GATE Innovation Lab

Phase 3 Progress Update

Tailored technical assistance and flexible financial support



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About GATE

GATE works to advance global justice for trans and gender diverse communities. Our vision is a future where trans and gender diverse communities live freely, safely, and with dignity. We are community-led and community-centered, working with integrity and innovation to create opportunities for shared learning and resource equity in order to advance global solidarity across borders and movements.

Find out more about GATE by visiting www.gate.ngo

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Introduction

GATE's Innovation Lab is a bold and strategic approach to reducing financial dependency and fostering economic resilience among trans and gender diverse organizations around the world. Its four phases connect collective strategy, knowledge production, tailored support, and implementation. The Brain Trust provides strategic guidance across this process. The Innovation Lab is currently in Phase 3: Technical Assistance & Tailored Support.
Find out more about the Innovation Lab phases.

In Phase 3, a cohort of 10 trans-led organizations receives support to develop social enterprise models through tailored technical assistance combined with flexible financial support. GATE matched each organization with a technical assistance provider with expertise in social enterprise and business development, with pairings based on expertise, regional familiarity, language skills and fit with organizational needs.

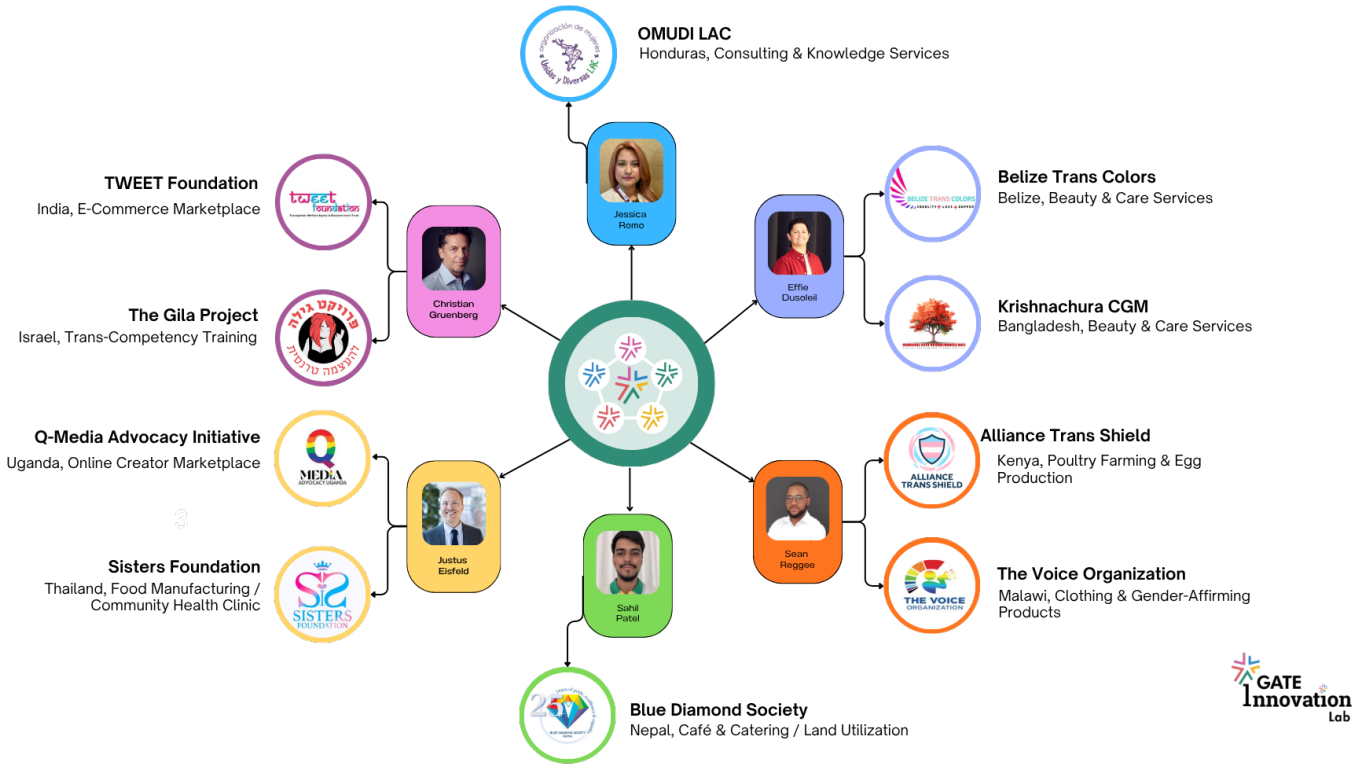


Fig. 1: Diagram of GATE member organizations participating at Innovation Lab phase 3.

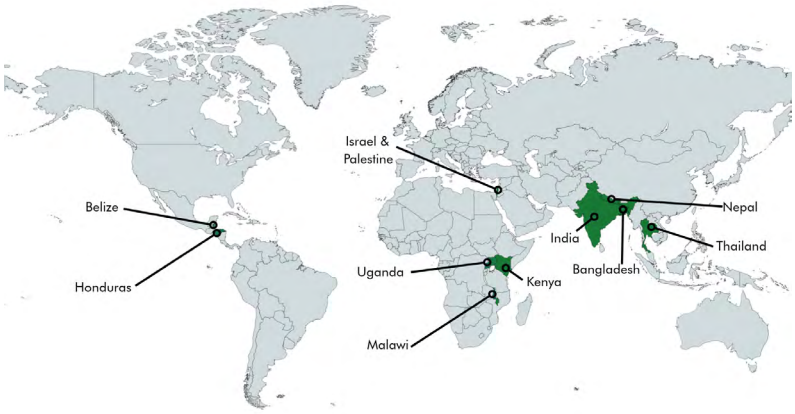
The aim is to build a cohort of trans-led organizations well-positioned for business implementation and funding - the final phase of the Innovation Lab. Anticipated outcomes include an assessment of capacity and readiness, technical assistance to address key challenges, and a business plan outlining a feasible implementation path. Phase 3 is due to be completed by the end of 2026.

As of October 2026, interim reports for all 10 grantees are approved. To encourage networking and further learning, GATE hosted a technical assistance provider group check-in and a grantee cohort meeting on 15 October. **This report highlights the main results achieved so far and offers strategic reflections for the initiative's next phase.**

Progress across the cohort

We have prepared a summary of each grantee. Each summary includes an introduction to the organization, a description of its original social enterprise idea and an overview of the main results achieved so far. Thanks to the technical support received throughout the program, some of the organization's initial ideas have shifted to better align with the organization's mission, strengths, market opportunities and community needs.

Fig. 2: World Map with GATE Member organizations participating at Innovation Lab phase 3



Bangladesh, KRISHNACHURA: A Center for Gender Minorities Rights

Who are they?

KRISHNACHURA is a community-based organization working toward a Bangladesh where transgender, hijra, intersex, non-binary and queer people can live with dignity, safety, economic independence and social recognition. Founded in 2017, their work combines advocacy, community mobilization, partnership building and economic empowerment. Over the next few years, their main strategic goal is to build a strong, community-led economic model that can reduce dependency on short-term grants and create dignified livelihood pathways for gender diverse people.



Social enterprise vision

The organization envisioned the creation of *Ayna Collective Studio*, a trans-led beauty and care business offering inclusive care and wellness services. The studio would offer a wide range of services, from hair and nail care to hair removal and makeup.

Initial challenge: Krishanachura did not have extensive prior experience generating income through such activities.

Results to date

KRISHNACHURA conducted community market analysis for *Ayna Collective Studio* with four anonymized customer conversations and two community consultations comprising 15 participants. This research is informing the studio's proposed appointment system, pricing approach, discount packages and service standards. The team is also mapping suppliers, partnerships and legal and financial requirements. Growing hostility in the country toward trans and gender diverse communities is also reflected in how they develop their business plan. Their priority is to organize safe customer validation, develop a realistic minimum viable offer and secure local legal, tax and accounting advice.
How this benefits the trans community: Through their social enterprise, they aim to strengthen the organization's mission by creating dignified, safe employment opportunities while securing funds to support advocacy and community outreach.



Belize: Belize Trans Colors

Who are they?

Belize Trans Colors is a trans human rights organization established in 2018, working to empower their community and protect their rights. They are pursuing a society where trans and gender diverse people can live with safety and dignity, and have equal access to services and legal gender recognition. Their advocacy priorities include documenting barriers affecting trans communities and calling for changes in laws, policies and public services.

Social enterprise vision

The organization's initial business idea was to launch a trans-led digital services enterprise offering graphic design, social media management and video editing. This has since shifted towards the beauty and care industry to better match the organizational assets, the current needs of the trans and gender diverse community, and the state of the market in Belize.

Initial challenge: Belize Trans Colors has no previous income-generation experience.

Results to date

Belize Trans Colors developed stakeholder and community asset maps, identifying skills in cosmetology, massage, customer service and social media. To better assess the market and community needs, a questionnaire was distributed to 15 key stakeholders through in-person interviews. As a result of these assessments, Belize Trans Colors shifted its focus from digital services to beauty and care, with its social business model canvas under development as a foundational document for its business plan. They are currently conducting a competitor analysis and clarifying how the enterprise can legally engage with the NGO.
How this benefits the trans community: The social enterprise will contribute to the organization's mission by creating safer employment opportunities for trans people, while generating unrestricted income to sustain its work protecting trans rights.

Honduras: La Organización de Mujeres Unidas y Diversas de Honduras

Who are they?

La Organización de Mujeres Unidas y Diversas de Honduras (OMUDI) is a trans-led organization working to build a society where women and trans and gender diverse people can live freely, exercise their rights and access equal opportunities. Established in 2020, their mission focuses on promoting, defending, and ensuring the human rights of the community they serve, strengthening their autonomy and active participation in social, political, and economic spheres through a trans-inclusive, feminist, intersectional, and social justice approach.

Social enterprise vision

The initial idea was to launch *DiversaLab*, a digital services enterprise specializing in graphic design, video editing, social media management and digital communications. With the encouragement of their technical assistance provider, the organization decided to expand the scope of its work to include a wider range of services, including training and research, among other services.

Initial challenge: OMUDI had no prior experience with income-generating activities.

Results to date

OMUDI had initiated the process to legally register the non-profit organization, advanced *DiversaLab's* organizational design and visual identity and begun its research, development and financial plans. The social enterprise is structuring and validating its service portfolio, potential clients, revenue mechanisms and relationship with OMUDI. The remaining priorities are customer engagement, business model validation and a financial plan that connects its service offering to costs and income.

How this benefits the trans community: *DiversaLab* will contribute to OMUDI's mission by offering opportunities to develop professional skills within the trans community while generating income to sustain the organization's advocacy and community work.





Kenya : Alliance Trans Shield

Who are they?

Alliance Trans Shield is a survivor-led collective that advocates for and empowers trans and gender diverse asylum seekers and refugees. Their work combines digital advocacy, narrative development, and community-led campaigns aiming to strengthen the visibility of marginalized groups and challenge systemic violence. The organization supports its members through resources to safely engage in online spaces, combat digital violence and create networks of support that span national boundaries.

Social enterprise vision

The organization aimed to develop a social enterprise that combines cooperative farming and poultry production. Profits would be reinvested in safe housing, food security, sustainable livelihoods and other essential support for community members.

Initial challenge: Although Alliance Trans Shield is already running an ad hoc poultry activity, this is done on a very limited scale.

Results to date

Alliance Trans Shield is using the program to formalize and strengthen its core business model of poultry production. This involved finalizing an agreement with its fiscal host, defining the roles of its team members and digitizing historical business records dating back to September 2025 in order to create 10 detailed financial and production registers. A visit to a competitor's farm offered valuable insights into cage systems and the potential for revenue from chicken sales. The next step involves transforming the digital records and competitor research into a framework for poultry unit economics, performing a break-even analysis, and crafting a detailed business plan that outlines a 12-month timeline and clarifies the business registration procedure.

How this benefits the trans community: By establishing a well-structured enterprise, they aim to enhance their income-generating activities, ensuring more stable resources for safe housing, food security and livelihoods, which in turn supports the collective's goal of safeguarding and empowering displaced trans and gender diverse individuals.



India: TWEET Foundation

Who are they?

The Transgender Welfare Equity and Empowerment Trust (TWEET) Foundation is a community-led organization dedicated to the holistic advancement of trans and gender diverse individuals across India. Their vision and strategy are anchored in the principle of 'self-reliance with dignity', moving beyond mere crisis intervention toward long-term systemic change. Established in 2015, its work combines community building, skills development, employment support, shelter, healthcare access and advocacy to strengthen trans people's opportunities and participation in society.

Social enterprise vision

The organization aimed to develop *T-Commerce*, an e-commerce platform connecting trans-led micro-enterprises with customers across the country. The platform would also provide digital entrepreneurship training and support participants in growing their businesses.

Initial challenge: While TWEET Foundation doesn't run a formal business, they are already experienced in running small-scale income-generating activities, such as selling artificial jewelry, tote bags and community paintings.

Results to date

Through the program, TWEET Foundation has developed a prototype demonstration portal for *T-Commerce*, finalized a survey questionnaire and created a process for identifying trans entrepreneurs, their products and support needs. The team has also appointed dedicated staff and begun discussions with corporate social responsibility partners. Priorities include conducting community consultations, using the findings to refine what the platform offers, substantiating revenue and risk assumptions, clarifying partnership arrangements and completing the business plan.

How this benefits the trans community: *T-Commerce* will advance TWEET Foundation's mission of providing opportunities for trans and gender diverse community members to achieve economic independence by supporting trans entrepreneurs to access customers, strengthen their businesses and develop the skills needed to sustain their livelihoods. In parallel, the enterprise will generate complementary, unrestricted revenue streams to support the TWEET Foundation's mission.





Israel & Palestine: The Gila Project – Transgenders for Social Justice

Who are they?

Established in 2010, Transgenders for Social Justice centers trans voices and community experiences in working toward systemic change and builds alliances with other movements addressing exclusion and inequality. Based in Israel & Palestine, they serve and organize with Israelis, Palestinians and Palestinian citizens of Israel. They envision a society in which trans and gender diverse people can access affirming healthcare, live free from discrimination, and participate fully in public life. Their work focuses on four core areas: community-led knowledge accessibility, trans-inclusive healthcare, combating organized transphobia and individual and community support.

Social enterprise vision

The organization currently operates a professional training enterprise, the *Trans Training Institute*, and aims to strengthen and expand the business. Priorities include improving marketing, client management, operational systems and educational quality to increase revenue from trans-competency training and reduce long-term reliance on donations.

Initial challenge: The current social enterprise has plateaued and is not operating to its full potential.

Results to date

Transgenders for Social Justice has focused on improving and scaling its already existing Trans Training Institute. It has completed a review of its strategic review of its budget and is reassessing strategic priorities, including audience focus, balancing subsidized and full-fee services, and placing greater emphasis on longer-term institutional partnerships. Also underway are the implementation of a customer relationship management system (CRM) and workflow automation. GATE resources are being directed towards marketing and educational consultancy, with another donor supporting the CRM setup.

How this benefits the trans community: Developing the Trans Training Institute will support the organization's mission both by strengthening their trans-competency educational program and generating income to sustain their advocacy and community work.



Malawi: The Voice Organization

Who are they?

The Voice Organization envisions a world where trans and gender diverse people can live with freedom, dignity, bodily autonomy and economic security. It seeks to strengthen the economic resilience of trans and gender diverse people by equipping them with vocational skills and income-generating opportunities. Their work is grounded in five thematic areas: advocacy, community leadership and empowerment, access to health services, documentation and research, and violence prevention and response.

Social enterprise vision

The organization aimed to establish the *Identity Stitch Collective*, a tailoring and garment production initiative focused on clothing, accessories and gender-affirming products such as binders and tuckers. The model would combine vocational training with business development to strengthen livelihoods and generate organizational income.

Initial challenge: The organization has no prior experience with income-generating activities.

Results to date

Through the program, a technical advisory board was established, and Voice Social Enterprise was selected as the business name, with textile products to be marketed under the Stitch Collective brand. Prototypes are being developed, with binders, socks and embroidered t-shirts selected for prototyping. 40 trans and gender diverse people were identified for testing, and 61 market survey responses were collected. Priorities include analyzing survey results, validating products and pricing, and completing a production and income-generation strategy.
How this benefits the trans community: The enterprise will advance the organization's mission by creating livelihood opportunities, developing gender-affirming products and generating income to sustain its work for trans and gender diverse people's rights and economic security.



Nepal: Blue Diamond Society

Who are they?

Established in 2001, Blue Diamond Society emerged as a grassroots movement advocating for the human rights, equity, and social justice of LGBTIQ+ individuals. Today, the organization is a pioneering organization led by trans and gender diverse people. Its work includes HIV prevention and care, human rights advocacy, community capacity building and the promotion of employment and income-generating opportunities.



Social enterprise vision

The organization is already running a social enterprise for meeting room rentals that has been successful so far. Through the Innovation Lab, they aimed to enhance their current social enterprise by implementing a catering service for their conference facilities to reduce outsourcing costs and to train and employ local community members. They are also exploring how to use a piece of land they own for income-generating purposes.

Initial challenge: The organization is currently facing high outsourcing costs for catering services.

Results to date

Much of the organization's focus has been on securing the mandatory administrative and legal authorization to open a café and catering service, with project implementation approval received from the Ward Office, Municipality and Social Welfare Council. The organization began refining its business idea by collecting vendor quotations for the cafeteria renovation, initiating menu costing and successfully trialing menu items. In parallel with the café and catering venture, the organization is exploring how its available land could contribute to the enterprise and is, for instance, exploring a poultry business. Considering Alliance Trans Shield's expertise in the business, GATE facilitated learning exchange opportunities between the two organizations. The next priorities are a costed operational and marketing plan and progress on the cafeteria works.
How this benefits the trans community: Strengthening and scaling their social enterprise will support the organization's mission through community skills development and livelihood opportunities, while reducing outsourcing costs and generating resources for its human rights and well-being programs.



Thailand: Sisters Foundation

Who are they?

Sisters Foundation is a trans- and gender diverse-focused community-based organization in Thailand that has provided health, education, and support services to the transgender community in the Pattaya region since 2004. Sisters Foundation is one of Thailand's earliest organizations established specifically to respond to the needs of trans and gender diverse communities. Its community-based approach helps connect people who may be reluctant to attend conventional clinics with care and support.

Social enterprise vision

A few years ago, Sisters Foundation decided to begin registering a social enterprise, given how long and slow the administrative process is. The registration has now been finalized. At the time the organization joined the program, its enterprise was dormant as no clear business model had yet been defined. Joining the Innovation Lab provided them with the opportunity to turn it into a fully operational, mission-aligned business. Through the program, Sisters Foundation will assess which business would be the most strategic and meaningful to launch.
Initial challenge: The organization has a dormant registered social enterprise with no clear business model.



Results to date

Sisters Foundation has created initial models and financial forecasts for two different initiatives: a fermented fish seasoning product and a community health service. An early version of the fish seasoning product has been tested, and an organizational workshop has been conducted to establish governance structures, clarify the distinction between the company and the foundation, and outline administrative needs. They have begun consulting with legal and financial advisors and have subscribed to a cloud accounting service. The formal establishment of a social enterprise is under consideration, but this will be a later phase that calls for more legal preparation. Upcoming tasks involve assessing demand, evaluating costs, understanding willingness to pay and identifying operational requirements. Additionally, a pilot project will need to be chosen, and the business plan, along with the implementation schedule, will have to be finalized.

How this benefits the trans community: Regardless of the business model chosen, the enterprise will support Sisters' mission by producing unrestricted income that contributes to the sustainability of its health, legal and community services.



Uganda: Q-Media Advocacy Uganda

Who are they?

Q-Media Advocacy Uganda works to strengthen the dignity, safety, rights and opportunities of trans and gender diverse young people through media, information and creative platforms. Over the next few years, their goal is to strengthen community resilience by expanding inclusive media platforms, increasing access to holistic sexual and reproductive health and rights information, and promoting socio-economic empowerment through digital and creative spaces.

Social enterprise vision

As they started the program, they planned to develop TransForm Market, an online marketplace where trans and gender diverse creators can offer their products and services. Participants would receive training in entrepreneurship, branding and digital marketing.

Initial challenge: The organization has no prior experience with income-generating activities, and this is the first time they are considering it.

Results to date

Q-Media Advocacy Uganda has commenced the pilot for TransForm Market. Prior to this, two consultation workshops with 10 participants were held, 10 artisans were profiled, cataloged products were cataloged, and maker contracts were developed with legal support. E-commerce and WhatsApp Business tools were set up alongside payment integration, with 50 potential buyers reached through promotion. The website and payment structure are underway, and sales testing via a pop-up market is planned. Priorities are to verify what the pilot demonstrates about transactions, pricing, customer acquisition and platform costs and to ensure that the team can explain and manage the model.

How this benefits the trans community: TransForm Market will contribute to the organization's mission by giving trans and gender diverse creators greater opportunities to earn income and develop their entrepreneurship skills, while securing unrestricted income for the organization to pursue its work.

Technical assistance results

Evidence-based social enterprises

As a result of the technical assistance provided by social enterprise experts, grantees have developed evidence-based business ideas with greater specificity about the products and services they can realistically deliver:

- KRISHNACHURA used 4 anonymized customer conversations to identify potential service issues and shape proposed beauty and hair appointments, transparent pricing and grooming packages.
- Belize Trans Colors mapped community skills and distributed its market questionnaire to 15 participants through in-person interviews in an effort to better assess the market and community needs.
- The Voice Organization selected 3 textile products for prototyping and identified 40 trans and gender diverse people for future product testing.

This research and analysis provides an evidence base for refining offers and, for some organizations, prompting them to reconsider their initial ideas:

- Belize Trans Colors' assessment resulted in a shift in business focus from digital service delivery to the beauty and care industry.
- OMUDI has broadened DiversaLab's positioning beyond digital communications to include research, consulting, training and social innovation.
- Transgenders for Social Justice's Trans Training Institute, an established social enterprise, addressed which clients and services to prioritize, balancing single trainings, longer institutional engagements and subsidized work.

These results clearly demonstrate the relevance of Phase 3 in providing tailored technical assistance in combination with flexible financial support, highlighting the critical need to allocate time and resources to focus on capacity and readiness so that social enterprises are set up for success.

Strengthening business plans through early testing

Phase 3 facilitated the strengthening of business plans through early pilot testing and commercial business focus, with several grant recipients generating tangible products to assess:

- Blue Diamond Society tried out a Momo menu, served during the organization's 25th anniversary, to gather real-time feedback.
- Sisters Foundation experimented with an initial seasoning mix that has been tested with potential consumers.
- TWEET Foundation created a demonstration portal of their e-commerce platform for internal use and stakeholder evaluation.
- Q-Media Advocacy Uganda has documented 10 artisans, cataloged their products and initiated e-commerce and WhatsApp Business tools as part of an initial pilot program.

These early pilots are helping organizations question assumptions prior to making further investments. Furthermore, testing is combined with collecting commercial evidence to ensure that business decisions are based on real market conditions. For example:

- Although Q-Media Advocacy Uganda has identified 50 potential buyers who have expressed interest, this has yet to translate into 50 confirmed sales.
- While TWEET Foundation's demonstration portal serves as a powerful initial review mechanism, it has yet to show customer engagement.

This commercial evidence includes customer feedback on the actual offerings and pricing, completed transactions where possible, business costs such as delivery expenses and considerations regarding staffing and cash flow. Combining early testing with strategic commercial analysis ensures that the business plan is evidence-based and context-appropriate.

Stronger systems for responsible enterprise development

One of the strongest results at this stage is the improved capacity readiness of the organizations to make informed, sustainable business decisions and responsibly lead their enterprise:

- Alliance Trans Shield has digitized and reconciled historical records into 10 standard registers and clarified governance and fiscal-host arrangements.
- Sisters Foundation developed a governance framework and set up a dedicated cloud accounting subscription.
- OMUDI advanced organizational design and legal registration work while strengthening its equipment base.

These changes address practical constraints on operating an enterprise and managing its relationship with the parent organization, and are tangible steps toward implementation. This is key to trans-led social enterprise, as the social and financial success of the enterprise will depend on the parent organization's structure and systems to ensure mission alignment and responsible commercial oversight.

Overall, the tangible progress of each grantee leads to a clear interim conclusion: **the integration of technical support with adaptable financing is yielding concrete planning and organizational results.** Ultimately, the final business plans will reveal how effectively these outputs can be transformed into actionable implementation readiness.

Learnings and Recommendations

Continuous evaluation of the Innovation Lab phases is crucial for GATE, with ongoing program refinement informing the design of future editions. The below learnings and recommendations provide key insights into unforeseen challenges and the actions GATE took to address these.

Tailoring approaches must account for the varying starting points of different organizations.

Learning: The cohort includes emerging organizations building foundational systems, the launch of new ventures, and established businesses reassessing their future direction. Regular consultations between GATE and the technical assistance providers have indicated that these groups require distinct strategies and varying levels of engagement.

Recommendation: Future cohorts would benefit from customized support pathways that clarify each group's expected capacity and staff involvement. In response, GATE deliberately designed a process tailored to each organization and regularly engages with its technical assistance provider to determine the most suitable approach. For those organizations with limited capacity, we provided more direct support through hands-on exercises and in-depth working sessions, while those with greater capacity had more extended periods of time for independent work. Where technical assistance providers were supporting two organizations, we tailored strategies to fit the needs of each team to ensure that emerging organizations received the support they needed throughout the program.

Effective working relationships need a mutual understanding of the objectives.

Learning: Grantees have consistently reported the benefits of technical support, yet discussions with technical assistance providers revealed disparities in responsiveness and expectations. These insights highlight the importance of collaboratively setting priorities, confirming comprehension during discussions and promptly addressing any misalignments.

Recommendation: To address this, GATE adapted its level of engagement and, when needed, conducted one-on-one assessment conversations with grantees. In two instances, we organized conversations to identify obstacles and agree on practical adjustments. As a result, both organizations were able to tackle their challenges and course-correct their engagement with the program.

Technical assistance should be flexible to meet organizational needs.

Learning: To be impactful, the technical assistance offered needs to go beyond the initially intended session-based approach and instead combine multiple formats, such as individualized sessions, written reviews, resource sharing, and more. Technical assistance providers noted that a significant amount of preparation, document analysis and follow-up occur outside the framework of the original sessions.

Recommendation: Future program designs should account for a more ambitious scope of work and workload. To address this, GATE adjusted the sessions' frequency to allow for document reviews and additional support outside of meetings. We also offered additional technical assistance in areas such as budgeting, effective communication and pitching. Collaboration was encouraged among the cohort to combine common learning paths and alleviate the support needed from the providers.

Local constraints may affect the pace and design of support.

Learning: Environmental and social issues arose that impacted the delivery and implementation of the program. During the course of implementation, Nepal experienced disastrous flooding, while in Bangladesh, the organization faced serious personal safety concerns, both of which affected initial work plans and required providers to adapt their ways of working. These are material planning factors that could be considered in future editions.

Recommendation: Through regular check-ins, GATE facilitated flexible adjustments to work plans and the pace of technical assistance in response to changing local conditions. When necessary, sessions were temporarily replaced with asynchronous written check-ins to allow teams to maintain communication while managing pressing demands.

Next steps

Phase 3 will come to a close at the end of 2026, with the finalization of organizational business plans and reports on technical assistance completion. Overall priorities for the Innovation Lab Initiative are to:

- Agree on a realistic timeline for the remainder of the program with each grantee and technical assistance provider, outlining key final deliverables, outstanding issues and any necessary adjustments to support the timeline.

- Finalize any targeted market and product assessments to analyze insights into customer demand, pricing, costs and delivery capabilities.

- Refine the business plan, financial projections, governance structures and the implementation strategy of each organization, clearly outlining any remaining legal, banking and staffing dependencies.

- Utilize reports from grantees and reflections from technical assistance providers to capture the support provided, shifts in readiness and other insights that can benefit future cohorts.

As we transition to Phase 4: Funding and Implementation, GATE will develop and strategically **disseminate a catalog of the 10 supported organizations and their social enterprises by March 2027.** This catalog will present each organization's business plan and budget in detail. **This tool will support fundraising efforts to secure resources to implement the grantees' social enterprises.** The **Global Trans Conference** in September 2027 will also be a key strategic opportunity for GATE to present the main results of the Innovation Lab's first edition and further raise awareness and appetite for economic resilience and autonomy within the trans movement.



GATE Innovation Lab



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