Catalyzing Collaboration:

The Developing Infrastructure for Federal Public Private Partnerships

The Center on Philanthropy & Public Policy
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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Discussion paper written by
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

There is an increasing recognition among the sectors – government, philanthropy, and business – that they may achieve greater impact by working together to solve problems of shared interest. While public private partnerships are not new, they have tended to be episodic, time-limited and ad hoc. As a consequence, the costs and risks of mounting such efforts can discourage their development. In recent years, there have been a number of efforts to overcome such barriers through the creation of an infrastructure for partnerships that we refer to as offices of strategic partnerships. They are found at the local, state and federal levels. And, although they have different names and origins, and varying roles and structural details, collectively they represent an intriguing innovation in public problem solving.

This study focuses on the development of offices of strategic partnerships across the federal government that work to leverage the strengths of philanthropy and business – their dollars, knowledge and networks – on issues as diverse as education, civic engagement, disaster relief, international development and climate change. It was inspired by the presentation of our earlier report on local, state and federal partnership offices at the White House in May 2013 to the Community Partnerships Interagency Policy Committee. We thank Jim Thompson for inviting us to present on our work, and to he and his colleagues from across the federal government for sharing their experiences and insights for this report. In addition, we are appreciative of those who contributed to a discussion of the findings at a research roundtable that was held on June 6, 2014 in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the Council of Foundations annual conference, which benefited from the efforts of Stephanie Powers.

Institutionalizing these offices to provide an infrastructure for cross-sector partnerships is challenging work. We are heartened by the growing community of practice that is developing as a result of this movement. There is evidence that – with time and experience – these offices can develop more robust forms of partnerships with philanthropy and business that result in more effective problem solving. We will continue to document and analyze the progress of these offices.

James M. Ferris
Director,
The Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy

Executive Summary

There is growing interest on the part of government, philanthropy and business to work together to achieve greater impact. Partnerships that span the sectors have the potential to achieve more than any sector can achieve on its own by leveraging the strengths of each. However, such partnerships also give rise to added costs and entail greater risks. To address these challenges, offices of strategic partnerships are emerging at the federal level to provide an infrastructure to catalyze cross-sectoral partnerships.

This report examines 21 such offices in federal departments and agencies whose purpose is to facilitate and accelerate partnerships with philanthropy and business – ranging from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Education, to the Department of State and the Agency for International Development, to the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The formation of these offices has been driven by champions within government – many with prior experience in philanthropy or business – that have witnessed the power of working collaboratively with other sectors. Their actions have often been reinforced by executive orders and other directives conducive to their growth. In the case of those offices that have been created in the last few years, they have also been encouraged by the examples of their more established counterparts.

These offices are relatively new with the oldest established in 2002. They go by different names, have a variety of structures, and approach their work based on their department's mission and objectives, their rules and the policy domains in which they work. Regardless of these variations, the common thread among these offices is their role as an infrastructure for strategic partnerships. They catalyze partnerships by identifying potential partners, aligning interests and developing platforms for engagement. They build the capacity of the federal government to work more effectively across sectors by teaching federal agencies how to broker partnerships. And, they facilitate partnerships by trouble shooting problems and serving as an ongoing point of contact for philanthropy and business.

The types of partnerships these offices are facilitating range from information sharing agreements to fully-integrated partnerships with co-investments and shared decision making. Some offices focus on partnerships with business, while others stress partnerships with philanthropy, and still others encompass both. The policy domain in which the offices work has an important influence on the value proposition of cross-sectoral collaboration that, in turn, determines the types of partnerships the offices pursue and with which sectors they partner.

There are three critical challenges that the offices face: understanding and navigating government rules; instilling a partnership approach within government; and ensuring the continuity of the offices as leaders come and go. They underscore the importance of these offices continuing to share lessons learned, developing promising approaches to their work, and expanding their community of practice. This is reinforced by the fact that the more established offices have been able to advance more robust partnerships that leverage the dollars, knowledge and networks of their partners as a result of learning from their successes and failures.

I. Introduction

Partnerships with philanthropy and business are an increasingly common strategy for the federal government to achieve greater impact in addressing the wide range of policy issues that are its responsibility. While the precise value proposition underlying cross-sectoral partnerships is likely to vary if the partnership is with philanthropy or business, there is a growing appreciation that blending the relative strengths of two or more sectors may be a more effective way to solve some public problems than reliance on government alone.

The value of cross-sectoral partnerships is understood across the political spectrum. The current and previous administrations have pushed for greater collaboration with philanthropy and business. For example, the White House Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Initiatives, which created more pathways for religious organizations to become involved in federal programs, was established by Executive Order in 2001 by President George W. Bush.[1] This office provided an important precedent for the establishment of subsequent government efforts to work with philanthropy and business.

During the Obama administration, there has been a "surge of interest" in high-profile partnerships with philanthropy on domestic issues such as those associated with the Corporation for National and Community Service's Social Innovation Fund, the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Choice Neighborhoods, and a number of initiatives of the Department of Education, such as the Investing in Innovation Fund, Race to the Top, and Promise Neighborhoods.[2] Business has been sought as a partner on some of these initiatives as well as other public policy issues in which they have a vested interest, like the roll out of the Affordable Care Act,[3] new workforce development programs,[4] carbon reduction initiatives[5] and social impact bonds.

Much of the work on cross-sectoral partnerships, to date, has been done on an ad hoc basis. Each partnership demands its own careful calibration of how it should be structured based on the objectives, rules, expectations, and intentions of the partners. As a result, there is a growing recognition that working together has costs and risks that may inhibit such partnerships from emerging.

There is an advantage – to the extent that such partnerships are seen as a strategy for governance – to create an infrastructure within agencies that can accumulate knowledge about how best to engage philanthropy and business, what rules govern that engagement, and how to advance each partner's interests and priorities. And, once partnerships are in place, it is imperative to provide ongoing support and to apply lessons learned to subsequent partnerships.

[1] Mathematica Policy Research, *Fostering Effective Grassroots Partnerships: Lessons from Faith-Based and Community Initiatives*, (2010).

[2] See: Abramson, Alan, Soskis, Benjamin and Stefan Toepler, *Public-Philanthropic Partnerships: Trends, Innovations and Challenges*, Council on Foundations (2012), for more on the new imperative for federal partnerships.

[3] For example, the Department of Health and Human Services partnered with a number of national pharmacies to provide outreach and enrollment services for the Affordable Care Act.

[4] For instance, several new workforce development partnerships have emerged between government and businesses around technology and manufacturing as part of the Advanced Manufacturing Partnership. "Capturing A Domestic Competitive Advantage in Advance Manufacturing," Education and Workforce Development Workstream Report, President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, July 2012.

[5] See http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/EPAactivities/voluntaryprograms.html for numerous examples of partnerships with business around carbon mitigation and climate change.

As a consequence, there is a trend in the federal government to institutionalize the promotion of cross-sectoral partnerships with the creation of offices that catalyze, facilitate and accelerate them. These offices marshal resources and expertise that provide the infrastructure for instilling a collaborative approach to the work of departments and agencies and build their capacity to partner with philanthropy and business.

This study focuses on these innovative arrangements across the federal government. It builds on The Center's earlier research that examines offices of strategic partnerships at the local, state, and federal levels;[6] and, it is inspired and informed by efforts across the federal government to encourage a partnership approach, spearheaded by the Community Partnerships Interagency Policy Committee.[7] For this analysis, phone interviews were conducted with senior leaders of offices working on partnerships with philanthropy or business, or both. We began with those leaders who participated in the Community Partnerships Interagency Policy Committee, and extended to those that were brought to our attention during the interviews.

We focus on how the offices approach their work – including why and how they were created, what strategies they pursue to establish a culture of partnerships, the impact they are making, and what it will take to sustain them. We supplemented the interviews with additional background and contextual information gathered through an online survey, agency websites and materials the offices shared with us.

Twenty-seven different offices working on partnerships were asked to participate in the study and twenty-one chose to do so.[8] They include a wide swath of the federal government, but they do not fully account for all of the federal agencies involved in cross-sectoral partnerships. The list of agencies and the principals interviewed are listed in Figure 1.[9] Nine of the offices are in agencies focused on domestic policy areas; six are in the international aid and development arena; and six are concerned with national security and emergency response. These offices go by different names, take a variety of shapes and forms, and approach their work based on their department's mission and objectives and rules as well as the policy domain in which they work. Regardless of the variations, there is a common thread among them – providing an infrastructure within federal agencies for strategic partnerships with philanthropy and business.

In this report, we provide a conceptual framework for cross-sectoral partnerships, including an examination of the value proposition and the associated costs and risks, to develop the rationale for an infrastructure around partnerships. Then we examine the 21 federal offices of strategic partnerships in terms of their formation, scope of work, and structure. Subsequently, we outline three of the enduring challenges they face and the lessons learned for more effective practice.

[6] See: Ferris, James M. and Nicholas P.O. Williams, *Philanthropy and Government Working Together: The Role of Offices of Strategic Partnership in Public Problem Solving,* The Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy, University of Southern California, December 2012.

[7] Community Partnerships Interagency Policy Committee, *Building Partnerships: A Best Practice Guide,* April (2013). The Committee was a White House initiative that began in 2012 in response to an executive order to share ideas and create a community of practice around partnerships focused on issues related to national security, and extended over time to include other policy arenas of the federal government.

[8] This includes eighteen interviews with representatives that participated in the Community Partnerships working group and three interviews with leaders from other partnership offices that were referred during the interviews. For the purposes of this paper, we refer to all participants as "offices," even in cases where there is a single individual with the responsibility and no formal structure has yet to evolve.

[9] The title and affiliation of individuals were current at the time of the interviews, which were conducted between January and March of 2014.

FIGURE 1. FEDERAL OFFICES AND PRINCIPALS INTERVIEWED

International Aid & Development

Corey Griffin
Associate Director
Strategic Partnerships
Peace Corps

Jim Hallmark
Director, Finance Investment & Trade
Millennium Challenge Corporation

Chris Jurgens
Director, Global Partnerships
U.S. Agency for International Development

Lauren Marks
Director, Private Sector Engagement
President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

Jacob Moss
Director, U.S. Cookstoves Initiatives
Department of State

Jim Thompson
Director for Innovation, Global Partnership Initiatives
Department of State

National Security & Emergency Response

Jonathan Andrew
Interagency Borderlands Coordinator
Department of the Interior

Darrin Donato
Community Resilience Coordinator
Division for At-Risk Individuals
Department of Health and Human Services

Steve Hancock
Director, Public Private Partnerships
Department of Homeland Security

Jeanie Moore
Director, Private Sector Division of External Affairs
Federal Emergency Management Agency

Trent Thompson
Chief of Private Sector and NGO Office
Private Sector & NGO Office (J99)
NORAD-US Northern Command

Steve Smith
Director, Disaster Planning & Risk Management
Small Business Administration

Domestic Programs

Ana Marie Argilagos
Deputy Assistant Secretary
International and Philanthropic Innovation
Department of Housing and Urban Development

Paul Batlan
Partnerships Coordinator
Office of Youth Partnerships and Service
Department of the Interior

Andrea Bedell-Loucks
Deputy Director, Partnership Office
National Forest Service
Department of Agriculture

Douglas Carmon
Special Assistant to the Secretary
Office of the Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs

Jessica Daly
Team Lead for Strategic Partnerships
Centers for Disease Control

Diana Hoyt
Manager, Innovation and Strategic Partnerships
National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Suzanne Immerman
Director, Strategic Partnerships
Department of Education

John Kelly
Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy
Partnerships and Engagement
Corporation for National and Community Service

Katherine McQuay
Assistant Director
Community Oriented Policing Services
Department of Justice

II. Framework for Public Private Partnerships

Although public private partnerships are not needed to address every public problem or issue, there is growing agreement across sectors that some problems can be better addressed by working together.[10] Leaders in government, philanthropy and business increasingly see the value of working across sectors to leverage the strengths of each in order to increase impact – from fighting deadly diseases to responding to natural disasters, and from providing high-quality education to fostering economic growth both domestically and abroad.

Cross-sectoral partnerships are multi-faceted and built around the common interests and priorities of the partners where working together creates value. While there are myriad definitions of public private partnerships, we define them as an intentional and sustained relationship in which government works with philanthropy and/or business to accomplish a shared goal.[11] These partnerships can be simple and informal such as sharing information to better inform decision-making about disaster response or to spark new ideas around affordable housing. Or, they can be more formal and complex such as agreements that stipulate joint decision making and resource allocation for international economic development.

THE VALUE PROPOSITION

There are multiple motivations for the federal government to want to partner across the sectors. According to *Building Partnerships: A Best Practice Guide,* the value proposition of strategic partnerships with other sectors enables federal agencies to "do more with less, build on the capabilities of others, leverage collective action, broaden investments to achieve policy goals, and improve performance."[12] Partnerships are a tool to draw upon the complementary and reinforcing strengths of business and philanthropy. Partnering can increase the flexibility and nimbleness of the agency; leverage dollars, knowledge and networks to address issues of mutual concern; and augment the credibility and reputation of public programs and government initiatives.

- **Increased Flexibility and Nimbleness.** Most federal agencies and departments have limited discretionary funds and rules that circumscribe their decision making authority. As a consequence, they have a limited ability to experiment and innovate as well as to respond quickly to emergent problems. Both philanthropy and business have considerably more flexibility. By partnering, government is able to become more dynamic.

- **Leveraging Dollars, Knowledge and Networks.** The federal government has vast resources relative to either philanthropy or business. Yet, philanthropy and business can make a difference on the

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[10] See: Goldsmith, Steven, Georges, Gigi and Tim G. Burke, *The Power of Social Innovation: How Civic Entrepreneurs Ignite Community Networks for Good,* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass (2010).

[11] In our definition, the connection in the relationship between government and the private sector, which includes both philanthropy and business, is bi-directional and distinct from service-delivery contracts, grants or procurements, where the engagement and decision-making authority of the private sector actors are substantially subordinate to government and are largely transactional.

[12] Community Partnerships Interagency Policy Committee (2013). p. 2.

margins by contributing discretionary dollars, sharing knowledge of communities and markets, and creating connections to their networks.

- **Enhanced Credibility and Reputation.** The public's trust in government to solve problems remains low by historical standards,[13] while philanthropy and business are increasingly viewed as uniquely positioned to help address public problems.[14] By partnering with philanthropy and business to forge innovative solutions, government can enhance its credibility and reputation for effectiveness and innovation.

The actual value proposition may vary depending on which sector the government chooses as its partner, based on the objective of the partnership and which sector is a viable option.

Philanthropic foundations are empowered by their endowments giving them wide latitude in pursuit of their self-defined missions. As a result, foundations are able to approach problems and dedicate resources to deeply entrenched social problems – which often intersect with those being addressed by government – over a longer period of time without the constraints of politics and bureaucracy. In addition, many foundations have developed expertise and knowledge – through applied research and programs – that can be leveraged by government as a way to design or experiment with new programs, and they have vast networks of individuals and institutions that can be used to help influence or implement government policies and programs.

Business, on the other hand, provides government with a vehicle from which to access private markets for the public good. By working with business, government agencies may be able to leverage the distribution networks of business to reach a larger segment of the population or to access expertise and technical innovations that enhance operations and service delivery. Such partnerships are likely to emerge where the work of particular industries overlaps with government such as agriculture, energy, healthcare, and technology. As with philanthropy, business has financial assets that can be leveraged by government; business is well-positioned to play a "venture capital" role for public problem solving, as evidenced by innovations like social impact bonds.

THE COSTS AND RISKS OF PARTNERSHIPS

While there is growing appreciation of the value proposition for working together across sectors, partnerships can be hard to initiate and sustain because of significant costs and risks. The institutional logic of each sector – the rationales, incentives, and formal and informal rules – is different and sometimes in conflict with one another, which increases the transaction costs and risks of partnering.[15] As a consequence, it takes time and skill to lay the groundwork for a partnership.

[13] Pew Research Center, "National Election Studies," Gallup, ABC/Washington Post, CBS/New York Times, and CNN Polls. October 18, 2013.

[14] For instance, a recent survey shows that 87 percent of consumers globally, and 86 percent of those in the United States, believe businesses should place at least equal weight on society's interests as they do on their own business interests. See: "Global Deck: 2012 Edelman Goodpurpose Survey," Edelman Insights, April 23, 2012. In another survey of more than 50,000 respondents globally, foundations and other non-governmental organizations are viewed as the most trusted institutions with a clear majority trusting them to do the right thing, followed by businesses; at the same time, the survey shows that trust in governments has continued to drop year over year. See: "2012 Edelman Trust Barometer: Annual Global Study," Edelman Insights, January 22, 2012.

[15] Ferris and Williams (2012).

Government is not accustomed to partnering. Federal workers typically operate on their own or with others in government to accomplish their objectives. When they do work with external organizations, it is largely through competitive contracts, grants, or bids. But working in partnership requires a different approach than the *modus operandi* of government, one that emphasizes an understanding and respect for how other sectors make decisions and approach their work. As a result, strategies and approaches to partnering must be taught and reinforced continuously as misperceptions are replaced with more realistic expectations about how the sectors can best work together.

It is imperative to understand and have the ability to navigate the rules and regulations that guide how such collaboration may occur, which vary across federal agencies.[16] In agencies where there has been limited focus on partnerships, there is the need to develop rules and procedures and to orient the agency staff towards them. Beyond that, there are costs of identifying partners and conducting due diligence, a process that can be time consuming and complex, requiring multiple layers of bureaucratic approval. When financial investments are involved, partnerships become even more complicated as they often require additional oversight and involvement from general counsel.

There are cultural barriers to partnering as well – the hard work of fostering relationships with the other sectors that can lead to opportunities for making a greater impact. For government-philanthropic partnerships, this often means gaining an understanding of the foundation's mission, structure and approach to addressing social problems, and how that might influence the type of partnership that is eventually developed. For example, foundations generally look to address problems over longer time horizons than either government or business, sometimes focusing on particular strategies for a decade or longer. Governments, by contrast, tend to look at problems in the context of electoral cycles whereas businesses are prone to strategizing and adapting over an even shorter time horizon, for instance, around quarterly earnings. Because of their longer view, foundations are more interested in gaining a more nuanced understanding of the underlying causes of a particular problem or issue, and may be more attracted to partnerships that study or address root causes than those that merely attack the symptoms.

In partnerships involving business, by contrast, what is to be achieved and how that fits into its business model may be more important. Business is motivated largely by profits. A business wants to know what role it can play in the partnership and how it might, for instance, bolster its image, reach new audiences or otherwise help the company's bottom line. Thus, partnerships with business involve a balancing act in which this understanding shapes how a partnership is developed and framed while paying careful attention to ensure that the interaction is open and transparent and mitigates against conflicts of interest.

The risks of partnerships – both perceived and real – may also inhibit their development. Those who have experimented with cross-sectoral partnerships are more attuned to the challenges of working together. For instance, the Community Partnerships Interagency Policy Committee identified conflicts of interest and the appearance of preferential treatment or access as two such risks that the federal government considers when vetting a potential partnership. By overstepping rules,

[16] See: D. Radner, *The Essentials for Collaboration Between Foundations and Government*, Council on Foundations (2010).

even if inadvertent, the reputation of the agency is put at risk.[17] This creates a tension between the flexibility that is required to make partnerships work and the ethos of public accountability. If the rules surrounding partnership are too tight, they inhibit partnerships from emerging. If they are too loose, they increase the potential risks of partnering that might erode public trust. Importantly, because of the profit motive, the risk of partnering with business may be higher than with philanthropy.

THE RATIONALE FOR PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP INFRASTRUCTURE

Given the value proposition of working across sectors and the associated costs and risks, offices of strategic partnerships have emerged within government to provide an infrastructure to promote partnerships by reducing the transaction costs and mitigating the risks of partnering. Such organizational support is critical to fostering a culture of collaboration.[18]

These offices seek to catalyze, facilitate, and accelerate partnerships with philanthropy and business in three ways. First, they seek to demystify the sectors by educating those inside and outside of government about how to work better together. Those working in the offices frequently have knowledge from their experience in working in and with other sectors that they can share. As the offices gain more experience working on different partnerships, they learn effective practices to mount, facilitate and sustain partnerships. Second, the offices convene and facilitate stakeholders to stimulate conversations, exchange information, and broker partnerships. These offices act as a primary point of contact for philanthropy and business to connect with government and vice versa, and they apply their specialized knowledge and skills to help broker relationships. Third, the offices try to leverage the assets of both sectors – dollars, knowledge and networks – and help focus them on common goals. They are uniquely positioned to identify the areas of greatest opportunity for partnerships.[19] In so doing, these offices help to both lower the costs and risks of partnering with the other sectors while helping to identify and maximize the partnerships of greatest potential value for government.

[17] Community Partnerships Interagency Policy Committee (2013).

[18] See: O'Leary, Rosemary and Catherine M. Gerard, *Collaboration Across Boundaries: Insights and Tips from Federal Senior Executives*, IBM Center for The Business of Government (2012).

[19] Ferris and Williams (2012).

III. Federal Offices of Strategic Partnerships

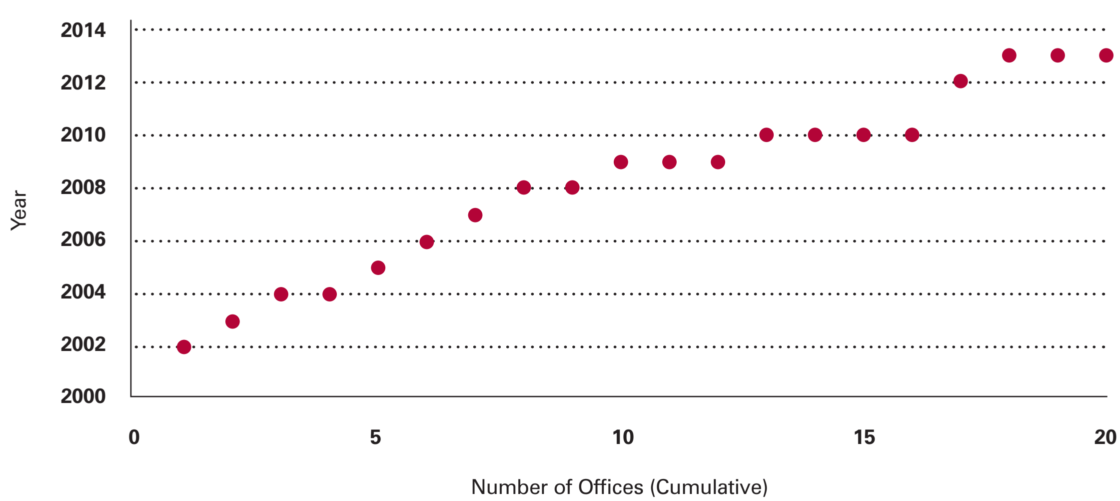
This section presents findings from our examination of the 21 offices focused on public private partnerships across the federal government. We examine how these offices have emerged; their scope of work; and how they are structured and organized to accomplish their goals.

FORMATION OF PARTNERSHIP OFFICES

There is a long history of public private partnerships within the federal government, but the emergence of formalized offices that focus on partnerships with philanthropy and/or business is relatively new. Of the 21 different offices or agencies we examine, the earliest office that was developed is USAID's Global Development Alliance, which was created in 2002. Since then, the number of offices has grown steadily, as shown in Figure 2. Nine of the offices emerged between 2008 and 2010, and four more since 2012.

The growth of federal offices over the last 12 years has been highly influenced by champions within government who see the value in partnerships with philanthropy and business, policy and administrative directives from the White House and other parts of the administration, and the example and guidance of pioneering federal offices. External events, like the recession of 2008, and the general interest of philanthropy and business in partnering have also contributed to the development of these offices.

FIGURE 2. GROWTH OF FEDERAL OFFICES BY YEAR (2000-2014)



Champions

Important in the development of many of the offices are champions that understand the value of partnerships with philanthropy and business. In total, 17 offices identified a champion within the department as critical. For instance, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Strategic Partnerships was formed at the direction of Secretary Arne Duncan, who had worked closely with both philanthropy and business as head of Chicago Public Schools. In that role, the Secretary saw the value of partnering with other sectors as extending beyond an avenue for developing additional financial resources as a means to generate new ideas, build capacity and help implement policy. As the office's leader recounts: "When Secretary Duncan first arrived in Washington he assumed there was a process in place to work with philanthropy and business. But, what he found was there were relationships with the private sector and there were examples over the years of ways that philanthropy and business had been incredibly valuable to the Department, but there was no formal infrastructure in place to harness and leverage that value over time."

Other offices have taken shape over a number of years and across administrations with the support of multiple champions. For instance, the partnerships office at the State Department was initiated and formalized by Condoleezza Rice. Before becoming formalized, Secretary Rice had asked the management team at the time: "What are we doing on partnerships? Who are our partners? What are we leveraging?" As the office head notes: "Nobody could really answer the question because there was no center that was capturing information or learning about partnerships." When Secretary Clinton arrived, the office was elevated to the executive level and tasked with not just capturing information and being a center of excellence for the department's partnerships, but one that initiates and pursues opportunities to partner.

Other champions within departments and programs, particularly those with direct experience working in a foundation or business, have helped to push senior leadership toward the creation of a partnership office. For instance, the office at HUD had been initiated at the urging of a senior staff member who had spent a career in philanthropy. She notes: "I could see that more and more foundations had an interest in aligning and leveraging their resources with other funders and thinking creatively about their work. And, at the same time, there was this wasted opportunity in not working at the federal level since that is where things get scaled. So, with the potential for both foundations and government to learn from each other and align resources, the moment was ripe for launching the office, so I took it to the Secretary and together we tried this experiment."

Policy and Administrative Directives

The offices have also been spurred by White House directives and policies to encourage collaboration, with some explicitly focused on partnerships with philanthropy and business and others that encompass work across federal agencies and with state and local governments. For instance, President Obama in 2011 issued a directive to heads of all executive departments and agencies, ordering them to take steps to accelerate technology transfer and commercialization of federal research. This directive helped to stimulate new agency-led efforts to develop partnerships that were not directly tied to their mission.[20] For example, it led NASA to think about creating an office to leverage its

[20] Presidential Memorandum, "Accelerating Technology Transfer and Commercialization of Federal Research in Support of High-Growth Businesses," The White House, October 28, 2011.

technological expertise and brand through partnerships with business in order to spur regional economic development and activity. In another case, a presidential directive ordered a significant expansion of AmeriCorps, which in turn spurred the Corporation for National and Community Service to think more about how it could structure partnerships to better achieve the new mandate.[21] Other directives were broader. For example, one of the first executive orders issued by President Obama emphasized a more transparent, participatory and collaborative government that led to the development of the Open Government Initiative. This signaled a willingness on the part of the federal government to partner with business and philanthropy, and is viewed as a critical pre-condition and enabling factor in the development of the offices and the focus of their efforts.[22]

Diffusion of Ideas and Practices

While the earliest offices had a senior-level political appointee or career staff member that was an impetus, about half of the offices – the more recently created ones – began organically, modeling themselves on what they saw happening at other agencies and departments. The experiences of the pioneering offices provided a framework for how other agencies might develop their own office. Just as importantly, they could point to tangible wins and successes of their counterparts as exemplars to demonstrate the value of an office.

For example, the success of FEMA's partnerships, and its more pronounced orientation toward working with business, provided a roadmap for the disaster recovery efforts at the Department of Health and Human Services to explore a partnership office and for NORAD to bolster their office. Many of the offices that focus on international development and foreign diplomacy suggest that first movers like USAID have been among the greatest influences on how they approach partnerships, providing models and new ways to think about their work. Not coincidentally, many experienced staff members from the USAID office are moving on to lead offices in other agencies. And, established offices focused on domestic issues, such as the Department of Education and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, have been promoted as centers of excellence, providing a pathway for other agencies and departments to experiment with their own structure and ways of working.

Additional support for the creation of new offices has come from groups like those convened by the Council on Foundations and the federal government's Community Partnerships Interagency Policy Committee. These communities of practice are encouraging peer exchanges about how offices can be constituted within federal agencies and how they can be advanced with support of agency and external stakeholders.

Environmental Factors

External factors have also played a role in the establishment of several offices. Fourteen offices identify wider recognition inside and outside of government about the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration as an enabling factor in their office's development, and twelve note the increasing

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[21] Presidential Memorandum, "Expanding National Service Through Partnerships to Advance Government Priorities," The White House, July 15, 2013.

[22] Obama, Barack H., "Open Government Directive," Memorandum to the head of executive departments and agencies. M-10-06. December 8, 2009.

number of external partnership opportunities as contributing to the development of their office. For example, Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy demonstrated the value of philanthropy and business in coordinating and marshalling resources in response to natural disasters. Two offices note that the economic stimulus that followed the financial crisis of 2008 had a catalyzing effect, providing resources to create an office that could more fully leverage non-federal resources in communities; and three offices say that cutbacks from government austerity measures have helped to push agencies and departments to partner as a strategy to do more with less.

SCOPE OF PARTNERSHIP OFFICES

Federal offices of strategic partnerships vary widely in terms of their missions, which sectors they tend to partner with, and the types of partnerships they pursue. As indicated in Figure 3, nearly half of the offices are located in domestic departments or programs with the remaining offices evenly divided between national security or emergency response and international development. Most of the offices in our study partner in some capacity with business (16), more than half work with philanthropy (13), and almost half work with both sectors (10).[23]

Regardless of policy domain or the sector they partner with, the offices share a set of roles and responsibilities – catalyst, capacity builder, and facilitator – that links them together and creates an infrastructure that helps to lower the cost of cross-sectoral collaboration. We examine the scope of these offices – their primary roles and responsibilities, the spectrum of partnerships available to them, their different views of working with business and philanthropy, and how the offices in the domestic, international and national security arena approach their work.

Roles and Responsibilities of Offices

While the approaches of different offices vary by mission and issue area there are three primary roles that most offices play: catalysts, capacity builder and facilitator. As shown in Figure 3, fifteen of the offices take on all three of these roles; two offices play the roles of both catalyst and facilitator; one office is primarily focused on catalyzing and capacity building; one on capacity building and facilitating; one on catalyzing and facilitating and one on capacity building.

As ***catalysts,*** the offices identify potential areas for collaboration and help to vet potential partners and negotiate terms of agreement; nineteen of the offices play such a role. At its most basic, such work involves gathering and disseminating information. Many of the offices hold regular calls with business or foundation leaders to learn what philanthropy and business are doing as well as to keep other sectors abreast of what their agency is doing. Some offices – such as those at FEMA, DOJ, CDC and NASA – host conferences and conversations with foundations and businesses to share knowledge and explore new ideas for potential partnerships.

Once an opportunity has been identified, the offices help to negotiate terms of agreement and to vet them. For instance, many will work with their general counsel to research potential conflicts of interest between the agency and the partner. Others gather information about the different

[23] In addition to working with philanthropy and/or business, many of the offices also work with nonprofits (16) and other nonfederal agencies (13).

FIGURE 3. FEDERAL OFFICES OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

		PRIMARY ROLES			
	Year Established	Catalyzing	Capacity Building	Facilitating	Evaluating
Domestic Programs					
Centers for Disease Control, Private Sector Engagement	2010	X	X	X	
Corporation for National and Community Service, Strategy Office	2013	X	X	X	X
Department of Education, Office of Strategic Partnerships	2009	X	X	X	X
Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office for International & Philanthropic Innovation	2010	X	X	X	
Department of the Interior, Office of Youth Partnerships and Service	2010	X	X	X	X
Department of Justice, Partnerships & Technical Assistance	2008	X		X	
Forest Service, National Partnership Office	2003	X	X		
NASA, Innovation and Strategic Partnerships	2009	X	X	X	
Veteran's Affairs	na	X	X		
National Security and Emergency Response					
Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)	na		X		
Department of Homeland Security, Office of Public Private Partnerships	2010	X	X	X	
Department of the Interior, Borderland Protection	na	X	X	X	X
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Private Sector Division	2007		X	X	
NORAD-U.S. Northern Command, Private Sector and NGO Office	2005	X	X	X	
Small Business Administration, Office of Strategic Alliances	na	X			
International Aid and Diplomacy					
Department of State, Office of Global Partnerships	2008	X	X	X	X
Department of State, U.S. Cookstoves Initiatives	2009	X	X	X	
Millennium Challenge Corporation, Finance Investment & Trade	2004	X	X	X	X
Peace Corps, Office of Strategic Partnerships	2012	X	X	X	X
President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Private Sector Engagement	2006	X	X	X	X
United States Agency for International Development, Office of Global Partnerships	2002	X	X	X	
Cumulative Total	**na**	**19**	**19**	**17**	**8**

FIGURE 3. FEDERAL OFFICES OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS (CONTINUED)

TYPES OF PARTNERS				STRUCTURES		
Business	Philanthropy	Nonprofits	Other Gov't Agencies	Formal Office	Staffing	Gift Authority
X	X	X	X	X	2	Indirect
X	X	X	X	X	1.5	X
X	X			X	4	X
	X		X	X	6	X
	X	X	X		1	X
	X	X		X	2	
		X	X	X	6.5	
X	X	X	X		1	
X	X	X			na	
		X	X		3	
X		X	X	X	6	
X		X	X		na	
X				X	6	
X		X	X	X	2.5	
X		X	X		1	
X	X			X	10	X
X	X	X			20	X
X				X	10	X
X	X	X	X	X	21	X
X	X	X		X	8.5	X
X	X	X	X	X	17	Indirect
16	**13**	**16**	**13**	**14**	**na**	**9**

partners, their strengths and weaknesses, and the roles they may or may not play in the resulting partnership. As one office leader notes: "The key is not to create more bureaucracy or red tape around partnerships, but to catalyze new partnerships and create more activity around those that already exist by saying: 'you can do these types of collaborations and here is how.' The offices, in turn, provide contacts and other resources to guide the partnerships as they progress."

As ***capacity builders,*** the offices cultivate and share knowledge and resources to educate their colleagues on how best to work with philanthropy and business. Nineteen of the offices play such a role. Many of these offices provide tools, technical expertise, advice, and training on how to structure a partnership, navigate the rules of the agency, and work with legal counsel. They also provide guidance on how to approach and work with those in philanthropy and business. In the case of USAID and the State Department, they have even developed formalized online training on partnering.

Many of the offices also promote the importance and value of partnerships, encouraging staff across government to consider partnerships as a strategy to advance their work. One office leader notes: "It's important that we reinforce the idea that there's no reason you can't work with the private sector on a number of issues." These offices help to break down the misperceptions of working with philanthropy and business, set expectations for cross-sectoral engagement, and teach agency staff how to be a better and more collaborative partner.

The offices also act as ***facilitators,*** serving as a central point of contact and hub for new and existing partnerships to turn to for support. Seventeen of the offices support the management of the partnerships in some way. For example, they might develop or help to implement a work plan within the partnership. While there is a formal project management function to some, particularly offices at the program level, most of those at the executive level are overseeing and facilitating the partnership process rather than actively managing each partnership. This involves stepping in at strategic points to help troubleshoot problems and to ensure the objectives of the partnership are being properly and effectively pursued by the agency staff – and partners – doing the work.

In addition to these primary roles, slightly more than a third of the offices also help to evaluate the partnerships by developing assessment tools and collecting and analyzing information and data about the results of their agency's partnerships. Such work is more common among some of the established offices, and it is an area that others say they wish to develop.

The Spectrum of Partnerships

The nature of the partnerships advanced by these offices can be arrayed along a spectrum. As Figure 4 depicts, the most basic partnerships are focused on situational awareness and extend to more complex partnerships that ultimately become fully integrated.

Nearly all of the offices partner with philanthropy or business in ways that help them better understand what is happening in the field that may be relevant to their work. Such information is often gathered by office staff through their contacts in philanthropy and business or through formal partnerships with affinity groups such as those serving charitable foundations, corporate philanthropy or trade associations. Direct contacts with foundations and businesses are more common within larger and more established offices, which often have developed such relationships through earlier partnerships.

Approximately half of the offices also elicit ideas and information from philanthropy and/or business on how government can better approach specific challenges. For example, offices at USAID and NASA have organized competitions to encourage the participation of business and philanthropy to work with government to solve particular community or social problems; and HUD and the Department of Education have developed online registries to connect funders to specific problems and programs that might be of interest.

More integrated partnerships – including co-funding and fully-integrated partnerships – are most common among a handful of the more established agencies. These partnerships leverage dollars, knowledge and networks of the sectors; they are often based on input of the various sectors in their design and implementation; and they even occasionally involve shared decision-making.

Views of Business and Philanthropy as Partners

The value proposition for government to partner with business and philanthropy differs based on the extent to which the agency's mission and objectives overlap with either or both of the sectors. Ten of the offices work with both philanthropy and business such as the Department of Education and the Peace Corps. Some others specialize on partnerships with particular sectors. For instance, the office within HUD works largely with foundations, while the offices at the Small Business Administration, Homeland Security and NORAD focus largely on partnerships with the business community.

The benefit of partnering with the philanthropic community is seen as expanded access to philanthropy's knowledge and networks. The federal government may come to better understand what is working well at the community or programmatic level with the help of philanthropy. Programs that address difficult public problems – from teacher retention to affordable housing to treatment for persons with mental illness – are frequently tried and tested in the community through the work of foundations and their grantees before being scaled by government. A recent example is the Department of Education's Promise Neighborhood program, which is modeled on the Harlem Children's Zone. The philanthropic community is also seen as instrumental in helping the federal government to leverage community knowledge, expertise, and networks to support the implementation of government programs and policies at state or local levels.

The business community, on the other hand, is viewed as a pathway for access to market-based solutions and distribution networks that may be more cost-efficient, sustainable or effective than the available alternatives. For instance, in international aid and development, the Millennium Challenge Corporation is interested in working with extractive industries that may have a presence and infrastructure within a developing country that can be leveraged. Or, in the case of providing aid and recovery support following a national emergency, FEMA and other disaster recovery agencies are looking to form partnerships with businesses that are often on the front lines and locally positioned to offer significant and immediate help to support those in need.

FIGURE 4. SPECTRUM OF PARTNERSHIPS

More Autonomous

Activity	Description	Example
Situational Awareness	Who is out there that may be an asset? What are they doing? What can we learn from them?	The offices of NORAD and FEMA have worked to create inventory maps of local businesses like Home Depot and Walmart that can be called upon as assets in disaster prone areas as part of the National Response Framework.
Information Sharing	Here is what we are doing on this issue and here is how we're doing it. What are you doing on this issue? How are you doing it? What has worked or hasn't? What are the opportunities and challenges?	The Department of Homeland Security's office uses MOUs with trade associations like AutoHarvest and others to both push out information about its activities and technology needs as well as to receive information about what the business community is doing and what it's capabilities are that may complement the Department's.
Relationship and Network-Building	What assets can we bring together with philanthropy and/or business to accomplish our goals? Who do we know and trust in the sector and who knows and trusts us? Who is going to be a resource not just with this issue but in the future?	The Centers for Disease Control holds semi-regular convenings with other government agencies and business and philanthropic partners as way to share information, research and ideas, and to build new connections or enhance existing relationships with philanthropic and business partners. For example, the office recently worked with the CDC Foundation and the Milken Institute to put on a global health summit.
Technical Assistance	The private sector has an issue or challenge, how can we solve it using government's expertise or knowledge? We have an issue, how can the private sector help us to solve the problem?	NASA's office is trying to leverage the expertise of the agency to foster regional economic development. To this end, it recently partnered with the Colorado Association for Manufacturing and Technology to bring a NASA engineer to the state in order to develop new perspectives on how NASA technology can be used to solve the technical challenges of small businesses there.
Intermediary/ Platform Role	Here is what needs to be accomplished? Here are some ideas and some resources? How do they align with your work? What can you offer to help accomplish this goal?	The U.S. Department of Education created the i3 Registry, a platform that has connected 117 unique Investing and Innovation (i3) grantees (over $1 billion in funded projects) since 2008. The development of the platform, which is now housed at the Foundation Center, has also led to others using the registry model, like 100k in 10, which focuses on finding 100,000 highly qualified stem teachers within 10 years with support of business and philanthropy.
Co-funding/ Co-Investment	Let's both fund this area together and in a coordinated way. What make sense for you to fund? What makes sense for us to fund?	HUD's office developed the What Works Collaborative, which is a foundation-supported partnership that conducts research and analysis to help inform the implementation of an evidence-based housing and urban policy agenda that is funded with federal dollars.
Fully-Integrated Partnerships	Let's decide what we want to do, but solve this problem together with shared decision-making and concrete commitments of staff, funding and other resources to address it.	USAID's Global Development Alliance and Chevron have each contributed more than $16 million dollars to partnerships that benefit Angola. Partnerships have focused on helping vulnerable households become more food self-sufficient by aiding farmers in more effectively producing and marketing high value crops and micro-lending to small entrepreneurs and low-income households.

More Integrated

Both philanthropy and business allow the federal government – whose discretionary dollars are limited – to be more flexible and experimental in how they approach hard-to-solve problems. Yet, while those leading the offices acknowledge the value of corporate and philanthropic dollars, they do not see it as the most valued or sought after resource given the scale of federal funding. Instead, they view the most important value of business and philanthropy as inspiring innovation and providing intellectual capital. In addition, they recognize the value of the credibility that partnering with philanthropy can bring.

Partnerships Across the Policy Domains

The policy issues that the various agencies address influence how the different offices approach their work, including the types of partnerships in which they engage and which sector is a likely partner. Nine offices focus on partnerships related to domestic issues and programs such as K-12 education, volunteerism and civic engagement, community investment and economic development, disease control, veterans' issues, housing, community policing, youth programs, national forests and other environmental concerns. Six focus on partnerships related to international aid, development and diplomacy. And six more center on partnerships around issues of national security or emergency response.

Many of the internationally-focused agencies work with both business and philanthropy and have adjusted their rules to do so. Their approach has long been to leverage resources in other countries in meaningful and sustainable ways. Such a strategy makes sense especially in countries where government institutions are weak and philanthropic and business assets can make a significant impact. As a result, these offices have developed the capacity and tools to partner with either sector. Nearly all of them engage in the full range of partnership activities in the spectrum shown in Figure 4. They all have some form of gift authority available to them that they frequently use to engage in highly-integrated partnerships. These offices have also built up larger and more experienced staffs.

Domestic agencies are more limited in what they are able to do with partnerships than international aid agencies. This may be because they view partnerships with business as riskier, particularly if the agencies in which they are embedded interact with the private sector in other ways. Moreover, the budgets of domestic agencies tend to be significantly larger than those of many international aid agencies. Thus, they often find that non-financial resources are the key benefit of cross-sectoral partnerships rather than private dollars. As a result, they are more likely to be focused on information sharing, relationship building and leveraging the knowledge and networks of philanthropy or business. Slightly less than half of the domestic agencies carry out the full range of partnership activities, and they are more inclined to partner with philanthropy than with business. They also tend to create platforms, such as competitions and registries, in which to engage philanthropic and business sectors rather than to partner with any specific foundations or businesses. This enables them to keep a safe distance and avoid perceptions of undue influence or conflicts of interest. Creating platforms also helps to lower their transaction costs by reducing the number of interactions each agency or office must have with each and every potential partner.

Offices within agencies working on national security, emergency response and community resiliency tend to focus more on coordination of activities with businesses than philanthropy. These offices are also more likely to partner with different federal and non-federal government agencies than offices focused on domestic issues or international development since such a significant portion of their efforts are in coordination and information sharing with public agencies. The partnerships they help to support are largely focused on creating situational awareness and sharing information between and across sectors. None of these offices carry out the full range of partnership activities. Given the episodic nature of responding to or preparing for natural disasters or emergencies, many of the offices also report capacity building as one of their primary activities as a way to increase their readiness during an emergency.

STRUCTURE OF PARTNERSHIP OFFICES

The organizational structures of the offices vary as do their missions and activities. As shown in Figure 3, 14 have formalized offices dedicated to partnerships; and two are moving towards one. Five said they had a different type of arrangement or structure in which partnerships represent an aspect of a larger portfolio. In these agencies, the offices provide general technical assistance throughout the engagement, but partnerships are driven at the programmatic levels within the agency.

The offices vary considerably in scale. They range in size from 1 to 20 staff members with an average of between 6 and 7 full time staff that includes a mix of political and career staff (seven offices have at least one political staff). The larger offices are found in the international arena, reflecting the emphasis on more robust partnerships and their longer track record.

Nearly all of the offices that have been established for more than five years have evolved in some way. For instance, two of the offices were elevated to positions within the secretary's office. Others are actively exploring the development of an office at the department or executive level. This was viewed as a way for the position to look across the activities of the whole department or agency and to coordinate and plan strategic partnerships that would advance the overall agency or department's mission or the specific priorities as defined by the Secretary and their senior staff. In some cases, these initiatives span across different agencies entirely.

About half of the offices are located at the highest level of the agency in the office of the secretary, administrator, or executive. Most, but not all, of these positions are politically appointed. The primary benefit of political appointees at the highest level of the office is seen as the access to and influence on agency leadership. These offices view their positions as being more adaptable and responsive when compared with other possible locations of their office within the agency. They also suggest that it provides a bird's eye view as to what other programs and agencies are doing on partnerships and a boost in the credibility and legitimacy of partnership work.

By contrast, other agencies have positions that are integrated at the programmatic level or have a mixture of both political appointees and career positions. For example, the office at the Department of Justice is located within the Community Oriented Policing Services unit and reports to the Deputy Director of Community Advancement. While this approach does not always ensure the same level of access to top agency leadership, it can more easily be institutionalized with career staff positions and specific budgets, both of which make it more likely they can weather political transitions. As a result, offices embedded at the program level may have a greater likelihood of being sustained over time.

Approximately half of the offices have some gift acceptance authority within the department – though the exact location of that authority varies. Such authority allows offices to more easily accept contributions from philanthropy and business. Some gift acceptance authority is granted to the offices themselves such as at the State Department and the Corporation for National and Community Service. Others note that the agency has such authority, but not in the office such as at the Peace Corps and USAID. A few offices have their own foundations such as the CDC. The remaining offices do not have any gift acceptance authority, which constrains their ability to accept donations.

IV. Making Federal Offices Work

Forging strategic partnerships and making them work is not easy, especially when they span sectors. The leaders of the offices of strategic partnerships identify three challenges in their efforts to advance cross-sectoral partnerships: the complexity of navigating government rules; the difficulty of integrating a collaborative approach into agency practices; and the disruption from staff and leadership turnover and transition.[24] They also offer lessons they have gleaned from their experiences in response to each.

UNDERSTANDING AND NAVIGATING GOVERNMENT RULES

> "*Many in the federal government are cautious about engaging in cross-sector partnerships because they feel they lack the statutory authority to do so, since policies around partnerships have not been fully developed. But, what many agency attorneys have determined is that partnerships are a viable option under the basic authority that agencies have to complete their missions. Getting that message out across government has been challenging.* —Jim Thompson, Director for Innovation, Global Partnership Initiatives, Department of State"

The federal government is a vast and complex institution with 15 executive departments and hundreds of smaller agencies and offices. These organizational units, even those within the same executive department, often have their own rules and regulations when it comes to partnerships. Many staff members on the frontlines of delivering programs and services – those that are perhaps best positioned to effect partnerships – are sometimes less willing to do so out of fear of inadvertently breaking agency rules, creating potential conflicts of interest, or risking agency reputation. Such sentiments are particularly prominent where there is no explicit guidance for working with philanthropy or business. There is also a sense, at some of the agencies that do have rules, that they are outdated and need to better align with current standards and practices.

To address the ambiguity and complexity of understanding and navigating rules related to partnerships, many offices have guidelines and policies for working with philanthropy and business, and others are working to develop or update them. These guidelines are a way to manage interactions with partners. Where the guidance already exists, it frequently outlines the firewalls between the office of strategic partnerships and the agency's work on contracts, grants and procurement; they clarify rules guiding the agency's interactions with business and philanthropy; and they provide the guidance for vetting processes for new partnerships.

[24] The leaders of a majority of the offices identified each of these three challenges. Some other challenges mentioned by a few of the offices include: limited discretionary dollars in federal departments and agencies, particularly for outreach and relationship building exercises such as traveling to conferences; the perception by some within government that the offices of strategic partnerships focus on fundraising; and the difficulty in measuring outcomes, which appears to have varying levels of sophistication across the offices.

Many of the more established offices have best practice guides and other practical tools for working with other sectors. These extend beyond information about the rules and provide examples about how best to forge and facilitate partnerships with philanthropy and business. As one office leader notes: "In order for us to really amp up our ability to partner, we had to look at our policies and our strategies and make it really clear that partnering is a critical aspect of what we as an agency do."

Offices also note the importance of being open and transparent about their work with other sectors, and the need to manage the expectations with their partners about what the agency can and cannot do. To this end, they say that offices should try to work with their general counsels and senior executive staff on the actual development of policies and procedures guiding partnerships within the agency. This requires a familiarity with "the plumbing" of how government operates, and the cultivation and education of legal counsel so they understand and become supportive of the work.

Key Takeaways

- Develop and continually update policy guidance around partnerships.
- Create best practice guides about the "do's" and "don'ts" of partnerships.
- Be open and transparent about partnership activities with other sectors.
- Work with general counsel and others to develop the policies.

INSTILLING A PARTNERSHIP MINDSET

> "*A lot of people in government feel skeptical of the private sector. Or, they are open to working with the private sector but they aren't really sure it's relevant or important to what they do. It is out of their comfort zone. If they are thinking of working with the private sector, it's usually a question of who can we contract with, not who can we partner with.* —*Jessica Daly, Team Lead for Strategic Partnerships, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Center for Global Health*"

Cultural barriers within the federal government to working with business and philanthropy are another challenge. Public bureaucracies work to become proficient at doing things in a particular way and, as a result, are often resistant to changing their practices. As one office leader points out: "There is a natural tendency within the government to follow the status quo, especially when contracts and grants are involved or there may be opportunities to do it ourselves. It is just second nature to how we operate and interact with those outside of government." Partnerships are out of sync with traditional practices and, as a result, are sometimes seen as too risky or cumbersome to be worth the investment of time and other resources.

The federal government is also accustomed to being the dominant decision-maker. This can cause friction when trying to partner with others sectors. Philanthropy and business, who are themselves use to driving decisions, expect that there will be mutual respect, and that decision-making authority will be shared in a partnership. This tension between sectors can reinforce the tendency within government to go it alone.

A few offices suggest that their agency has established a partnership culture, but note that it is an ongoing task for them. First, they suggest cultivating champions to make collaboration a core value in how they operate. Those leading the offices themselves are often their own best champions. They use their bully pulpit to continually espouse the importance of partnerships and use their positions to develop models and agency policies and practices. The higher up in the organization champions are identified and cultivated, the better the opportunities to promote partnerships and influence the agency's support.

Second, offices suggest identifying or creating opportunities for federal government employees to get to know their potential partners. For instance, several of the agencies responsible for emergency response hold annual meetings with stakeholders specifically on the topic of cross-sector collaboration. The meetings provide opportunities to build relationships and share ideas across sectors. Another office provides tours to business leaders that help to explain what the office is doing and what they would like to do. The office at HUD has used exchanges and fellowships with foundations to immerse staff from government into philanthropy and vice versa. These meetings, relationship building exercises and exchanges attempt to reduce misperceptions about the sectors; establish new nodes in collaborative networks; and provide exposure and learning opportunities for each sector to better understand what their partners value and how they work.

Third, many of the offices provide explicit training on how to approach partnerships. Leaders underscore that the education process is ongoing, and its importance is magnified by turnover and transitions. Some offices, such as those at USAID and the State Department, introduce the partnership processes within the agency during orientation, emphasizing training on the soft skills necessary to partner. Other offices use exercises for staff to help them think through which external partners "care about an issue, why they care and how to bring them to a table."

Key Takeaways

- Cultivate champions at the top of the agency to encourage partnerships.
- Engrain partnership in agency doctrine.
- Create opportunities for the other sectors to get to know each other.
- Train and orient staff on how best to partner.

ENSURING CONTINUITY IN FEDERAL OFFICES

> "*Finding government staff that are entrepreneurial and that have the capacity, the sophistication and the understanding to help bridge the sectors is not that easy. You have to have folks that understand both worlds equally well. They need to be generalists that can speak to the private sector about issues important to them as well as understand how to get things done within the government bureaucracy.* —Ana Marie Argilagos, Deputy Assistant Secretary, International and Philanthropic Innovation, Department of Housing and Urban Development"

Frequent transitions in leadership and staff within government agencies make ensuring the continuity of partnership offices challenging. Most of the agencies are inherently tied to the office of the President as part of the Executive Branch and the appointed members of the cabinet that set the orientation of the government units under their control. Many of the leaders of these agencies have signaled their support for partnerships with philanthropy and business, with some taking an active role in the development of a partnerships office. However, agency leaders frequently transition in and out of these positions and there is no guarantee that what was developed under one department or agency leader's tenure will be continued or prioritized in the same way by the next. In addition, the human and social capital of exiting office leaders and staff members is not easily replaced. They frequently have developed unique skills and experiences in working across sectors; and they have developed relationships and built a common understanding of shared commitments and priorities.

Issues of transition and sustainability should be addressed while the offices are being created. For example, some offices formed internal stakeholder groups comprised of principals from general counsel and agency leadership to help strategize how the office might be structured and at what level, what types of authority might be required and where funding can be secured. A few offices in the earlier stages of their development have asked representatives from more established offices to share their experiences in dealing with such issues.

Several offices suggest the importance of not overpromising on what the offices can deliver and to get some early wins from which to learn and grow. For instance, the office at the Department of Education narrowed in on developing the Investing in Innovation's Funds (i3) registry, an online

Key Takeaways

- Think through issues of sustainability and transition as the offices develop.
- Don't overpromise, be humble, fail forward and learn from mistakes quietly.
- Look to areas where there is the greatest alignment and opportunity for success.
- Create networks with individual foundations and businesses as well as infrastructure groups.

platform to connect corporate and philanthropic funders together with applicants, in order to score an early success. As one leader notes: “I think that when you are starting out, you don’t want to advertise too much, or make a big splash, because you end up creating huge expectations without any track record of success and pretty limited capacity to follow through. You want to be able to kind of quietly build the office, learn the lessons and fail forward.” During transitions, such successes can be used to demonstrate the office’s value and to document what has worked in the past.

Another way that offices help to ensure continuity is by creating and weaving networks. For example, many of the offices partner with trade associations and affinity organizations, which provide an easy point of entry into the philanthropic and business communities. Because these partnerships do not solely rely on the individual relationships of any one leader or staff member, either within government or within the business or philanthropic sector, they make transitions more manageable and lower the transaction costs. Such networks further provide an avenue for building a broad base of support outside of government that can be called upon to advocate on behalf of the offices during transitions.

V. Conclusion

The emergence of offices of strategic partnerships across such a broad and diverse range of federal agencies is a growing signal of interest in working across sectors. The value for government to partner with philanthropy and business is increasingly clear. Such partnerships can increase the flexibility and nimbleness of government; leverage dollars, knowledge and networks to address issues of mutual concern; and enhance the credibility of public programs and government initiatives. Yet the costs and risks of working in partnership with philanthropy and business – from developing the relationships with reputable partners to navigating the formal and informal rules to ensuring that the partnership achieves its promise – are not insignificant.

These offices are an infrastructure for cross-sectoral partnerships. They catalyze partnerships with philanthropy and business by identifying potential partnerships, aligning interests and developing platforms for engagement. They build capacity to work more effectively with partners by developing rules, clarifying processes, and educating civil servants about the value of collaborating and how to broker partnerships. And, they facilitate the development of partnerships by troubleshooting problems and serving as an ongoing point of contact for philanthropy and business.

The types of cross-sector partnerships these offices are catalyzing and supporting range from information sharing agreements to coordination of resources to fully-integrated strategic co-investments and partnerships. Interestingly, office leaders are clear-eyed about the value gained through partnerships, emphasizing the importance of the knowledge and networks that philanthropy and business contribute rather than the dollars. As offices become more established and gain experience, we sense that they are inclined to advance more substantial partnerships that integrate funding and decision making.

Some offices focus on partnerships with business, while others stress partnerships with philanthropy, and still others encompass both. The choices appear to be driven by the policy domains that shape the value proposition and where there is the greatest potential for partners. There seems to be a greater orientation to working with business among those focused on national security, disaster recovery and international aid and development than on domestic policy issues. By contrast, there seems to be more overlap of interests between philanthropy and the federal government among many of the domestic agencies and programs.

These offices and liaisons are becoming established points of contact for philanthropy and business to engage with government and they are creating new platforms and forms of engagement for the sectors to work, learn, and solve problems collaboratively. They are providing expertise and advice on partnerships, bringing in fresh ideas, and connecting with the partners in new ways that might be a surprise to those in philanthropy and business. In doing this work, the offices face three critical challenges: understanding and navigating government rules; instilling a partnership approach within government; and ensuring continuity over time as leaders come and go. This underscores the importance of the offices continuing to share their lessons learned, developing promising practices and expanding their community of practice.

As these offices evolve, adapt and succeed in catalyzing, facilitating and accelerating partnerships across the sectors, champions will emerge in other agencies to create new offices of strategic partnerships. And, as a consequence, collaboration with philanthropy and business will become a more viable strategy as the ability to solve public problems grows across the federal government.

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