



# District Collectives

Enabling partnerships for systemic transformation in education

---



A playbook to guide non-profit organizations to forge active partnerships with districts

Co-created with partner organizations



## Foreword

With India's scale and diversity, it is no surprise that the school improvement challenges in India are also aplenty and diverse. There is a variance between different state education policies and an even bigger one between the needs and requirements of individual schools. What we've learnt is that districts have the great potential of driving systemic improvements at scale, operating as a decentralized unit of change. This is one side of the powerful game-changing possibility - decentralized action in education led by districts.

On the other hand, **EduMentum** as an initiative has strongly believed in and propagated the idea of collaborative efforts, when different players in the ecosystem join together in bringing about collective impact. **Shikshāgraha** is a movement to enable such systemic partnerships between Civil Society Organizations and districts, towards achieving exponential shifts in public education through decentralized and collective action.

This playbook has been curated and designed to support non-profit organizations aspiring to work with district education bodies around improvement areas. The document contains some suggestive process steps and activities, along with some specific ideas and interventions to drive systemic efforts towards school improvements at the district level. We bring you this compilation in collaboration with partner organizations who have walked the journey of working with the education system at scale and have also delivered impactful programs at the grassroots level.

We extend our gratitude to **InvolveEdu, Prajayatna, Mantra4Change, Vidya Vidhai** and **ShikshaLokam** for contributing their valuable time and efforts in assimilating the learnings and experiences in the form of this playbook. We hope you find value in the ideas shared here and we look forward to hearing from you about your district journey of collaboration.

## Table of Contents

Principles for district collaboration

Journey of district collective partnership

- Process Steps
- Examples of Program Packages

Modalities of Execution - Different forms of collaboratives

## Principles for Collaboration

The principles of collective effort revolve around shared responsibility, mutual respect, and a commitment to continuous growth. By embracing these principles, groups can work cohesively, capitalize on individual strengths, and evolve together, ultimately achieving higher levels of success and collaboration.

*With co-creation at its core , we have defined 5 principles that will help in driving the success for the collective – Shikshagraha*

### **1. Agency : Empowerment to make impactful choices**

Agency, with a strong emphasis on user-centric design, places users at the forefront. This entails close collaboration with those who will use the solutions, prioritizing their feedback and making adjustments based on their input. Similar to refining a recipe, it involves piloting solutions with the right stakeholders and embracing a lean design approach for flexibility and adaptability. Additionally, involving stakeholders helps ensure the solution fits both user needs and broader goals, leading to better, user-friendly outcomes.

### **2. Embrace efficiency through leveraging existing solutions and Open Source Solutions:**

As we begin working with systems, we must remember to build upon existing solutions instead of reinventing the wheel. By tapping into existing programs and resources of the system, we maximize efficiency, achieving more with less. The principle of open source in a collective means creating resources that can be easily used by anyone in different ways, like a versatile toolkit. It will help organizations to contextualize the solutions . Additionally, within the collective, by fostering a culture of sharing, we can contribute our insights and resources to the collective, creating a pool of information that can be leveraged further. We can extend our reach and impact by seeking the support, resources, and peer learning within the collective. Together we can amplify the impact of individual programs, capitalizing on the collectives and the systems strengths and expertise.

### **3. Champion transparency:**

Transparency is key to building sustainable relationships. When working with the system it is essential to communicate regularly and openly with stakeholders, defining roles and responsibilities, setting expectations and non-negotiables clearly.

It is valuable to build relationships with stakeholders based on trust, by regularly showing up, and meeting commitments. It is also important to regularly share data, insights, highlights, challenges and celebrate successes with the stakeholders thereby making them own the solutions.

Within the collective also, it is valuable to communicate regularly and openly, share resources, learnings, challenges and successes. It is also important to give due credit and appreciation for members of the collective, for their contributions.

#### **4. Commit to the challenge, not the fix :**

As individuals and organizations, we may have worked on developing innovative solutions to problems in our own domains, but when we begin working with the system it is crucial to remain open to reframing our solutions and ideas, to solve the contextual problems. Spending time with the stakeholders and users to understand the problem and building the solutions with them rather than for them, would be key to sustainable solutions at scale. Additionally it would be very important to leverage the vast knowledge and experience of the collective in designing and implementing solutions at scale.

#### **5. Long-term commitment for meaningful impact :**

Most meaningful change and progress often require patience and persistence. Collectives or any other collaborative effort, need time to develop the necessary knowledge, accumulate resources, and generate a substantial impact. It's akin to planting seeds and nurturing them over time, knowing that the fruits of your labor will only fully emerge with dedication and continuity. So, organizations who commit to a collective should be prepared to invest the necessary time and effort, for lasting change and success.

Next step

## District Collaborative - Journey of partnership

### Phase 1: Need Sensing

#### Parallel process:

- Aligning the district program to the larger strategic trajectory of the organization (internal)
- Building operational strategy in terms of human resources, funding, etc

#### Understanding the district (4-6 weeks):

District landscaping and profiling to identify the context and priorities of the district

#### ➤ Secondary Research

- State priorities for education
  - What are the broad focus areas for the next 3 years?
  - What are the state-wide initiatives in education in the last 3-5 years?
- District developmental indicators
  - Education data from UDISE, NAS, etc ([Samples of state-level landscaping research](#))
  - Other developmental indicators from central repositories such as [IBEE](#), [PGL](#), [NITI Aayog's SDG India Index](#), [NFHS](#), [Antyodaya](#), etc
  - Available data from prior needs analysis and assessments carried out at the district, such as Shaala Siddhi, SQAA, etc
- Structure of district administration & department of education
  - Organogram and job chart - to understand actors in the system (from district to school) and their roles & responsibilities
- Knowledge of other NGO partners in the geography and their work (both current and previous work/interventions in the district)

#### ➤ Primary Research

- Field visits
  - Demographic pulse to understand the context of the district (social, economical and cultural)
  - Interactions with stakeholders (from district to schools) to identify context, needs and challenges ([Sample interaction tool](#)). Here is a [Generic Diagnostic Framework](#) that you could customize from based on domains and stakeholders that are most crucial to the intended program focus.

#### ➤ Identifying the focus program

Defining the focus intervention with the district, a convergence based on what the

district needs and the expertise/offer of the NGO partner

### Some tips and suggestions:

#### ★ Who could you collaborate and co-create with at the district level?

- District Administrative Office
  - ◆ District Commissioner
  - ◆ District Magistrate
  - ◆ Community Development Officer (CDO)
  - ◆
  
- District Institute of Education and Training (DIET)
  - ◆ DIET Principal
  - ◆ Senior DIET Lecturers
  - ◆ Junior DIET Lecturers
  
- District Education Office (DEO)
  - ◆ District Education Officer
  - ◆ District Project Officer (DPO)
  - ◆ Deputy Program Coordinator (DyPC)

#### ★ Some district structures that may exist to support NIPUN Bharat

- District Steering Committee (DSC)
- District Resource Group (DRG)
- District Project Management Unit (DPMU)
- District Task Force (DTF)

**Some ideas to engage with key stakeholders** (*collated based on experiences of other organizations*):

- ❖ **Block-level Gatherings:** Most districts have structures where stakeholders meet frequently at cluster/ block level. Leveraging these spaces to gather insights, share learnings, highlights and challenges allows us to integrate programs within systemic practices while also building relationships with the key stakeholders.
  
- ❖ **District Education meetings chaired by the DC / DM / CEO:** In many districts, meetings anchored by the the CEO of the Panchayati Raj, or the District Commissioner / Magistrate, have been instrumental in driving positive change and alignment at the district level. These IAS officials not only have the authority to establish structures and priorities for the district but can also positively influence collective action.

## Phase 2: Preparation

### Parallel process:

- Formal written documents (letters/MoU) authorizing the district-NGO partnership ([Sample MoU](#))

### Co-creating the program journey with the district (8 weeks):

Co-design programs and interventions with the district incorporating elements of *Learning, Implementation and Sharing*

- District design imagination
  - [Program Design \(Sample Template\)](#)
  - Review & co-creation of interventions with nodal officer / key stakeholders
- Finalizing the program plan with the district (DIETs / DEO office / DC / DM)
- Defining the timelines of the roll-out in phases and establishing clarity around expectations and roles (shared responsibility)
- Baseline exercise (specific to the focus intervention only)
  - Design the tools and review with district POC
  - Define implementation plan and timelines + capacity building
  - Conduct the baselining exercise
  - Collate and analyze data to record the baseline levels
  - Share data and findings with key stakeholders
  - Make any relevant changes to the intervention plan, if required

### Some additional resources:

Here are some program packages that you may refer to as samples as you design your own customized program in collaboration with your district based on their specific needs and interests.

1. [School Leadership Development Program](#) (You could also refer to this [SLDP Package](#) for more resources)
2. [FLN - Literacy and Numeracy Program](#)

## Phase 3: Implementation (Stage 1)

### Parallel process:

Building a broader district program design including the activities/interventions based on

the overall needs and intended outcomes at scale. ([Sample LFA for district program](#))

### **Pilot the intervention (6-12 weeks):**

Prototype the first cycle of the intervention at scale and refine program design based on results and feedback

- Launch the first cycle of the program (4-8 weeks)
  - Workshops / capacity building sessions with relevant stakeholders
  - Communicating the activities/intervention and setting expectations with key stakeholders who would be implementing the activities on ground
  - Implementation of first cycle of activities by stakeholders
- Measure effectiveness through data and qualitative feedback, and review with district team
- Refine program design based on learnings from Phase 1 of implementation

### **Some ideas for interventions at scale:**

- ❖ **Pragatiya Hejje:** Pragatiya Hejje, a platform created to celebrate the interventions carried out in the district by CRPs and Schools.

Objectives:

1. Identifying and appreciating the creative elements being planted in clusters
2. To provide more opportunities for CRPs to engage in academic work
3. Building an appropriate platform for utilization and sharing of resources
4. Identifying the functions of CRPs and motivating other CRPs

Rubrics that can be designed to identify and celebrate CRPs who have improved their clusters.

1. Creative elements in academic areas and support to classroom teachers (F.L.N, Classroom Observation, C.D.P)
2. Participation of community and local governments (SDMC, Gram Panchayat) in educational development of schools
3. Strengthening and effective utilization of mass resource centers
4. Use of technology in records management

- ❖ **Teacher Sanchalana:** Sanchalana is the name for Hobli level sharing (a group of 3-5 clusters) – learning meetings which aim to empower teachers with Experiential Teaching and Learning (ETL) strategies via dialogues, accompanied with resources for seamlessly incorporating and adapting ETL activities in their classrooms. Teachers who teach Science, Math and English from both Higher and Lower Primary Schools have participated in Sanchalana in their respective Hoblis of all 10 Blocks.

Subject-specific teacher mentors were identified and developed across the Hoblis. These teacher mentors are given the necessary resources for each Sanchalana session along with a webinar on the previous day to equip them for the session.

Every teacher gets to participate in one Sanachalana session every month. Cluster and block officials take care of organizing these sessions across the block.

- ❖ **Samudayada Shaale:** Samudayada Shaale is a half-yearly event where the School Development and Monitoring Committee(SDMC), parents and other volunteers from the community come together to work towards improving the quality of education in the government schools. Samudayada Shaale is a day designated to help teachers and parents to create the School Development plan.

Structure of Samudayada Shaale at school level:

According to the circular, Samudayada Shaale at school level should be organized as follows -

- Advance notification of school program to SDMC members and all parents in the community, as well as publicity through other media.
- Cleaning and beautifying the school premises/environment.
- All the faculty should measure the learning progress of the students in our subjects, the learning progress of the students should be made clear in the unit test, first semester /Mid-term test, this information should be shared with the parents on the day of the school program to the community.
- SDMC meeting should be held for at least half an hour after the school prayer on the days when the school program is held in the community. Details of children who are absent from school, Learning progress of students in school, The school outlook, deficiencies found in the school, etc. should be discussed and recorded.
- Calling the parents in the classroom and personally exchanging information with the parents about their children's learning progress, the teachers should be instructed to be careful not to have any adverse effect on the children's minds. The class-wise order of information exchange is given as follows.



#### References:

1. [2012-13ನೇ ಸಾಲಿನ ಸಮುದಾಯದತ್ತ ಶಾಲಾ ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮ.](#)
2. [Samudayadhatta Shaale - Mantra4Change.](#)

#### Phase 4: Implementation (Stage 2)

##### Parallel process:

Establishing and strengthening presence & credibility as a co-creation partner to the district by engaging and facilitating collaborative spaces for planning, sharing, review and celebrations.

##### On-going district program implemented:

Continuous cycles of planned sequential activities at the district level

- Launch the next phase of the program with respective stakeholders
  - Communicate and roll-out the next cycle of activities around focus intervention

- Setting up a Core Committee OR Task Force (consisting of both representatives from the NGO as well as key stakeholders at different levels from the department)
  - Co-establish regular monitoring and evaluation structures at district level cascaded to schools
  - Define clear roles and responsibilities and assign owners for elements of implementation and monitoring
  - Co-create structures for sharing and appreciation of stakeholders
- Re-align at the district (quarterly and annually) to review progress and revisit program focus areas and interventions

### Some ideas for effective governance & recognition structures:

- ❖ **The 2-4-6-8 structure:** The District Education Transformation Program (DETP) of Tumkur introduced a groundbreaking system of monthly reviews, known as the '2-4-6-8 model'. This innovative practice brought a structured rhythm to the district's educational landscape, ensuring consistency in improvement efforts.

*On the second working day of each month, the school-level review meetings come alive, to discuss successes and challenges, sharing unique contextual practices. On the fourth working day, the action shifts to the cluster level, where schools within a geographical cluster unite to learn from one another. The sixth working day marks the block-level review meetings, where leaders from multiple clusters converge to exchange ideas and strategies, as well as challenges. Finally, on the eighth working day of the month, the culmination of the review meeting at the district-level takes place. Here, the collective action of Tumkur's leaders at every level is shared, and innovations from every corner of the district are celebrated. This 2-4-6-8 model has become more than just a schedule; it serves as a symphony of collaboration and learning.*

- ❖ **Coffee with Collector (Informal Connect):** "Coffee with Collector" is an innovative and informal intervention that aims to recognize and reward the efforts of highly motivated students, teachers, headmasters, block officers, and education leaders in the field of school development and education improvement. This initiative typically involves the District Collector, who is a senior administrative officer responsible for the district's overall governance and development, taking some time to have a 15-minute conversation with these education stakeholders over a cup of coffee or tea.

#### Objectives:

- To acknowledge and appreciate the dedicated efforts of individuals and teams working towards the betterment of schools and the education

system.

- To foster a sense of motivation, recognition, and a direct connection between the district administration and education stakeholders.

Selection Process: Education stakeholders who qualify for a "Coffee with Collector" session are typically selected based on their outstanding contributions to school development, student welfare, or education improvement initiatives.

Invitation: Once the individuals or teams are selected, they are formally invited to meet with the District Collector. The invitation may include details such as the date, time, and venue for the meeting, which is often hosted in a relaxed and comfortable environment, like the Collector's office or a nearby cafe.

Informal Conversation: During the "Coffee with Collector" session, the Collector engages in a friendly and informal 15-minute conversation with the education stakeholders. The conversation can cover a range of topics, including their achievements, challenges faced, innovative practices, and suggestions for improving the education system.

Publicity and Inspiration: "Coffee with Collector" sessions can be publicized through local media, social media, and official government channels to inspire others to take similar initiatives in the education sector. Sharing success stories and experiences from these meetings can motivate more individuals

### Other modalities for district programs:

The above process steps have been laid out considering that both or either of the district bodies (DIET / DEO) largely partners with one particular NGO to co-create and implement the improvement programs. There could be other ways of collaborating on district improvement initiatives. Here are a few to provide you some perspective:

### Suggestive impact and outcome metrics for district transformation program:

#	Outcomes	Impact	Impact Indicators
1	Schools organize enrollment drives and other community awareness initiatives	Improved access to education for children	% increase in enrollment (6-14 years) % increase in average attendance from the current status

2	Schools create a welcoming and safe school environment		
3	Schools track attendance and implement strategies for improving attendance		
4	Schools provide regular, nutritious mid-day meals		
5	Schools sensitize parents on student attendance		
6	Schools create a print-rich environment	Improved student literacy outcomes	% of students achieving reading competencies as per state goals
7	Schools set up and enable regular usage of library/reading corners		% of students achieving speaking listening competencies as per state goals
8	Schools conduct regular reading events		% of students achieving writing competencies as per state goals
9	Schools enable parents to set up learning spaces at home		
10	Schools implement project-based learning (PBL) for literacy		
11	Schools conduct regular student literacy assessments		
12	Teachers use age-appropriate teaching-learning material (TLMs) in the classroom		
13	Schools conduct regular numeracy-focused events	Improved student numeracy outcomes	% of students able to read and write numbers as per state goals
14	Schools implement project-based learning (PBL) for numeracy		% of students able to perform mathematical operations as per state goals
15	Schools conduct regular student numeracy assessments		% of students able to exhibit measurement competencies as per state goals
16	Teachers use age-appropriate teaching-learning material in the classroom		% of students able to exhibit data handling competencies as per state goals
17	Schools implement BALA (Building as Learning Aid)		% of students able to exhibit
18	Schools enable parents to engage children in numeracy exercises		



			spatial understanding competencies as per state goals
--	--	--	--