

# TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR COORDINATING AGENCIES

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*This document supports the crafting of more specific country-level terms of reference for a coordinating agency in any GPE partner country. It also aims to create a shared understanding around the expected role of coordinating agencies across country contexts and provides clarity around what support is available to organizations taking on this role.*

*Partner countries are encouraged to adapt and tailor the contents provided according to the specific country situation and ensure that the local education group agrees on the terms of reference for the incoming (or current) coordinating agency.*

# I. GENERIC TERMS OF REFERENCE

*The following situates the functions of coordinating agencies against their importance to an effective in-country partnership and education system transformation. It outlines the [roles and responsibilities](#) they are expected to perform in GPE partner countries. This can support the crafting of country-specific terms of reference, using [the template](#) provided in section II.*

## 1. OVERALL PURPOSE

### Coordinating agencies and system transformation

Coordinating agencies are important catalysts for positive change and transformation in education systems, supporting governments in: i) aligning external support, including that of GPE, with a country-led vision for the education sector and its priorities for sustainable outcomes; and ii) facilitating harmonized and inclusive dialogue with partners, and collaboration and coordination across the broader education community on how best to support countries in achieving their goals.

In both areas, coordinating agencies work with the local education group as the primary forum through which governments and their partners convene on education sector development. They support government leadership of this coordinating mechanism, **helping to ensure the government is supported by a dynamic group** and strengthening the links between the members. They play a role in **moving stakeholders in the same direction** behind priority reforms, highlighting the need for coherent strategies for achieving national education goals. In doing so, they promote trusting relationships and transparency between the government and development partners.

With a physical presence in partner countries (unless impossible for security reasons), coordinating agencies are also the **link for GPE-specific matters**, reinforcing coordination and communication between the GPE Secretariat, the partner country government and GPE grant agents.

### Coordinating agencies and effective partnerships

Across GPE partner countries, coordinating agencies are essential to operationalizing the system transformation vision of GPE 2025<sup>1</sup> which relies on an effective partnership at country level and brings together bilateral donors, multilateral partners, civil society, teacher organizations, private foundations and the private sector to support governments' ambitions for education transformation and to deliver quality education for all girls and boys. Coordinating agencies are **critical to the principle of mutual accountability for an effective partnership**, at the heart of the GPE Charter.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. KEY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Coordinating agencies are critical to mutual accountability and specifically in **three key areas**: 1) [sector coordination](#), 2) [GPE grants](#) and 3) [GPE communication](#). The roles and responsibilities that would generally fall to the coordinating agency in each of these areas are outlined below.

<sup>1</sup> [GPE 2025 strategic plan](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Charter of the Global Partnership for Education](#)

However, coordinating agency's **role and responsibilities must adapt to each country's context** established mechanisms and be guided by country ownership and leadership (see Annex 1). While there are expectations in relation to GPE, the focus of the role is to support effective and harmonized dialogue between development partners and the government, and in doing so, to go beyond GPE-specific topics. Partners have a shared objective of supporting progress in the education sector as efficiently and effectively as possible, in line with broader aid effectiveness principles of national ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results, and mutual accountability.

## 2.1 Sector coordination

Sector coordination takes place through the local education group or any fora where partners come together<sup>3</sup> to support national education priorities and goals **under government leadership**. The coordinating agency supports this leadership and partner coordination in the following ways:

### Inclusive and effective dialogue:

- Promotes **representation and inclusion** of key stakeholders in sector dialogue, paying special attention to local civil society organizations, representatives of the teaching profession, private foundations and private sector. This includes attention to gender representation in the group's composition and engagement.
- Supports the local education group in **fulfilling its dialogue functions** as defined in its terms of reference,<sup>4</sup> enabling partners to provide strategic and harmonized support to the government and its education vision, and for the government to lead and interact with partners without excessive transaction costs. Types of support for a **dynamic group** can include:
  - Facilitating regular convening and links to its working groups, building a connected community and collaborative relationships
  - Ensuring the dialogue agenda is in line with the agreed objectives of the group to meet members' interests
  - Encouraging members to use data and evidence, document and share experiences and lessons for evidence-based dialogue and fostering a learning culture
  - Coordinating consultations, when needed, to integrate stakeholder inputs and voice into key policy processes in a transparent manner
  - Fostering synergies and complementarities across partners
  - ⊖ Ensuring smooth transfer of the coordinating agency role when this responsibility passes from one agency to another, supporting the onboarding of new coordinating agencies
  - Ensuring information flow between the ministry of education and local education group members on key developments, activities and opportunities in the sector.

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<sup>3</sup> *Local education group* is a generic term, used here and by GPE (but is not a GPE construct), to describe the country-led arrangements for the governance of education sector policy dialogue. Names of groups with such dialogue functions vary from country to country, for instance: 'education coordinating group', 'education consultative group', 'education sector development committee' and 'joint education sector working group'.

<sup>4</sup> [Local education group terms of reference](#)

- Works alongside key actors to **enhance the effectiveness** of the local education group's work and capacity as a forum for coordinated action,<sup>5</sup> such as through learning and adaptation.
- **In situations of crisis** (whether due to conflict, health emergency or natural disaster), coordinates with local education group members to act together for continuity in education delivery and support for recovery, while ensuring consultation and alignment with other structures (such as the Education Cluster and Refugee Education Working Group) as relevant.

### Collaboration for national education system transformation:

- Supports **partnership compact** development activities, especially the involvement of the local education group at key moments, working towards an evidence-based and compelling partnership compact that reflects i) broad agreement on one priority reform with the potential to catalyze systemwide change; ii) solutions to key system barriers to achieving the priority reform; and iii) alignment of partner support behind the reform.<sup>6</sup>
- Facilitates discussions on the **strategic focus** for system transformation and system strengthening to be financed by GPE grants (see section 2.3), or other sources of funding.
- Continuously mobilizes **partner collaboration** behind the priority pillars identified in the partnership compact and seeks opportunities for **cross-sector** collaboration.
- Supports regular **monitoring and learning** moments around implementation of the priority reform and conducting **midterm review** of the partnership compact, embedded meaningfully in the national policy cycle and meeting key objectives (see section 2.2).

### Key moments in the national policy cycle:

- Generates clarity on roadmaps, timelines and processes for local education group contributions to **education sector analysis** and **sector plan development**. This may include support to task teams and coordination of inputs at different stages of the drafting processes, including review of partners' comments, ensuring an inclusive and transparent process and evidence-based output(s), endorsed by the local education group.<sup>7</sup>
- Supports **joint reviews** of the implementation of the national education sector plan and its reform priorities, promoting information sharing of development partners' financing to the education sector and coordinating their engagement in key steps of the process.<sup>8</sup>
- Supports the government in **evaluation exercises** to elicit lessons learned among local education group members on policy planning, implementation and monitoring processes to inform future practices and investments.

## 2.2 GPE grants

GPE offers different types of country grants<sup>9</sup> and other initiatives<sup>10</sup> to support partner countries in implementing their priority reforms to achieve better learning outcomes. The coordinating agency

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<sup>5</sup> [Principles towards effective local education groups](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Partnership compact guidance](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Guidelines on education sector plan preparation](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Practical guide for organizing effective joint sector reviews](#)

<sup>9</sup> [System transformation grant](#); [GPE Multiplier](#); [Girls' Education Accelerator](#); and [program development grant](#).

<sup>10</sup> [GPE Knowledge and Innovation Exchange \(KIX\)](#); [Education Out Loud](#); and [technical assistance initiatives](#).

works with decision makers and grants agents<sup>11</sup>, and involves the local education group to ensure relevance, transparency and accountability in relation to GPE grants in the following ways:

### Grant development:

- Supports the government to mobilize and apply for **technical support** (if requested) through the system capacity grant for partnership compact development and/or for key instruments and moments in the policy cycle (sector analysis, planning, joint monitoring), including grant agent selection for such capacity strengthening support.
- Collaborates with the government and the Secretariat following completion of the partnership compact to facilitate **grant agent selection** for the system transformation grant(s), ensuring appropriate timing and an inclusive, transparent and documented process within the local education group in line with GPE grant agent selection guidance,<sup>12</sup> including managing any conflict arising from the grant agent selection.
- The above includes considerations around the **most fitting financing modalities** in the country context for the system transformation grant(s) in terms of alignment mechanisms, such as joint financing, pooled funding and budget support mechanisms, to promote alignment with country systems as the foundation for implementing aid to education.
- Informs the Secretariat of opportunities for **innovative and additional financing** as relevant for GPE grants such as the Multiplier and supports the transparent selection of the most appropriate co-financing to access the Multiplier.
- Backstops grant application processes and facilitates inputs from the local education group to the design of **transformation grant programming** at agreed intervals, ensuring coherence with the partnership compact.

### GPE grant implementation and monitoring:

- Coordinates with the government and the grant agent to ensure **progress updates** of GPE grants to the local education group on a regular basis (at least twice a year) about aspects of grant implementation that impact the achievement of the overarching policy and reform strategies the transformation grants support.
- Consults government and grant agent to ensure evidence and lessons from implementation feed into **broader monitoring** efforts around the priority reform.
- Ensures the local education group is consulted regarding **revisions** to grants before the grant agent submits a revision request to the Secretariat on behalf of the government.
- Seeks out opportunities to **link to other GPE initiatives** whenever relevant for the reform effort, policy dialogue and learning, including the GPE Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX), Education out Loud and technical assistance initiatives.
- Ensures the **midterm review** of the partnership compact is designed to produce outputs required for decision making around the GPE current grant (such as the assessment of top-up triggers, if relevant) and GPE 2030 country allocations (including defining strategic parameters for a future GPE grant).

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<sup>11</sup>[GPE Grant Agents Terms of Reference](#)

<sup>12</sup>[GPE grant agent selection guidance](#)

## 2.3. GPE communications

Regular and timely communications are key to trusting relationships and collaboration. The coordinating agency supports close communication between the GPE Secretariat and a partner country in the following ways:

- Communicates with the Secretariat's assigned country team lead on **how GPE works**, roles and responsibilities of key players, and GPE's added value to country-level processes.
- **Keeps the Secretariat informed** about key developments in a partner country's education sector by sharing minutes of local education group meetings, key reports (including evolving drafts) of education sector analysis, planning development, implementation reports, joint monitoring aide-memoires and other key evidence, including from other education partners
- Supports the organization of GPE missions to country in collaboration with the country team lead.
- Provides data and other **country-specific information** to the Secretariat as requested and as appropriate to the coordinating agency role.
- Informs the Secretariat of changes in the coordinating agency (agency or contact person), copying the new agency and providing the new contact details to ensure a smooth transition in communication with the GPE Secretariat.
- When a new minister of education is appointed, the coordinating agency helps ensure the Secretariat is promptly informed of the change a responsibility shared with the partner country focal point.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the coordinating agency helps ensure any changes in the focal point are communicated to the Secretariat.
- If the country is not yet a GPE partner country, coordinates initial dialogue between the government and the Secretariat about joining GPE.

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<sup>13</sup> The **GPE focal point** is appointed and duly authorized by the minister of education to serve as the ministry's primary interlocutor in GPE-related matters. The focal point should have full knowledge of the [GPE Charter](#), [strategic plan](#) and [operating model](#) at the global level, and financial and technical support at the country level. The focal point facilitates communication and the coordination of a partner country's participation in GPE governance structures within the country's ministry and other members of the constituency.

## II. CUSTOMIZABLE TEMPLATE

The following provides a structure and prompts to develop a country-specific terms of reference for the coordinating agency. In all cases, the coordinating agency's roles and responsibilities in relation to sector coordination, GPE grants and communications (articulated in I) should be included and adapted to the specific country situation and the nature of existing coordination arrangements between the government and its development partners through the local education group or other structures.

Such adaptation should be guided by the **overarching principles** of promoting country leadership, inclusive partnership, mutual accountability, transparency, and low transaction costs. The Frequently Asked Questions in Annex 1 can be useful to consult while considering practical aspects of the coordinating agency role.

### 1. Introduction

- Briefly introduce the background, purpose and scope of the terms of reference

### 2. Context and overview

- Provide a brief overview of the country situation, situating where [the](#) country is on [their-its](#) system transformation pathway
- Provide a brief overview and purpose of the coordinating agency's role in the country, referring to existing coordination structures

### 3. Objectives

- Specify topline objectives of both coordination in the education sector at large and GPE-related activities in the country

### 4. Roles and responsibilities in relation to sector dialogue and GPE grants

- If the role is shared between two or more agencies, describe how responsibilities are expected to be shared

### 5. Communications and collaboration framework

- Describe the framework for collaboration with the local education group, including communication channels and mechanisms for sharing information, including on decisions and arrangements determined by partner country preferences or context-specific constraints

### 6. Knowledge building and institutional memory

- Briefly outline any asks by noting specific challenges for the coordinating agency in the role, and successes and achievements of previous coordinating agencies

### 7. Designation of the coordinating agency

- Outline how the coordinating agency will be designated and when
- Outline handover process for when the role is expected to change from one agency to another



## ANNEX 1. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*The responses below aim to **clarify similarities and nuances** around the practical aspects of becoming, designating and being a coordinating agency in practice, and to **inform about available support**, and what it takes to act as coordinating agency. Again, in case of doubt on practices, the overarching principles of promoting country leadership, an inclusive partnership, mutual accountability, transparency and low transaction costs, should help guide decision-making.*

### 1. Who can perform the role of coordinating agency?

The coordinating agency should be an organization with i) a physical presence in the country, unless there are exceptional circumstances where the coordinating agency is located outside of the partner country—often the case in contexts of emergency or crisis, ii) significant experience in the education sector and iii) strong motivation to take on this role.

**All agencies interested in taking on the role should have the opportunity to express interest** and be considered (see question 4). The role is often played by the chair of the development partner group, but it can also be taken on by a nongovernmental organization or philanthropic foundation. Coordinating agencies are expected to take on the role in their own capacity as a partner to the country and contributor to or stakeholder in the sector, and as a member of GPE (as applicable).

The designated **role is usually held by one agency, but it is sometimes shared** across two or more agencies. In cases of multiple agencies assuming the role, it is key that the terms of reference (see section II) clearly delineate the functions of collaborating agencies and how the agencies are expected to: share roles and responsibilities, collaborate and ensure both efficiency and light transaction costs.

The coordinating agency should be a **different agency to the one acting as grant agent** to avoid conflicts of interest in grant-related matters and to enable complementary roles, shared responsibility for an effective partnership within a partner country and transparent decision making, rather than one agency having full control. To this extent, rotations are often triggered when a partner holding the coordinating agency role becomes interested in becoming a GPE grant agent. **In exceptional cases**, the coordinating agency and grant agent may be the same in transition periods or if there are limited number of partners in a country.

An agency which is **a sub-contractor/implementing agency of GPE's funds**, should not be excluded from the coordinating role because it manages part of the funds, unless this conflicts with proper, transparent management of the resources. This may require putting some safeguards in place.

### 2. What are important characteristics of a good coordinating agency?

The organization interested in becoming a coordinating agency must be able to mobilize agency **leadership, staff and capacities** to effectively perform tasks associated with the role that require:

- Excellent and deep knowledge of the education sector and partner landscape of a partner country

- Sufficient organizational capacities to carry out tasks associated with the facilitation of sector dialogue and partner coordination as well as support to the GPE grants pipeline, from initial discussions to approval, monitoring exercises and their follow up
- Capacity for regular communication with government (on behalf of GPE) and across stakeholders, including credibility to steer discussions as needed
- The ability to facilitate programming and create operational bridges focused on joined-up and effective interventions that support education system transformation
- Soft skills for relationship-building and conflict resolution
- Sufficient support from headquarters to perform the above.

### 3. What support is available to perform the role?

GPE has different types of support available to coordinating agencies including:

- The designated **country team lead** at the GPE Secretariat liaises closely with the coordinating agencies in all aspects of the roll-out of GPE's operational model, including GPE grants and compact implementation and monitoring. This person is the primary focal point for the country to the GPE Secretariat, can mobilize other GPE teams (thematic, the Gender Hub, grants, KIX, Education Out Loud, governance) and is available for any question the coordinating agency may have.
- **Financial support** can be accessed through the system capacity grant and within a partner country's allocation, meaning with the approval of the ministry of education to mobilize the support from this grant. Eligible activities include support to coordinating agencies (or ministries of education and other eligible partners) for the effective coordination and administration of the local education group. More broadly, the funding can also be used for activities related to strengthening coordinated action or financing—in which the agency often holds a key role, provided the financing is aligned with partnership compact priorities.
- **Technical guidance and tools** are available for coordinating agencies to support their role in promoting local education group effectiveness (see section 2.1) as well as leadership and meaningful engagement of all key stakeholder groups towards transforming education<sup>14</sup>.
- **Peer learning and exchange:** The Secretariat sets out to create a new community of practice which will be piloted in 2024 for incoming coordinating agencies.

### 4. How are coordinating agencies designated?

Most countries that join GPE already have an education partner coordination mechanism—a local education group—in place, usually with a lead or coordinating development partner who facilitates collaboration between the government and its partners. As a priority, GPE will always seek to strengthen existing mechanisms. The coordinating agency for GPE-related matters is usually the same agency, but this may vary depending on context as mentioned above. This helps to avoid duplication of efforts and ensures GPE-related matters are an integral part of existing sector coordination and dialogue arrangements. **Where a local education group is not in place**, the

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<sup>14</sup> [Briefs on coordinated action to transform education](#)

Secretariat will ask the country that intends to join GPE to 1) form a local education group and 2) designate a coordinating agency.

**Designating a new coordinating agency** should take place through the local education group to ensure continuity, consensus and transparency. To this end, it is useful to develop clear and country-specific terms of reference that outline roles and responsibilities, including core roles in GPE-related matters (see section II). This will help clarify expectations and specific arrangements such as shared roles, duration, support and any areas needing close attention.

Most importantly, terms of reference shared through the local education group are key to ensure a **transparent designation process**. It enables the ministry to invite development partners (bi- and multilateral agencies, nongovernmental organizations, private foundations and civil society organizations) to express their interest in becoming the coordinating agency and consider all available options; it also enables partners to organize themselves, when it is time to designate a new agency. The choice of interested partners will vary from country to country, and the process will also vary from context to context. Ideally, the designation should be decided through consensus with partners,, while the ministry also has a say in who the coordinating agency is, even if a proposal comes from the local education group through consensus among partners.

It is good **practice during hand-over** for the outgoing agency to undertake a small review exercise on what has been learnt, enabling the new agency to take forward these lessons.

### 5. How long is the term for a coordinating agency?

There is no set duration of term for the coordinating agency as this **depends on the country's** own coordination mechanisms, but the role should be understood as temporary—that is to say, for a set period. Countries have different arrangements with some working with a two-year rotation and others using an arrangement under which three partners act as lead on a rotating basis (outgoing, current and incoming lead). In other countries, a partner has taken on the coordinating agency role for many consecutive years. If options exist, it is **encouraged to regularly rotate** the coordinating role in order to share the responsibility among partners. The arrangement always depends on country context and what fits best.

### 6. Why take on the role as coordinating agency?

The roles and responsibilities of coordinating agencies are diverse and are an extensive undertaking for any organization. However, coordinating agencies that become well engaged on country policy processes, including GPE-specific processes, are often **recognized as catalysts** in driving progress and positive change in the sector.

The coordinating agency's level of communication and collaboration across the education community and partners can result in more joined-up, efficient and **impactful interventions**, leading to sustained collaboration and mutual support in future initiatives. Perceived benefits of communication and collaboration are interconnected with national education goals being achieved as well as outcomes in targeted communities.

## **ANNEX 2. COUNTRY EXAMPLES / AND TESTIMONIES**

[To be added shortly in the final version]

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