

THE GROW FUND – HIGHLIGHTS

SYNOPSIS

The **Grassroots Resilience Ownership and Wellness (GROW) Fund** aims to build, support, and sustain 100 grassroots organisations across India for two years. It is a unique collective of philanthropists, established by EdelGive Foundation to pool and deploy funding of INR 100 crores to support and sustain 100 grassroots NGOs.

Through an open application process launched in August 2021, GROW has selected [100 grassroots organisations](#) working pan-India, across all geographies and across all thematic areas, including but not limited to Conservation, Ecology, LGBTQIA+ Rights, Legal Aid, Women's Rights and Empowerment, Research and Advocacy, Rural Development, Skilling and Entrepreneurship, Policy and Governance, Health, Education, Livelihoods, etc.

We have selected 25 organisations each from the four zones of the country i.e., North, South, East & North-east and West. Altogether, GROW's 100 organisations represent 20 states working in varied topographies with diverse communities and population such as the remote and mountainous regions of Jammu & Kashmir, the marginalised indigenous and tribal communities of Orissa, Assam and Nagaland and more. GROW will support this cohort of 100 grassroots organisations working across the domains of social justice, equity and access to accelerate their recovery, and build resilience and reserves as safeguards against future adversity.

Objectives of the Fund:



Sustaining operations through support that covers critical costs



Capability Building to recover from immediate challenges due to COVID-19



Future readiness for long-term institutional sustainability

Problem context

The GROW initiative began to take shape just as the extent of the impact of India's catastrophic second wave of COVID-19 was becoming clear. The premise of EdelGive's concern was that distress from COVID-19 will leave a lasting negative impact which will outlive grassroots organisations' capacities to mitigate them.

We realized that as funders, we have a large opportunity to steer credible organisations towards maximising their impact; to help organisations operate optimally and reach the last mile. Therefore, as strong believers to this, we joined the [Pay-What-It-Takes-Initiative](#)¹ in 2019 as an anchor partner to enable the creation of self-sufficient growth for the organizations that we support, especially in this current crisis. Results from Bridgespan's [new study](#) on *"Building Strong, Resilient NGOs in India: Time for New Funding*

¹ Pay-What-It-takes (PWIT) philanthropy initiated in 2019 is co-led by Bridgespan with five anchor partners - ATE Chandra Foundation (ATECF), Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), EdelGive Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Omidyar Network India, it highlights the true cost of funding effective organisational development for non-profits in India; with a vision to contribute to Indian NGOs becoming stronger organisations that can leverage more funding and have greater impact.

Practices” with 388 NGOs also showed that NGOs in India are chronically underfunded in the areas of operations and support functions. Some findings from the survey presented that:

- 54% had less than 3 months of reserves while 50% NGOs never had an operating surplus in last three Financial Years
- NGOs led by DBA² leaders are relatively smaller, and have lower financial resilience, 60% of such NGOs had less than 3 months of reserves, against 53% of non-DBA led NGOs
- NGOs based in non-metro areas are worse off, with 61% of such NGOs having less than 3 months of reserves
- 70% NGOs in the financial analysis reported a gap in indirect cost allocation

Therefore, given the sheer size of the problem, EdelGive understood that the situation cannot be addressed alone. It would need a bigger involvement and joint efforts of like-minded individuals and institutions to contribute collectively if philanthropy were to make a dent to address the problem at hand.

Hence, after receiving an overwhelming response from funders, GROW currently has 13 core funders and 7 community funders ³ onboard comprising of both international and domestic funders from diverse sectors such as private philanthropic foundation, corporates, industry leaders and high-net worth individuals.

ACTIVITY UPDATES

1. Outreach

The GROW team leveraged multiple channels to reach as many organisations as possible, including social media, emailers, web and print advertisements, and webinars. Certain large NGO networks and non-profits were on-boarded as outreach partners to enhance GROW’s reach to grassroots organisations.

A [GROW website](#) was built and published to provide information to potential applicants about the Fund, application process and key dates. The website also contained a comprehensive FAQ section.

Following is the summary of the outreach approaches used:

- **Print Media – 83 regional and national publications**
Articles published in 90 districts across 22 states, in 7 languages: Gujarati, Marathi, Kannada, Bengali, English, Hindi and Odiya.
- **Social Media – WhatsApp, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram**
Campaign gained over 10,000 likes and reactions and over 31,000 impressions across platforms.
- **Our Outreach Partners**

² DBA refers to members of the Dalit, Bahujan and Adivasi communities. The Y1 PWIT research found DBA-led NGOs faced higher financial vulnerability

³ Core funders are institutional givers coming in for longer term support whereas Community partners are individual giving in individual capacity

Acumen, Arthan, Covid Action Collaborative, CSDD, CSRBOX, Digital Empowerment Foundation, Goonj, Jan Sahas, Oxfam, Phia, Pravah, Sattva Consulting, Social Lens and UnLtd.

- **Web Advertisements**

Promotional posts on CSRBOX, NGOBOX and Devnetjobs India for 2 weeks

- **Emailers**

83,000 emailers by EdelGive, 75,000 emailers by partners (CSRBOX, Arthan, Social Lens and others)

- **Webinars**

9 webinars attended by 750+ participants

2. Application Process

Following a rigorous review, deliberation and due diligence process, the GROW team partnered with Grant Thornton (GT) as process partner for applications and grant management. The EdelGive team worked with the Grant Thornton team at every stage of the process to ensure quality and timely delivery of work. A very robust and user-friendly application portal was developed for applicants to submit their forms online, and the entire application collection process was executed through this portal.

The top 5 states in terms of registrations were Maharashtra, Delhi, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. The thematic areas which were most represented were Education, Health, Livelihoods and Women Empowerment, followed by Rural Development, Vocational Skills and Environment.

A helpdesk for the applicants was also set up which received 1743 calls and emails over the application period, with queries about eligibility, timelines, 'how to' questions and aspects of the application process in general being received on a regular basis. Helpdesk also made 1500 reminder calls over 2 weeks to applicants requesting them to complete their application forms. About 2300 registrations were received for GROW, from across the country and in a range of thematic areas.

3. Application Evaluation

The application evaluation process commenced on 6th September 2021 for submitted applications and is in process at this time. The overall evaluation is conducted through a multi-step process which includes completeness and compliance check, multi-stage scoring and rationalisation, review by an external expert panel and final due diligence.

Following the scoring process in September and October 2021, 2255 registrations were filtered down to 241 registrations for evaluation by the expert panel. 16 expert panelists were invited to review these applications. Each panel included representation from different categories of expertise, including funders (foundations/CSRs), sector experts, NGOs and research experts.

The expert panel finalised 157 organisations who underwent detailed due diligence process, after which the final 100 organisations was selected announced 20th January 2022.

4. Grant Management

A robust system and process have been put in place for GROW at every stage of grant making and grant management to facilitate data driven decision making for timely disbursements. Additionally, customized

tools have also been developed for monitoring and evaluation which are simple and comprehensive and can be easily adopted by our GROW partner NGOs.

As of March 2022, final agreement signing with the 100 organisations have been complete and the first tranche of INR 40 Lakhs has been disbursed to them.

5. Capacity Building

In addition to the financial grant, the 100 NGOs selected under the GROW will also be supported through capacity building initiatives and trainings, managed by a central capacity building platform at EdelGive called the *GROW Hub*. EdelGive is working with Social Lens to plan and deliver these capacity building services. HR, Finance & Compliance and Technology have been identified as primary domains in which the GROW Hub would offer services.

Impact assessment – The 100 GROW NGOs will undergo a baseline, midline and an end-line assessment to measure the impact of the initiative. Multiple tools for conducting the baseline and end-line were jointly evaluated by EdelGive and Social Lens.

6. GROW HUB

GROW Hub is a knowledge dissemination platform initiated by EdelGive for the 100 selected for GROW Grant. This platform will be used for disseminating capacity building and other content to selected organisations in the form of educational videos, audios, documents and toolkits. These will be available in Hindi and English languages. The content will be sourced from capacity building experts engaged with GROW and also from open source.

The platform is envisaged to be a community forum for selected GROW's 100 where they can utilize the content to enhance their knowledge on broad range of topics relevant to social development and organisational development. It will also be a platform for them to ask their questions and solicit expertise from peers and experts.

7. Governance

A strong governance structure for GROW is currently in place to ensure accountability, transparency and equal participation of all stakeholders involved in the GROW Fund. The details include:

- **GROW Funders Committee** which comprises of representatives of all funders, GROW team and executing partners (Grant Thornton, Social Lens and others) who meet bi-annually to discuss programme updates, track milestones and activities.
- **Operating Committee** which includes the Core GROW team and executing partners like Grant Thornton and Social Lens amongst others, who meets every month to discuss the targeted tasks and activities, progress and upcoming tasks for the month.
- **Work Groups** which consist of individual leads from GROW Team and executing partners who meet on a weekly basis to review detailed tasks and activity progress and resolve any operational issues.

CONCLUSION

Our GROW journey so far has shown us how much there is to learn in this uncharted territory of developing a new model of philanthropy and development funding. There have been learnings on the diversity of grassroots organisations, on the kinds of support they are really looking for, and on modalities of structuring, planning and broadening access to that support.

- The GROW model **resonated with many major funders** who are now supporting the initiative. Although GROW has a remedial focus, we hope this initiative will inspire more funders to incorporate resilience funding in their future work.
- 650 credible NGOs were shortlisted during the selection process, of which only 100 organisations will be finally selected. We plan to **include the remaining 550 in our database** and disseminate information on their needs and efforts to funders who are keen to support specific thematic/regional initiatives.
- EdelGive received requests to support much smaller organisations and launch **geography-specific funds** for areas like the North-east which are underserved by grant makers. We believe this is a sectoral need that needs to be addressed collectively.
- **Reaching out to grassroots organisations** who are not already connected to existing funding networks was a key challenge. Joint webinars with well-connected outreach partners and leveraging larger organisation databases was effective to widen our reach.