

Director Education & Protection for an International Private Philanthropy

Client Needs

The client was seeking to hire a leader with comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the development sector in India; and subject-matter expert in Girls' Education and Child Protection, who will provide strategic leadership and vision to advance the organization mission of 'Girls for Success'. Their need was for a professional who could develop and execute innovative, evidence-based strategies that drive transformational and sustainable change for girls in India, managing portfolio investment of ~ USD 100 Million per annum. The role required someone adept at navigating complexity and ambiguity—able to distill challenges into clear priorities and drive a systemic, long-term approach across the portfolio. One of the most critical aspects of this role was to have a sound understanding of the political economy narrative of the country; with demonstrated experience working with the Government at the national and sub national level. The client needed a leader who could strengthen existing partnerships while also identifying and cultivating new, high-impact strategic collaborations critical to the success of the organization's India strategy. A strong orientation toward external risk management and ecosystem-level thinking was essential.

The client also needed someone capable of leading a high-performing team of Managers and Analysts to design and deliver high-quality, timely proposals and programs that aligned with the organization's strategic priorities. They would be accountable for delivering on the mission and overseeing a robust portfolio of investments and active programmes that reflected both the India priorities and the broader objectives of the organization's board. Above all, the client required a leader with excellent interpersonal flexibility and with proven success in building and maintaining strategic relationships and working in partnership across government and civil society to shape and influence the ecosystem, mobilize resources, and drive large-scale impact for adolescent girls.

Taplow Solution

Our search strategy focused on two distinct talent pools, aligned with the client's expectations for a leader who could deliver high-impact, scalable programmes in Girls' Education and Child Protection, while driving systems change and have measurable outcomes.

Development Sector Experts: The first set of candidates came from a more traditional development sector background. These individuals brought deep expertise in child

Executive Search

rights, gender and social norms, and child protection, and had significant experience working with government systems at both national and sub-national levels. They had a strong track record of designing and implementing scalable programs by leveraging government platforms and networks. These candidates were well-versed in navigating the development ecosystem—working closely with government bodies, non-profits, donors, and community-based organizations. Their strength lay in designing contextually grounded, bottom-up programmes that are evidence-driven and policy-influencing, particularly in areas of education, child rights, and protection.

The target organizations in this group included international and domestic philanthropic foundations, UN agencies, bilateral institutions, and global and national non-profits working across child rights, education, gender and adolescent girls; and as well as large-scale social impact institutions that leverage data and evidence to inform decision-making and drive the design of scalable, high-impact initiatives with government. We looked at candidates residing both in India, as well as returning Indians with global development experience.

Hybrid Candidates with Private Sector Experience: The second group consisted of hybrid candidates—professionals who began their careers in the private sector but had transitioned into the development space and are now actively driving impact at scale. We explored this talent pool because they bring a unique blend of strategic thinking, data-driven decision-making, and a results-oriented approach to programme design and execution. These candidates are often able to structure high-volume investments with clear KPIs, apply design thinking and operational discipline from the private sector, and embed strong monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track social return on investment. Given the hiring organization's emphasis on strategic clarity, use of data, and outcome measurement, this group of candidates aligned well with their preference for individuals who can bridge development expertise with private sector efficiency.

The target organizations in this group included global consulting firms with dedicated social impact practices, as well as CSR initiatives led by both domestic and multinational corporations. It also comprised social impact funds that utilize a mix of debt, equity, and grant-making models to drive change, and organizations that apply private sector expertise to design and deliver high-impact investment programmes. Additionally, this group included gender-focused impact funds, development consulting firms that work closely with governments and clients on system-strengthening initiatives, and domestic family foundations set up by high-net-worth and ultra-high-net-worth individuals to drive philanthropic efforts.

Executive Search

Outcome

Over the course of the search, we explored a universe of nearly 200+ candidates aligned with the defined target profile. From this pool, approximately 10 candidates were presented for consideration. The finalist emerged as a standout due to their robust private sector background, which included significant leadership roles in strategy and execution, as well as an extended entrepreneurial journey. This was complemented by a long tenure in the development sector, where they led large-scale, government-partnered transformational projects across multiple states. The candidate also demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the social determinants influencing development programmes and a strong, demonstrated commitment to advancing outcomes for girls through the Girls for Success mission.

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