support successful implementation of activities within the focus area defined in the compact and using an appropriate funding modality. If not, they will need to justify the alternative option and discuss with the co-financier whether this impacts the availability of its funding and thus potentially the Multiplier allocation.

If the choice for grant agent for the Multiplier is limited by the co-financier, there will be a separate grant agent selection processes for the Multiplier and regular system transformation grant if a country is eligible to access both grants, even when both grants are accessed through a single application.

4. Documentation and Quality Assurance

The process, key steps and final decision will be documented by the government with support from the coordinating agency and reviewed by the Secretariat in a dedicated quality assurance report.

For its quality assurance function, the Secretariat will pay particular attention to transparency and due process. The information provided by the government and coordinating agency should at a minimum allow assessment of these elements.

Appendix 1: Criteria for Grant Agent Selection

The government and development partners are expected to elaborate evaluation criteria for each of the selection criteria below. In particular, in the case of multiple candidates for grant agent, relevant, clear and objective indicators will need to be included for all criteria. As indicated in the [Charter](#) of the Global Partnership for Education, the government approves the final selection of the grant agent, endorsed by the other local education group members. The Board, in consultation with the trustee, agrees an accreditation framework and approves grant agents on the basis of that framework.

Criteria	Description
1. The ability to use the selected modality	<p>Ability to work with the most aligned funding modality available and appropriate in the context.</p> <p>The enabling factors analysis will have identified the most aligned and harmonized funding modality available, or to be developed if not available. This should then have informed the choice of funding modality in the partnership compact.</p>
2. The capacity to support efficient implementation of the program within the focus area defined in the compact	<p>This includes both the agility to take action to help activities progress and the ability to provide technical support and capacity building needs.</p> <p>The government and coordination agency, in consultation with the local education group, should either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Broadly define the technical and capacity building support desired from the grant agent—which in turn determines what kind of capacity the grant agent would require, for example, in technical expertise, technical resources within the country or accessible to the grant agent, or ability to procure such resources—and test potential agencies in this regard; or (ii) Request the agencies to indicate support they could deliver. <p>With regard to agility, prospective agencies should indicate which resources they could use should activities not start and/or progress as expected, and reference past programs they have supported in the country, preferably in the education sector.</p>
3. The capacity for technical expertise in gender equality and education	<p>The ability to provide gender and education technical support and ensure that gender equality is considered in developing the grant program with the government.</p>

4. The ability to help the government develop a program within six months after selection	The interested agencies are encouraged to draft a program development timeline as part of their expression of interest.
5. Appropriate administrative costs for delivery of the program	This includes costs to cover implementation, support and/or supervision costs for the grant agent, those related to implementing partners as well as program implementation units, or other costs to be borne by the grant to comply with implementation, reporting and verification arrangements.

Appendix 2: Minimum Fiduciary Standards Assessed Through the Accreditation Process

These standards are used to screen newly selected grant agents, prior to their approval by the Finance and Risk Committee, to systematically assess whether the organization or agency has all the capacities, policies and procedures needed to provide due oversight of GPE Trust Fund resources.

MINIMUM STANDARDS

ILLUSTRATIVE MEANS OF VERIFICATION

1. Financial management

1.1 Financial management and accounting systems

Robust financial management and accounting systems ensure accuracy of financial management and reporting. The entity has adequate systems, including systems for cash management and production of budgets, and for the production of reliable financial statements prepared in accordance with internationally recognized accounting standards.

- The entity produces reliable charts of accounts, which are prepared in accordance with recognized accounting standards and provide the necessary level of detail to monitor expenditure.
- Robust and reliable accounting systems are integrated with other financial management systems, to facilitate reconciliation with budget, and reporting requirements.
- Budgeting procedures are robust and provide donors with assurances related to expenditure.
- Banking arrangements provide for effective cash management.
- Based on available information, the entity's credit risk is acceptable.

1.2 External financial audit

The external financial audit function ensures an independent (if possible, as defined by the International Federation of Accountants, or IFAC) review of financial statements and internal controls. An independent auditor audits the entity's financial statements according to internationally recognized auditing standards on an annual basis.

- The entity has appointed an independent external audit firm or organization.
- The work of the external audit firm or organization is consistent with recognized international auditing standards.
- There is a transparent and competitive process for the selection of a suitable external auditor.

1.3 Control frameworks

An internal control framework (if possible, as defined by internationally recognized frameworks such as COSO, Cadbury and CoCo) is a risk-based process designed to provide reasonable assurance and feedback to management regarding the achievement of financial management objectives.

- The entity's accounting and finance organizational structure is clearly defined, with documented roles and responsibilities and sufficient segregation of duties, including for implementing any GPE grants.
- The entity has adequate policies and procedures in place for risk assessment and management.

<p>The entity's control frameworks are in place, are documented and have clearly defined roles for management, internal auditors, the governing body and other personnel.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are adequate policies and procedures in place to guide activities and ensure staff accountability.
<p>1.4 Internal audit</p>	
<p>Internal auditing is an independent, objective activity designed to add value and improve an organization's operations. It helps an organization to accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes. The entity demonstrates capability for functionally independent internal auditing in accordance with internationally recognized frameworks (such as the International Professional Practices Framework, or IPPF).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The entity has an internal audit mechanism in place and its activities are subject to review by an internal audit unit. • The internal audit function is independent and objective and has a risk-based methodology for preparing its annual plan, and its findings are disseminated to management, who follows up on recommendations.
<p>2. Institutional capacity</p>	
<p>2.1 Legal status</p>	
<p>The entity must have the appropriate legal status and legal authority to enter into contractual arrangements with GPE and other third parties, and it must have the legal authority to receive funds.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The entity is a legally registered organization. • The entity has the authority to enter into legal agreements and receive funds.
<p>2.2 Project appraisal</p>	
<p>The entity has the ability to identify, develop and appraise projects. Project appraisal functions include the establishment of standards and appropriate safeguards that are used to determine whether projects and activities will meet their development goals before funds are disbursed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The entity has a good track record for timely implementation of similar projects and has a good track record of achieving appropriate programmatic results.
<p>2.3 Management and organization</p>	
<p>The entity's organizational structure and quality of management enables it to competently manage or oversee the execution of funded projects, including through management of subrecipients.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The entity has a board of directors that meets regularly and has statutes or terms of reference for its functions. • The entity has an independent audit committee, which reviews the integrity of the financial statements, has oversight of internal controls and reviews the effectiveness of internal audit. • The entity has a management structure that is suitable for undertaking funded projects.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The entity is well acquainted with the work of GPE and the grant work involved. • The entity’s staff—at all levels—have the requisite skills and experience to undertake funded projects. • The entity’s physical assets, including IT systems, are adequate to undertake funded projects.
2.4 Oversight of subrecipients	
<p>The entity’s organizational structure and quality of management enables it to competently manage or oversee the execution of funded projects through management of and program delivery and implementation support to subrecipients.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are adequate procedures and criteria in place for a transparent selection of subrecipients. • The entity has adequate plans and resources in place to ensure subrecipients have the capacity to implement the proposed activities and safeguard grant funds. • The entity has had previous experiences with managing subrecipients and disbursements of similar magnitude. • The entity has operational procedures and plans in place for managing subrecipients, including for monitoring the program implementation at subrecipient level, reviewing subrecipients’ financial and program reports for completeness and technical soundness and ensuring the safeguarding of assets held by subrecipients.
2.5 Procurement procedures	
<p>The entity’s procurement procedures, covering both internal/administrative procurement and procurement by recipients of funds, include written standards based on widely recognized processes and an internal control framework to protect against fraud, corruption and waste.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documented procurement processes include the following: (1) a code of conduct to avoid occurrence or perceptions of conflicts of interest, (2) methods of procurement and when different methods should be applied, (3) procedures for requests for tenders, (4) procedures for bid evaluation, and (5) procedures that are transparent and competitive. • Procurement approval systems are in place, with certifying and approving officers, and there are an appropriate segregation of duties and levels of delegation. • Procedures are in place to ensure that the goods/services delivered are of an acceptable quality.
2.6 Monitoring, evaluation and project-at-risk systems	
<p>The entity can demonstrate existing capacities for monitoring and independent evaluation of projects and evidence that a process or system,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The entity has operational procedures and plans in place for monitoring the program implementation at both the entity and subrecipient levels and for

such as a project-at-risk system, is in place to flag when a project has developed problems that may interfere with the achievement of its objectives, and to respond accordingly to redress the problems.

reviewing entity and subrecipients' financial and program reports for completeness and technical soundness.

- The entity has systems in place for early identification of problems/capacity gaps at the entity and subrecipient levels and for initiating effective remedial actions.

3. Transparency, self-investigative powers and anti-corruption measures

3.1 Misuse of funds procedures

In accordance with GPE's *Policy and Communications Protocol on Misuse of GPE Trust Funds*, which requires that the Board only choose agencies with robust policies and procedures for addressing misuse to act as grant agents, the entity can demonstrate competence to deal with financial mismanagement and other forms of malpractice.

- The entity has clear written policies and procedures regarding issues of misuse of funds. There is a system of adequate safeguards to provide reasonable assurance as to the protection of assets, including the GPE grant, from loss, fraud, waste and abuse at every step of the grant life cycle.
- The entity has publicly available avenues to confidentially report suspected fraud or misuse of funds.
- The entity has the ability to ensure independent, objective investigation of allegations of misuse.
- The entity has terms and conditions in its agreements with subrecipients and contractors in relation to the ability to recover funds in cases of misuse.

3.2 Protection of whistleblowers

The entity protects individuals from retaliation due to providing information in relation to misuse.

- The entity has policies and procedures in place in relation to whistleblowing and the protection of employees or contractors.

4. Safeguards for the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

4.1 Policies and procedures

The entity can demonstrate existence of policies and procedures for the protection of staff and program beneficiaries from all forms of harassment, abuse, exploitation and other forms of misconduct.

- The entity has clear written policies and procedures regarding safeguarding of children, staff and other beneficiaries of donor-funded programs and it is implementing/monitoring the implementation of these policies.
- The scope of safeguarding policies covers the entity's staff, its representatives, staff of partner organizations and vendors implementing activities on behalf of the entity.
- There are mechanisms for ongoing awareness creation on requirements of safeguarding policies.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The entity has publicly available avenues to confidentially report incidents of abuse, violence or exploitation. • The entity has the ability to ensure independent and objective investigation of reported incidents of abuse, violence or exploitation. • There are mechanisms for regular review of safeguarding policies and practices to inform continuous improvement.
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4.2 Protection of victims and whistleblowers

The entity protects individuals from retaliation due to providing information in relation to incidents of abuse, violence and exploitation.

- The entity has policies and procedures in place to protect victims and whistleblowers from retaliation.

Appendix 3: Initial Screening Criteria for Not-for-profit Organizations During the Accreditation Process

In November 2013, the GPE Board of Directors [approved](#) the Supervising and Managing Entity Eligibility Expansion Plan ([BOD/2013/11-09](#)) and the Guidance for Assessment of Newly Eligible Supervising and Managing Entities as set out in annexes 9 and 10 of the Report of the Financial Advisory Committee ([BOD/2013/11 DOC 06A](#)). This Board decision requires not-for-profit organizations that are seeking to become grant agents to be screened against the criteria below.

- Demonstrated experience operating in a fragile country context, where applicable
- Demonstrated experience in the education sector
- Demonstrated experience managing bilateral or multilateral donor-funded projects in excess of US\$10 million in a country and across more than one country
- Demonstrated experience working with national authorities to strengthen local capacity to implement basic social services.

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