



LEARNING BRIEF

Building cross-sectoral partnerships
for scale and impact: lessons from
the YearBeyond programme



This learning brief:

- Describes the YearBeyond programme's cross-sectoral partnership model;
- Unpacks key enablers for successful multi-stakeholder partnerships; and
- Explores how these lessons can help others achieve greater scale and more cost-effective impact through partnerships.

THE PROBLEM

South Africa faces many complex and pressing social problems. **1 in 3 young people ages 15-24 are not in education, employment or training** (NEET),¹ and the longer a young person is unemployed, the harder it is to get back into the labour market.² The majority of children struggle to master foundational skills: **only 1 in 5 children can read for meaning** in any language by Grade 4.³ And **60%** of children and youth felt that they **needed mental health support** in 2023⁴.

Government, civil society and the private sector must tackle these complex, “wicked problems” in a constrained fiscal environment: public budgets are shrinking even as policy makers grapple with competing, urgent priorities.

WHAT WE NEED

In this context, government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the private sector and philanthropy all need to think differently about how to collaborate for impact.

To tackle these issues efficiently, effectively and sustainably at scale, we need to embrace partnerships that:

- ✓ Harness the contributions of diverse stakeholders towards a common goal;
- ✓ Use funding to catalyse additional investment and unlock and align resources from across society; and
- ✓ Encourage cross-sector collaboration and innovation.

The YearBeyond (YeBo) programme offers a **blueprint for an effective partnership model** with a **dual beneficiary approach**: it leverages young people’s talent and skills to make a meaningful difference in their community.

The partnership uses a **social franchise model** to implement at scale while mobilising and coordinating contributions from government, private philanthropy, business and civil society.

This strategy is **effectively and sustainably reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)**, and simultaneously **improving learning outcomes, social cohesion and wellbeing** for children and communities.

1 Mudiriza and De Lannoy 2023

2 Graham et al 2019

3 Department of Basic Education 2023

4 UNICEF 2023

YEARBEYOND: A BLUEPRINT FOR EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP

Since its inception by the Western Cape Government in 2014, the YearBeyond Programme has built an innovative partnership model that changes the trajectories of young people's lives. The model has enabled impressive outcomes: each year, more than 75% of participating young people access their next opportunity within three months of completing the programme.

This section of the learning brief describes the programme and the partnership model, shares the rationale behind this approach, and unpacks some of the operational nuts and bolts that can inform the design of other partnerships.

The YearBeyond Programme: a bridge to opportunity

YeBo is a youth service programme that connects young people to opportunities. It recruits young people ages 18-25 (mostly matriculants) who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

YeBo offers a 6-12 month "bridge" that prepares young people (known as YeBoneers) to become economically active, while harnessing their skills and talents to give back to their communities.

For YeBoneers, the main benefits of the Programme are:

- ✓ **Meaningful work experience:** YeBoneers volunteer to deliver social programmes, like academic catch-up support in Grades 3-4 or ICT support in libraries, and receive a stipend.
- ✓ **Training, mentoring and coaching:** YeBoneers develop core competencies and work readiness through weekly "Future Fit" sessions, coaching and mentoring, work and study fairs and practice interviews. They also have access to psycho-social and mental health support.⁵
- ✓ **Connections:** YeBo builds YeBoneers' networks and helps match them to work, training and further study opportunities through pathway and progression support.

The **dual beneficiary approach** drives positive outcomes for both youth and the people they serve, by positioning YeBoneers as change agents who are making a difference in their communities.

5 Meyer and Parker 2022



“Many youth programmes focus on the youth and what they actually do is secondary. YearBeyond is committed to ensuring that young people contribute meaningfully to social change through their work.”

– Stefan Howells, Director, SCORE (YearBeyond implementing partner)

Since its launch in 2014, YearBeyond has achieved impressive outcomes:



Youth placement: Each year, at least 75% of YeBo’s cohort access their next opportunity within three months of completing the programme. A 2019 external evaluation found that only 16% of YeBo’s 2015-18 youth participants were still NEET.⁶



Youth development: The programme has built YeBoneers’ emotional resilience, encouraged them to exercise agency, helped them navigate conflict and complex team dynamics, and taught them to lead effectively.⁷ Alumni are more hopeful, more satisfied with their lives and more confident.⁸



Learner outcomes: Children have improved literacy and maths skills and attend school more frequently. They are more confident and have a more positive attitude toward learning.⁹



Community outcomes: Libraries have increased their membership numbers and book circulation.



Volunteerism: 70% of YeBoneers continue volunteering in their community after completing the programme.

In the long term, YearBeyond is reducing the number of people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) – which ultimately reduces dependency on the state, grows the economy, and moves families out of intergenerational poverty.

6 YearBeyond 2019

7 YearBeyond 2019

8 YearBeyond internal data: baseline and endline survey 2022

9 YearBeyond 2019

SCALING FOR IMPACT: HOW A SOCIAL FRANCHISE MODEL UNLOCKS RESOURCES AND ALIGNS ACTION

YearBeyond is structured as a partnership between provincial and national government, donors, NGOs (implementing partners) and employers and institutions of further learning (opportunity partners). It is an innovation of the Western Cape Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport (DCAS) that has recently expanded to other provinces.

The programme is rolled out through a **social franchise model**. Government provides tested models, training, systems and platforms for scale, opportunity placements, and a modest contribution to implementing partners' operational costs. Implementing partners run YearBeyond programmes, hire mentors and supervise YeBoneers.

What is social franchising?

Social franchising scales up proven, high-quality models to deliver social services by packaging these models so they can be replicated by others, and by working through partners who can leverage local expertise and bring existing resources to the table.

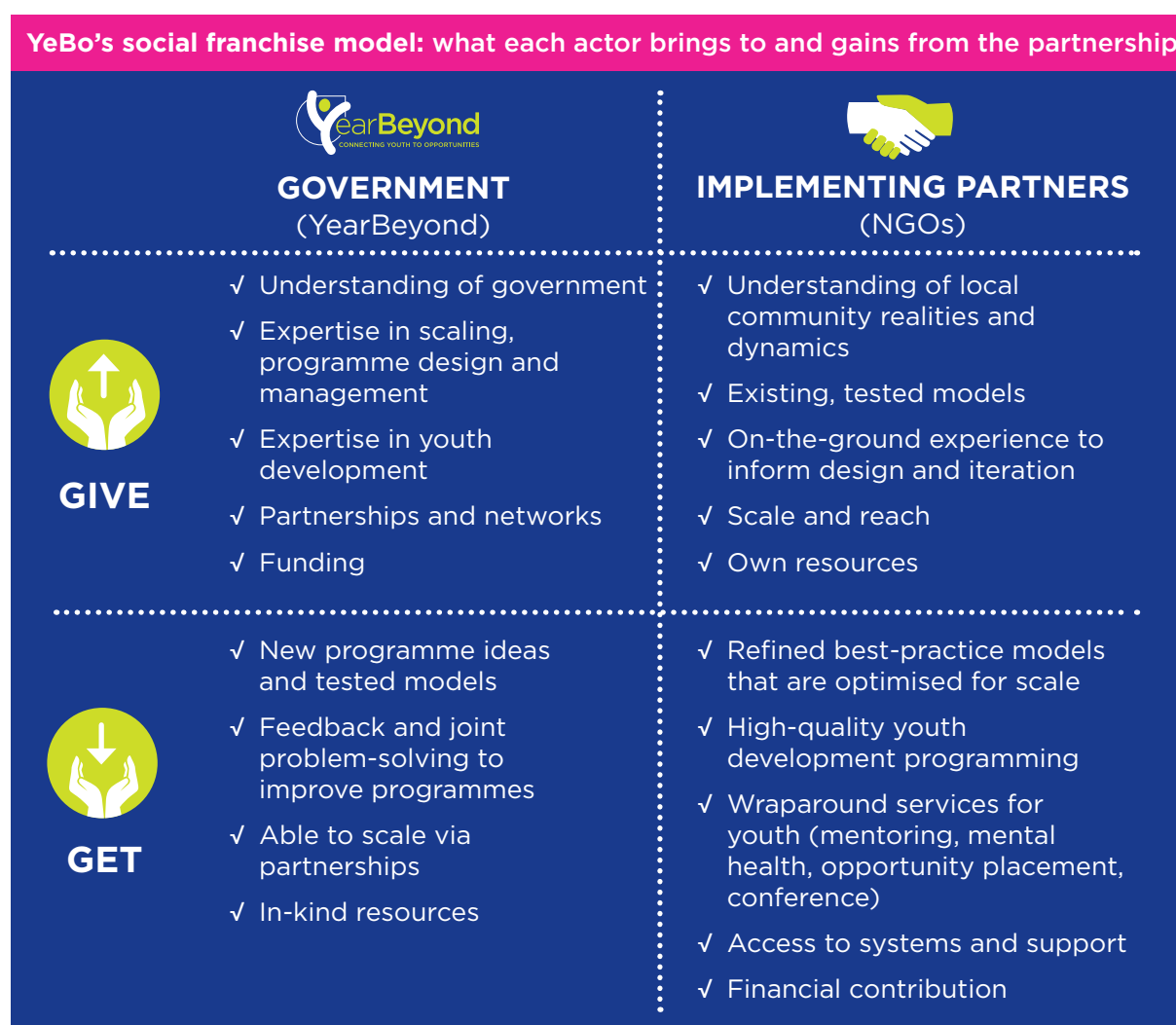
YeBo adopted this approach in 2018 after four years of testing its model with a handful of partners, and carefully reflecting on what it had learned about cost and scalability. Funding from the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation allowed YearBeyond to develop the systems to support scale in 2019 and 2020, and the programme grew from 399 youth in 2019 to 964 in 2021. Further investment from the National Youth Service enabled YeBo to expand to the Eastern Cape and triple its reach - to 3017 youth in 2022 and 3535 in 2023.



Rationale: why social franchising

While NGOs do critical work, most operate in limited geographic areas and are not geared up for wide reach. Many lack programme design expertise or struggle with big-picture strategy. Directly funding NGOs to deliver diverse, fragmented programmes is expensive, creates duplication, and makes it difficult to drive towards consistent outcomes across programmes. It can also dampen NGOs' agility and create dependency on government or private funders.

In contrast, franchising carefully-developed, tested and structured programmes allows NGOs to do what they do best, while ensuring quality and aligning work towards common goals. It allows functions like curriculum design and opportunity placement to be centralised and avoids duplication of overheads, keeping costs down. And it allows each partner to draw on their strengths to build something greater than the sum of its parts.



If we just fund the NGOs to do what they want to do, it's not a partnership, it's a funding model. Partnership is taking the strengths of both and putting them together to build something new."

- Jacqui Boule, Head: Youth and After School Programmes, Western Cape Government

How It Works: nuts and bolts

To scale via social franchising, YearBeyond plays a convening and coordinating role, and recruits implementing partners (NGOs) who deliver on the ground.

Both YeBo's youth development programme and beneficiary-focussed programmes are standardised. YeBo draws on local and international best practice to design them, and works closely with its franchise partners to test and iterate.

The division of roles and responsibilities is designed to avoid duplication, ensure cost-effectiveness, leverage systems for scale, and draw on each actor's respective strengths, as shown in the table below.

Roles and responsibilities: YearBeyond social franchise model		
AREA OF WORK	YEARBEYOND	IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS
Design, planning and resourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lead programme design, ensuring quality, relevance, and alignment to programme goals ✓ Raise funds from government and private philanthropy ✓ Provide per-YeBoneer contribution to implementing partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Contribute to programme design and iteration ✓ Contribute own resources
Recruitment, staffing and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Recruit and support head office team ✓ Recruit and select partner NGOs ✓ Market the programme to youth ✓ Shortlist youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Employ mentors (who supervise YeBoneers) ✓ Interview shortlisted youth ✓ Select and manage YeBoneers
Training and mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Train and support mentors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Train, support and mentor YeBoneers
Programme implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide technical support to partners ✓ Lead quality assurance ✓ Provide wraparound support, including psycho-social and pathway support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Run YeBo programmes ✓ Ensure quality implementation ✓ Build local relationships and referral networks
Systems, quality assurance and documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Build and run systems for scale, including monitoring and evaluation systems ✓ Document all aspects of the model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Capture data ✓ Use live data to manage programmes ✓ Align internal systems to YeBo requirements ✓ Adhere to policies and guidelines
Pathways and progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Build relationships with employers and tertiary institutions ✓ Help place YeBoneers into their next opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Hire YeBoneers when appropriate and possible ✓ Support YeBoneers to access and stay in next opportunity



KEY INSIGHT:

HOW YEARBEYOND DESIGNS PROGRAMMES

While YearBeyond leads the programme design process, its approach is consultative and opportunistic: many aspects of its programmes have been inspired by NGO partners' work. For example:

- The WCED@HomeLearning Programme was inspired by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), developed in partnership with Hope Through Action, and then scaled and refined via YearBeyond.
- The Early Childhood Development Programme, currently in a design-and-pilot phase, is an amalgamation of effective models run by three of YearBeyond's partners: a home-visiting programme, a centre-based approach, and parent workshops.

Other programmes are modelled on proven global approaches and adapted to the South African context. For example:

- Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), an approach to learning basic literacy and numeracy skills that groups children by ability rather than by age, was developed in India and has been refined in a number of countries around the world. It informed YeBo's Catch-Up Programme design for children in Grades 3 and 4.
- Planet Youth, a programme that maps and addresses teen risk-taking behaviour, was developed in Iceland and has a global community of practice. SAHARA, a YearBeyond partner NGO in George, is adapting the programme to South Africa's particular risk factors and context.

HOW IT WORKS: FUNDING MODEL

To support this approach, YearBeyond has adopted a unique funding model. Traditionally, government budgets to implement its own programmes; NGOs and civil society organisations do the same. But given the scale of the challenge, and highly constrained public budgets, YearBeyond has had to innovate.

With the Western Cape Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport's initial investment, YearBeyond mobilised additional funding from national government, other Western Cape government departments, private donors and NGOs. Each partner funds a different component of the work, in line with their mandate and risk appetite.

This funding model means that **each R1 contributed by the Western Cape government unlocks an additional R1.40** in cash, partner spend and in-kind contributions - **more than doubling** the value of its investment. It also ensures that national, provincial and donor efforts to reduce youth unemployment are aligned for greater impact.

The social franchising model has also unlocked **additional capacity and in-kind contributions** from NGOs and business. NGOs that implement YeBo programmes as franchise partners bring additional capacity, resources and infrastructure, as well as local knowledge and relationships, to the table. And YeBo’s opportunity partners, including businesses and tertiary institutions, volunteer at practice interviews and offer pathways for YeBo alumni. This amplifies the funding pot with significant in-kind resources.



The crowding in of financial and non-financial resources to strengthen each component of the model is critical. Each stakeholder plays a role to shape the unique offering.”

- Melissa Parker, Director: Provincial Skills and Partnership, Western Cape Department of Economic Development and Tourism

YeBo provides a standardised, per-YeBoneer financial contribution to partners to offset the operational costs of participation, pegged at ~50% of the annual non-stipend cost, but does not position itself as a funder. It also does not advertise this contribution when it puts out an annual call for new franchise partners: it wants NGOs to participate because they see the big-picture benefits, and does not want to raise expectations or create dependency.

In 2023, YearBeyond launched an **impact financing mechanism** in partnership with Harambee, a not-for-profit social enterprise tackling youth unemployment. NGO partners will be paid if 75% of youth remain economically active after 15 months, and again after 24 months. This incentivises partners to focus on the long-term outcome: ensuring that YeBoneer alumni remain economically active and do not return to the pool of NEET young people.



You’re not solving for one person placed in one job. You’re solving for reduced crime, violence and depression; increased employability; reduced cost to re-hire and reduced costs to the state in the long term.”

- Ariane de Lannoy, Associate Professor, Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) and Project Lead, Basic Package of Support

In sum, social franchising has helped drive a shift away from dependency, duplication and working in silos towards co-ownership, alignment and greater impact.

WHY IT WORKS: KEY ENABLERS

Scaling up via a multi-stakeholder social franchise model has been a learning journey. This section of the brief unpacks key enablers that have helped YearBeyond scale its reach and impact, under three key themes:

- What is required to successfully *design programmes for scale*?
- What enables YeBo to sustain *quality at scale*?
- What kind of *collaboration* is needed to scale through social franchise partners?

Designing for scale: lessons

YearBeyond currently runs three programmes: education, social cohesion, and wellbeing. Each has a few different programme streams, as shown below.

PROGRAMME			
PROGRAMME STREAMS	EDUCATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Catch-Up✓ WCED@HomeLearning✓ Scouting in Schools✓ Early Childhood Development	SOCIAL COHESION <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Reading Champions✓ Placemakers✓ ICT Champions	WELLBEING <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Planet Youth✓ Shukuma✓ Wellbeing Champions

All of YeBo's programmes are designed to be scalable. Practically, YeBo has learned that this calls for:

- **Adapting what already works.** YeBo draws on local and international best practice to design its programmes. Locally, it draws on and adapts tested partner models. It also tailors proven approaches from elsewhere to the South African context (see page 8).
- **Starting small, testing and iterating with partners.** YeBo pilots programmes at a small scale, and works closely with partners to reflect and refine models before finalising design and rolling out. This requires proactive, routinised engagements to leverage partners' experience and problem-solve together.
- **Keeping it simple.** A "good enough" programme, implemented with fidelity, will achieve better outcomes than a "perfect" programme implemented inconsistently or poorly (see page 11).
- **Balancing structure and flexibility.** While young people need clear structure to implement programmes well, programme design also needs to be flexible enough to adapt to diverse contexts and communities.
- **Letting go of what doesn't work.** YeBo pilots programmes before scaling them up, and does not scale up everything it tests. Saying "we tried it, but we won't take it forward" should not be viewed as failure, but as part of the learning journey.



KEY INSIGHT:

DESIGNING A 'GOOD ENOUGH' PROGRAMME

To scale, programmes need to be simple and structured enough for young people to implement them well under varied conditions.

In some instances, YeBo initially trialled more complex approaches, but realised that a simpler design would be more impactful at scale. For example:

- YeBo's initial Catch-Up Programme worked with high school learners, but found that youth did not have the educational background to support them.
- YeBo's primary school based Catch-Up Programme initially screened Grade 3 and 4 children's numeracy skills and placed them in differentiated skill groups. However, the screening tool was too detailed and nuanced and was difficult for YeBoneers to interpret and use. YeBo also found that most children were struggling with numeracy skills and would benefit from a standardised intervention. YeBo dropped the numeracy screening tool and offers the same numeracy programme to all Grade 3s and Grade 4s.
- YearBeyond's Wellbeing Champions programme builds young people's ability to cope with adversity by working with their mindset. During the pilot, YeBo found that some sessions were very triggering to the YeBoneers **and Programme Mentors were not equipped to deal with what arose**. These topics were removed from the curriculum before scaling the programme.

The takeaway for others is that a "good enough" programme, implemented with fidelity, will achieve better outcomes than a "perfect" programme implemented inconsistently or poorly.



Sustaining quality at scale: lessons

To move beyond small-scale programmes, it is critical to build platforms for scale that can support consistent, high-quality implementation. YeBo has learned that this calls for:

- **High-quality mentors.** Mentors attend three multi-day training blocks during the year, where they practice delivering content, and reflect on and problem-solve around their experiences. While mentors are selected and employed by implementing partners, YeBo must approve appointments and can veto if they are unsuitable. To create a pipeline of competent, committed mentors, YearBeyond launched the YeBo Academy in 2023, a one-year training programme for alumni to support their transition into a mentor role.
- **Action learning.** YeBo office staff visit mentors and partners in the field regularly to observe, give feedback and reflect on implementation. It revises its curriculum and programme design based on what mentors do well, what they struggle with, and feedback from field observations.
- **Efficient digital systems.** To grow from 500 to 3000+ youth, YeBo had to transition from paper-based to digital systems, with a “no exceptions” policy: all partners must use YeBo’s digital tools to register young people, upload documents, and track attendance, dropouts and progression. YeBo provides tablets and unlimited data to all mentors to remove barriers to access. These platforms also serve a dual purpose: they build digital skills young people need for the workplace.
- **Clear guidelines and documentation.** At scale, situations that arise with partners or youth can no longer be handled on a case-by-case basis. YeBo had to formalise and document its guidelines, policies and procedures. Training materials are also standardised and given to all mentors.
- **Centralised communication to support decentralised action.** As implementation became more decentralised, it became more important to centralise communication. YeBo communicates directly and frequently with all mentors and partners, via WhatsApp groups and email, to ensure key information reaches everyone and expectations are consistent and clear.
- **A centralised calendar.** This includes regular touch points with partners.
- **Agile fund management.** YearBeyond’s finances are managed by an administrative partner. This allows private donors to invest in a government-led project, and enables more efficient procurement and payment.
- **A culture of innovation.** The YeBo head office is constantly looking at ways to reduce costs, improve quality, leverage lessons and best practice and innovate - both bottom up and top down.



YearBeyond has conceptualised and developed a programme that looks like a start-up, yet is run by a government department, with the space and freedom to be entrepreneurial and open to opportunities.”

- Joanna Marzec-Visagie, Manager: Sustainable Development and Stakeholder Relations, Theewaterskloof Municipality



KEY INSIGHT:

MULTI-DIRECTIONAL LEARNING: YEBO'S APPROACH TO CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

YearBeyond is committed to ensuring and improving quality at all levels: at head office, via mentor training, and in programme implementation.

Its approach to continuous quality improvement is rooted in deep listening, feedback and multi-directional learning, with both implementing partners (NGOs) and opportunity partners (companies and tertiary institutions). For example:

- YeBo actively reaches out to employers who have hired YeBoneers, and uses their feedback about young people's competency gaps and how they adjust to the workplace to adapt its youth programme design. It also shares information with employers about what young people need to succeed in the workplace and how to be more youth-friendly.
- When YeBo observes Future Fit sessions, it pays attention to what facilitators do well and where they struggle, and revises the curriculum accordingly.

YeBo deliberately uses the term “action learning”, not “quality assurance”, to emphasise that learning goes in both directions.



The decentralised model, where a smaller, central YearBeyond office works with a broader network of partners that are already embedded in communities, is core to the programme's success.

The smaller central team is able to innovate, test new solutions and tools, ensure quality, and leverage insights from the teams on the ground to ensure the curriculum addresses the needs of the youth they are serving.

And the centralisation of many of these functions, that are typically duplicated across multiple sites in other programmes, makes for more effective and cost-efficient programming.”

- Ona Meyer, Programme Manager: Youth Employment, Michael and Susan Dell Foundation

Collaboration for scale: lessons

To scale as a social franchise, positive, productive working relationships with NGOs, employers and tertiary institutions are paramount. This requires:

- **Careful vetting.** YeBo invites expressions of interest from NGOs that would like to run its programmes. In 2022, 10 new partners were selected from more than 40 applicants. All prospective partners attend an in-person open day to ensure a good fit.
- **Clear shared goals, roles and responsibilities.** YeBo works with dozens of NGOs that have competing organisational mandates, operational standards and priorities. To mitigate this, YeBo makes expectations clear up front: if you would like to partner with YearBeyond, you need to run its programme(s) as designed and intended, and this is what YeBo can offer in return. Roles and responsibilities of YeBo, implementing organisations, mentors and youth are documented in the YearBeyond handbook.
- **Accessibility and visibility.** To build trust with partners, YeBo invests heavily in visiting partner sites and establishing open communication channels.
- **Transparent, accessible data.** Data is accessible to partners and mentors in real time. This creates equality of access and locates accountability with partners.
- **A genuine commitment to meeting opportunity partners' needs.** YearBeyond engages extensively with business and industry partners so it can recommend appropriate candidates. Its "Rising Stars" and "Gold Stars" programme enables it to filter YeBoneers that match businesses' specific needs.



KEY INSIGHT:

PARTNERSHIPS ARE NOT STATIC - PLAN FOR CHANGE

Partnerships are not static. It is important to regularly review and re-assess each partnership to ensure it still serves all partners' needs, and to have a structured process that allows either partner to exit the relationship without drama or acrimony.

YeBo reviews partnerships and mentor appointments annually. While most partnerships are renewed, a routine review makes it easier to part ways when a partner or mentor is not delivering or no longer a good fit.

TAKEAWAYS

As the YeBo example has shown, a collaborative, whole-of-society partnership approach has enabled it to effectively tackle complex problems, including youth unemployment, poor learning outcomes, social cohesion and wellbeing.

By strategically bringing stakeholders together through a social franchise model and using government funding to unlock additional funds and in-kind contributions, YearBeyond is leveraging actors' respective strengths, resources, and expertise to launch South Africa's next generation and rewrite the country's collective story.

This learning brief has offered a practical blueprint for how to design and manage multi-stakeholder partnerships, and highlighted enabling characteristics that support success.

Key takeaways for designing partnerships and scaling programmes, and for government and civil society, are summarised below:

Lessons for designing multi-stakeholder partnerships

- Collaboration makes it possible to use resources more efficiently and effectively, and to leverage different organisations' strengths to build a higher-quality programme.
- Social franchising is one partnership model for cost-effective scaling: it can expand reach by leveraging NGOs' local knowledge and resources, while maintaining a lean, agile head office.
- Think carefully about which partnership functions to hold centrally, versus which to locate with implementing partners. YearBeyond centralises programme design, mentor training, quality assurance, wraparound support, systems, documentation and pathway support, while mentoring and implementation are led by programme partners (see page 7).
- Be clear about roles and expectations, build and use strong data and accountability systems, and create open feedback and communication channels.
- Build in annual review and recontracting checkpoints for implementing partners.

Lessons for scaling programmes

- To scale, a programme needs a strong rationale: it must clearly articulate the target audience, the change it seeks to drive and the link to political priorities. YeBo's dual beneficiary approach - which improves youth employability and tackles challenges communities face in education, social cohesion, and wellbeing - has allowed it to crowd in resources for scale.
- To design for scale, keep programme design simple and ensure it is well-matched to facilitators' skills and background. A "good enough" programme delivered with fidelity is more effective than a "perfect" programme implemented inconsistently or poorly.

- Start small, test and iterate before taking a programme to scale. Spend time observing programme implementation and listen deeply to feedback from implementing partners.
- Invest heavily in mentor quality: the people on the front lines are pivotal to achieving programme outcomes.
- Be clear about desired outcomes and how you will measure them, and collect evidence to show the impact of the programme.

Lessons for policy makers

- Use state funding to give strategic direction on where investment is needed and to unlock private-sector funding.
- Consider how government funding unlocks other funding when setting budget priorities.
- Train staff in collaborative work and incentivise it. Move away from a dynamic of “command and control” to more adaptive leadership and systems.

Lessons for civil society

- Look at government as a partner (not a funder), who can offer value beyond funding.
- Map your organisational assets and what you have to offer, and use these to frame your value proposition to funders and government.
- Be open to implementing new programmes and franchised models, which can unlock access to networks and resources.

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This learning brief was written by Katie Huston. It is based on interviews with YearBeyond staff, sector experts and a review of relevant research.

