Special Olympics Program Leaders starting to develop a government relations plan should first do a self-assessment of their Program. Take a close look at your current activities and initiatives, identify gaps in programming, policy, and funding and determine your priorities. Your Program’s purpose for applying for government funding, staffing structure, ability to cultivate relationships, political factors, and time frame will all need to be considered. Here are five areas that should be part of your self-assessment.

Purpose for developing government relations

When determining your Program’s purpose for pursuing government relationships, the first step is to be clear about your goals. This will determine your direction moving forward.

**Key Questions**:

1. What do you most want from your relationship with the government at this stage? For example, permission to work with schools/health facilities, funding to support your Program, or value-in-kind contributions.
2. Are there specific programming areas where you have a good opportunity to deepen relations with specific government ministries or departments?
3. What are your short-term and long-term goals for government relations?

Political Factors

It is important to remember that your Program’s advocacy and government relations work must **always** be non-partisan and non-political. Special Olympics should never directly or indirectly endorse or oppose a candidate, government official, or political party in an election. However, as you consider pursuing government relations, it is still important to consider the political climate in your country and how that might impact your ask. Programs should consider all factors and use their best judgement when determining whether to pursue government funding.

**Key Questions**:

1. Are there potential risks to your Program or its reputation by engaging with the government or particular government officials?
2. To the best of your knowledge, are there any political factors that could be a threat to your Program’s current projects or potential asks of the government?
3. How do non-governmental organizations (NGOs) typically interact with, or receive support from the government in your country?
4. Has your government passed legislation or enacted policies supporting the rights of persons with disabilities that you could serve as an implementation partner for?

History of partnerships with government entities and officials

Your Program may have previously engaged with government entities or officials. If you are a new National Director, it is important to review historical information to better understand pre-existing relationships or attempts made to engage your government. You can build off this foundation and use it to inform how you want to move forward.

**Key Questions**:

1. Has your Program ever engaged government officials in your Program’s country at any level (locally or nationally)?
2. Have representatives from your Program ever met with government officials about Special Olympics? Who were they and what was the outcome?
3. Has your Program ever invited government officials to your Program’s events? If so, have any government official attended a Special Olympics event?
4. Has your Program signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or agreement with a government ministry, department, or agency?
5. Has your Program ever received value-in-kind (VIK) services or contributions from the government? For example, has the government allowed your Program to use a government-owned stadium for an event?

Time Frame

Consider the timing of meetings with government officials and how they will fit into your Program’s calendar.

**Key Questions**:

1. When does your government meet to make decisions about policies and budget decisions?
2. Does your Program’s fiscal year align with the government’s fiscal year?
3. Are there particular events or periods that would present opportunities or challenges for government relations, either within your Program or within the country overall?
4. Are there different term cycles for elected officials or ministers? When are elections?

Staffing Structure

It is important to think through how your Program’s staffing structure will impact how you implement a government relations strategy as well as any government-supported projects.

**Key Questions**:

1. Who will be a part of your government relations team? This could include Program staff, board members, athlete leaders, family members, or other key volunteers.
2. What will be the roles and responsibilities for the different members of your government relations team?
3. If you are asking for government support for a specific project, what staff support do you currently have for that project?
4. Do you need government support for additional staff for a specific project or area of programming, such as sport, Unified Schools, or Health?

Reporting

Receiving government support for your Program or a specific project is likely to come with additional reporting requirements. Consider the impact of new reporting requirements and the time and labor that will be required to meet them. Usually, government funding involves a required reporting process with strict deadlines and deliverables to ensure your Program is using the public support or funds appropriately. If you pursue government support or funding, it is **critical** that your Program submit the necessary reports on time. Failure to be a good steward of government support or funding could lead to consequences that will damage the reputation of your Program, and possibly lead to legal issues, loss of funding, or inability to secure funding in the future.

**Key Questions**:

1. Does your Program have the capacity to do all reporting required by the government for funds received?
2. Does your Program have a track record of on-time reporting for other types of funding or grants?