STRIDE
AN INITIATIVE BY PPI

Public Policy India

2026 EDITION

Public Policy India and STRIDE

Policy, Social Impact and Development Consulting in India

A guide to the kinds of work, the firms, the clients and the careers in a growing sector

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EDITION DETAILS

A guide to the sector

This guide maps India's policy, governance and social impact consulting sector: the kinds of work, the firms, the careers and how the sector is funded. Every figure is linked to its source in the text. Where a number comes from Public Policy India's own tracking, we say so.

PUBLISHERS

Public Policy India and STRIDE

EDITION

2026 Edition, version 1.0. Facts checked October 2026.

FORMAT

Digital book. Free to share and print.

LENGTH

Ten chapters in four parts, a one-page map and a glossary. About an hour of reading.

LICENCE

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CITE AS

Public Policy India and STRIDE (2026). *Policy, Social Impact and Development Consulting in India*, 2026 Edition. New Delhi: Public Policy India and STRIDE.

To excerpt, adapt or translate, write to contact@publicpolicyindia.com.

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FROM THE TEAM

Why we wrote this

Many young Indians interested in governance can name three or four consulting firms and assume that is the sector. It is wider and more varied than that. Well over a hundred organisations work in India's policy, governance and social impact consulting space, from teams briefing state secretaries to evaluation groups running surveys in villages.

This guide maps that space: what the work is, who pays for it, how firms differ, what the jobs pay and how people get in. Each part adds a piece to a single map of the sector, which comes together in Chapter 11. Contracts and headcounts are often not public, so we have been precise where figures exist and said so where they do not.

Yash Agarwal, for the Public Policy India and STRIDE team

Who this guide is for

- Undergraduates and early-career professionals considering policy or social impact work.
- Consulting and corporate analysts thinking about a move into governance or development work.
- Journalists and researchers who want to understand how the sector is organised.
- Senior practitioners and educators looking for something to share with juniors and students.

How to use this guide

Ten chapters in four parts, then a one-page map. You can read it in any order.

IF YOU ARE	START WITH
In school or college	Chapters 1, 2 and 5, then the map in Chapter 11
Applying for a first job	Chapters 4, 5, 7 and 8
Two to five years in	Chapters 3, 7 and 10
Already in the sector	Chapters 6, 9 and 10
Hiring, teaching or advising	Chapters 4, 7, 8 and 11

AUTHORS

The team behind this guide

This guide was researched and written by the Public Policy India and STRIDE team.

Yash Agarwal
Founder, Public Policy India and STRIDE

Kashish Goyal
Lead, Communications and Research, Public Policy India
Co-Founder, STRIDE

Manan Singh
Lead, Programs and Partnerships, Public Policy India
Co-Founder, STRIDE

Yugika Mital
Lead, Operations, Public Policy India and STRIDE

Snehaa Rajesh
Research and Editorial Associate, and Lead, Community Engagement, Public Policy India and STRIDE

Sireesha V. Reddy
Associate, Policy Consulting and Communications, Public Policy India and STRIDE

Shreya Singh
Fellow, Policy Consulting and Communications, Public Policy India and STRIDE

BEFORE YOU START

The guide in one minute

1. Policy consulting covers three kinds of work: governance, social impact, and research and evaluation.
2. Demand is rising as governments run more programmes, and as CSR, philanthropy, digital infrastructure and new rules create work.
3. Much of the work is commissioned in state capitals, often with support from foundations.
4. Five kinds of firm differ mainly in the work they do. Choose the type of work first.
5. Daily work ranges from district offices to field surveys and ministry briefings.
6. Durable impact often comes from simple, measurable systems, and good results lead to bigger programmes.
7. Pay depends mostly on who funds the work. Careers grow with subject depth, a visible body of work and a strong network.
8. Consulting hiring tests structured problem-solving, data and writing most directly, and using AI well matters too.
9. Government, multilaterals, philanthropy and CSR fund the sector, and each shapes the work differently.
10. The best engagements leave governments more capable after the consultants leave.
11. Chapter 11 brings it all together: kinds of work, clients, firms, roles and skills on one page.

PART I

I

The field

What the sector is, why it is growing, and why so much of the work happens in the states.

1 What this sector is

2 Why the sector is growing

3 The states at the centre



1

CHAPTER 1

What this sector is

Three kinds of work, and how they differ from corporate consulting

IN BRIEF

1. Policy and social impact consulting covers three kinds of work: governance consulting, social impact consulting, and research and evaluation.
2. It shares methods with corporate consulting but measures success differently.
3. Much senior work involves "translating" ideas across levels of government, places and time.

At a sector conference in Delhi or Bengaluru, the phrase "policy consulting" can describe three different jobs in one afternoon. One person describes a year of embedded work in a Chief Minister's office. Another is designing a CSR strategy for a company's foundation. A third explains how a research group fed evidence into a Finance Commission's thinking. All three are policy work, and each rewards different skills.

1.1 Three kinds of work

KIND OF WORK	WHAT IT PRODUCES	WHAT IT ASKS OF YOU
Governance consulting	Work inside or alongside government: a redesigned system, a launched scheme, a working dashboard, a recruited cohort	Comfort with ambiguity, fast learning, patience with budget cycles, frequent travel
Social impact consulting	Work for foundations, family offices, CSR programmes and large NGOs: strategies, programme designs, monitoring frameworks, sector scans	Clear storylines, financial modelling for social investment, explaining complex ideas to a board
Research and evaluation	Randomised evaluations, impact studies, surveys and policy briefs	Training in research methods, careful writing, and sustained attention over long projects

Careers often move across these three. One common path: a first job in **research and evaluation**, a second in **social impact consulting**, and a third in **governance consulting** or corporate public policy.

1.2 How it differs from corporate consulting

The two share many methods: structured problem-solving, slide decks, clients and deadlines. They differ in three ways.

- **Time horizons.** A corporate project is judged in quarters. A governance project may show results only after a budget cycle, a court order or a change of officer.
- **Stakeholders.** A state government team may include a minister, a career civil servant, an officer due for transfer and other consultants, each with different priorities.
- **What counts as success.** A corporate project ends at delivery. A policy project lives on: a scheme can be launched, redesigned, paused and revived over a few years.

Analytical skill gets you hired. Patience and relationships keep you useful while an institution changes.

1.3 Four kinds of translation

Much senior policy work involves carrying an idea across a gap.

- **Vertical:** turning a central scheme into something a state administration can run, and reporting results back.
- **Horizontal:** adapting an approach that worked in one state to another with different politics and capacity.
- **Temporal:** carrying a scheme from launch, when attention is high, to steady operation.
- **Scalar:** moving from a pilot in a few districts to a state-wide or national programme.

When you read a job description, ask which translation the role asks of you.

1.4 What this sector is not

Advocacy is a related craft: campaigns and public interest litigation aim to shift public positions, while consultants mostly help change how government works. **Think tanks** are also related. They choose their own research questions and publish independently for public debate. Research and evaluation consulting is different in one way: a client commissions it to answer the client's own question, such as whether a programme worked. Many people move between all of these.

Building the map

CHAPTER 1 ADDS THE KINDS OF WORK

KIND OF WORK	WHAT IT PRODUCES
Governance consulting	Redesigned systems, launched schemes, dashboards and PMUs
Social impact consulting	Strategies, programme designs and monitoring frameworks for funders
Research and evaluation	Evaluations, impact studies, surveys and policy briefs

Highlighted columns are new in this chapter. The full map is in Chapter 11.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Analysis gets you in the door. The lasting value lies in helping analysis work inside real institutions.

DO THIS NEXT See the whole policy field, beyond consulting, in our companion careers guide.

2

CHAPTER 2

Why the sector is growing

Six forces behind demand, and the work each creates

IN BRIEF

1. Demand rises as governments run more programmes and need help to deliver them.
2. CSR, domestic philanthropy, digital public infrastructure and new regulation each add new work.
3. Each force creates specific kinds of roles, summarised in the table at the end of this chapter.

There is no reliable estimate of the size of India's policy and social impact consulting market. The figures sometimes quoted describe the whole management consulting market, which grows for different reasons. What can be measured is demand, and six forces point the same way.

2.1 Governments are running more programmes

Governments run more schemes than before. Each scheme needs people to plan it, track it and manage it. Bain and Dasra's India Philanthropy Report 2026 puts total social sector funding at about Rs 27 lakh crore in FY25, around 8% of GDP, with public spending about 95% of it. To manage this, ministries and states hire small teams to run schemes, known as **programme management units (PMUs)**, and young professionals on contract. An RTI response reported in January 2024 counted 1,499 consultants supplied by firms across 44 central departments, alongside 1,037 Young Professionals.

India also has a lean government by headcount. Karthik Muralidharan's Accelerating India's Development (2024) counts about 16 government employees for every 1,000 people in India, compared with 57 for every 1,000 people in China and 159 in Norway. Rethinking Public Institutions in India shows that public sector jobs fell from 19.1 million in 1991 to 17.9 million in 2011, while the population grew from 846 million to 1.2 billion. With fewer staff and more programmes, governments bring in consultants for the capacity to build trackers, analyse data and coordinate delivery.

2.2 Mandatory CSR spending

Under Section 135 of the Companies Act 2013, qualifying companies spend 2% of average net profits on CSR. Spending reached Rs 40,794 crore in FY25 across 29,546 companies, a 17% rise on FY24, according to Fulcrum's CSR Performance Report 2026. The rules on which companies must spend can change: the Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 proposes raising the profit threshold, so check the current law. More CSR money means more demand for CSR strategy, partner selection, programme management and impact assessment, much of it bought from consulting firms.

2.3 Domestic philanthropy

Private philanthropy was estimated at about Rs 1.43 lakh crore in FY25, growing at 9 to 11% a year. The number of formal family offices rose from about 45 in 2018 to about 300 in 2024, according to Bain and Dasra's India Philanthropy Report 2025. Each new giving team commissions strategy, programme design and evaluation work.

2.4 Digital public infrastructure

India's digital public infrastructure, including Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker and Account Aggregator, is studied worldwide. UPI processed 24,162 crore transactions worth about Rs 314 lakh crore in FY 2025-26, and the MOSIP identity platform, built at IIIT Bangalore, supports national ID systems in several countries. Governments in India and abroad now hire people who understand both policy and technology to design digital services.

2.5 New regulation

New rules create work in drafting, compliance and assessment. India's data protection rules were notified in November 2025. MeitY released AI governance guidelines the same month, and amended IT rules in February 2026 require labels on AI-generated content. India's carbon market sets emission-intensity targets for industrial units, which creates demand for measurement and reporting.

2.6 Changing sources of funding

Foreign contributions are governed by the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act. Registered associations received about Rs 22,963 crore in 2024-25. Amended Rules were notified in June 2026, and as of October 2026 an Amendment Bill introduced in March

2026 was being examined by a Joint Parliamentary Committee. Indian sources, public and private, now fund most social sector work, so Indian funders commission more of the strategy work and evaluations.

2.7 What each force means for consulting

FORCE	WHAT THE NUMBERS SHOW	WORK IT CREATES
More government programmes	About Rs 27 lakh crore of social sector funding in FY25, 95% of it public, and about 16 government employees per 1,000 people	PMUs, scheme design, monitoring dashboards, embedded teams
Mandatory CSR	Rs 40,794 crore in FY25, up 17%	CSR strategy, partner selection, impact assessment
Domestic philanthropy	Rs 1.43 lakh crore of private giving; about 300 family offices	Foundation strategy and evaluation
Digital public infrastructure	UPI and India's ID model used at scale	GovTech and digital service design
New regulation	Data protection, AI and carbon market rules	Compliance, rule-making support, measurement
Changing sources of funding	About Rs 22,963 crore in foreign contributions in 2024-25; Indian sources now fund most work	Strategy and evaluation for Indian funders

The states are a seventh source of demand, and they get their own chapter next.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Each force creates specific kinds of roles. Knowing which force funds a role tells you how stable it is and what it will teach you.

DO THIS NEXT Follow funding, policy and job news each week in The Policy Post.

3

CHAPTER 3

The states at the centre

Why much of the work is commissioned in state capitals

IN BRIEF

1. Most services citizens use are delivered by state governments.
2. States run fellowships, delivery units and PMUs, often with support from foundations.
3. Time in a state government is one of the richest early-career experiences available.

Health, education, policing, water, power distribution, urban services and farm extension are all state subjects or run through state machinery. States account for around 60% of all government spending in India, much of it through centrally sponsored schemes. That is why translating schemes between the Centre and the states is such a large part of the work.

States have also added new welfare programmes, such as cash transfers to women and free bus travel. The national rural jobs law, VB-G RAM G, replaced MGNREGA on 1 July 2026, with most states meeting 40% of its cost. Each programme needs state-level capacity to run.

3.1 How state engagement is organised

- **Chief Minister's office cells:** three to ten people supporting the Chief Minister's priorities.
- **Departmental PMUs:** teams inside a department running a scheme or reform. Ask how long the funding runs before you join.
- **State fellowships:** young professionals placed across departments and districts (see below).
- **Aspirational Districts and Blocks:** NITI Aayog's programmes cover 112 districts and 500 blocks, the administrative units below a district, across 329 districts.

3.2 State fellowships

Gujarat launched the first Chief Minister fellowship in 2009. More than a dozen states have run one since, including Maharashtra (2015), Haryana (2016), Uttar Pradesh (2022) and Bihar (2026). Karnataka runs a different model that pairs senior professionals with civil servants. Our companion careers guide, Understanding Policymaking and Building Meaningful Careers, lists the main state programmes with links, in Question 7.

3.3 Why state work has grown, and who funds it

New governments want visible delivery within their term, and building permanent capacity through a state public service commission takes time. Embedded teams can start within weeks where an empanelment already exists. Fellowships have also built a network, as alumni move on to departments, foundations, consulting firms and other states.

Philanthropy often makes this work possible. Foundations fund many state PMUs and support teams. Haryana's school reform, for example, built on work the state had done with the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation since 2014. For a young professional, this means many state roles are funded by the same foundations described in Chapter 2.

3.4 New funding rules

The 16th Finance Commission, chaired by Arvind Panagariya, covers 2026-27 to 2030-31. It kept the states' share of central taxes at 41%, added each state's contribution to GDP to the formula, and recommended Rs 9.47 lakh crore in grants, including Rs 7.91 lakh crore for local bodies with a performance-linked share. More funding is tied to performance and accounts, which raises demand for support in local government.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A year as a Chief Minister's fellow, or two years in a state office or PMU, offers close exposure to how Indian governance works, and places you where much new work is commissioned.

DO THIS NEXT Browse current state and national fellowships in PPI's fellowships database.

PART II

II

The firms and the work

The five kinds of firm, what the work looks like from first job to senior role, and six public programmes.

4 **Five kinds of firm**

5 **What the work looks like**

6 **Six public programmes**



4

CHAPTER 4

Five kinds of firm

A simple way to read the field

IN BRIEF

1. Firms in this sector fall into five broad types, set apart by the main work they do and who they mostly serve.
2. Many firms work across types; the typology describes where each mostly sits.
3. Choose the type of work first, then the firm.

A two-person evaluation firm running a trial in Jharkhand and a global professional services firm running a large ministry programme are both "consulting firms". They share little else. The five types below are set apart by the **work they mainly do**; their size and origin follow from that.

4.1 The five types

TYPE	MAIN WORK	MAIN CLIENTS	TYPICAL TEAM	EXAMPLES
Global strategy firms	Strategies, vision documents, scheme design	Central ministries, states, large foundations	Small, senior-led	McKinsey, BCG, Bain
Professional services firms	Running PMUs and technology programmes at scale	Ministries and state departments	Large, structured	Deloitte, EY, KPMG, PwC
International development consultancies	Strategy and implementation for development programmes	Multilaterals, foundations, large NGOs	Mid-sized, often global	Dalberg, Palladium, IPE Global, Oxford Policy Management
Indian governance consultancies	Embedded teams inside state secretariats or Chief Ministers' offices	State governments	Small, embedded for a year or more	Samagra and smaller state-focused firms
Evaluation and research organisations	Randomised trials, impact studies, large surveys	Governments, foundations, multilaterals	Varies; strong methods focus	J-PAL South Asia, IDinsight, Sambodhi

Examples are illustrative, not endorsements, and many firms work across types. Dalberg, for instance, does both strategy and implementation. The four large professional services firms also run strategy practices. Social impact consulting for CSR and foundation clients, done by firms such as Sattva, sits across the second and third types.

4.2 What each type offers a young professional

- **Global strategy firms:** early access to senior decision-makers, with less hands-on implementation.
- **Professional services firms:** structured careers and predictable progression.
- **International development consultancies:** a strong writing culture and long client relationships.
- **Indian governance consultancies:** real responsibility early and a steep learning curve.
- **Evaluation and research organisations:** depth in research methods, at a pace closer to academia.

4.3 Geography

Delhi NCR has the densest concentration of firms and central government work. Mumbai is the centre for philanthropy and CSR clients. Bengaluru is strong in GovTech, evaluation and governance work. Hyderabad, Chennai and Pune have their own specialisms. District deployments of fellows and embedded teams reach many smaller cities.

4.4 Questions to ask in an interview

- Who pays for this engagement, and when does that funding end?
- Where will I sit: in a government office or in the firm's office?
- Who signs off my work: a partner, or a government officer?
- How many people are on my team?
- What happened to the last two people in this role?
- Is there a written plan for handing work over to government?

Building the map

CHAPTER 4 ADDS THE FIRMS

KIND OF WORK	WHAT IT PRODUCES	TYPICAL FIRMS
Governance consulting	Redesigned systems, launched schemes, dashboards and PMUs	Indian governance consultancies, professional services firms, global strategy firms
Social impact consulting	Strategies, programme designs and monitoring frameworks for funders	International development consultancies, social impact firms, CSR advisory teams
Research and evaluation	Evaluations, impact studies, surveys and policy briefs	Evaluation and research organisations, think tanks

Highlighted columns are new in this chapter. The full map is in Chapter 11.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The type of work matters more than the brand. A junior role in the right type of firm can build more skill by year three than a better-known name in the wrong one.

DO THIS NEXT Find organisations that hire in PPI's hiring database.

5

CHAPTER 5

What the work looks like

Five scenes, from first job to senior consultant

IN BRIEF

1. Job descriptions in this sector look alike; the daily work does not.
2. These five scenes come from real engagements, ordered by seniority, with names and identifying details left out.
3. More access to decision-makers usually comes with less freedom to publish.

The scenes below run from a first job to a senior role, and cover all three kinds of work from Chapter 1. The settings and events are real; we have left out names and details that would identify the people or projects.

SCENE	EXPERIENCE	KIND OF WORK	TYPICAL FIRM TYPE
A district health office	2 years	Governance consulting	Indian governance consultancy
A field evaluation	3 years	Research and evaluation	Evaluation and research organisation
A programme management unit	4 years	Governance consulting	Professional services firm
A foundation strategy	5 years	Social impact consulting	International development consultancy
A ministry engagement	6 years	Governance consulting	Global strategy firm

Associate, two years in

A district health office

An associate two years out of an economics degree works in a district health office in Uttar Pradesh. Frontline workers fill in more than sixty fields a month across four registers, and the team has been asked to reduce that burden. One indicator is collected twice; another has no

usable denominator. She talks it through with the district programme manager, who points out that every field belongs to someone who asked for it. The afternoon goes on checking definitions with the block and state teams. The result is a reporting system that asks frontline workers for less and gives decision-makers something they can use.

Analyst, three years in

A field evaluation

An analyst manages a randomised evaluation of a farm extension programme covering 4,200 households in two districts of Maharashtra. Half her day is logistics: forty surveyors, a hundred and twenty villages, tablets and vehicles. The other half is cleaning and analysing data. Results will take time, and a finding that a programme did not work is still a useful result for the government that commissioned it.

Consultant, four years in

A programme management unit

A consultant leads a fourteen-person PMU on a large centrally sponsored scheme. The team writes guidelines, runs the dashboard the ministry uses to track blocks, trains state teams and prepares regular reports. It is structured, steady work, and it is how many of the schemes that reach the most people are run.

Consultant, five years in

A foundation strategy

A consultant leads a six-month strategy for a foundation in Mumbai: a five-year programme to improve learning across thirty districts in three states. Her week mixes client check-ins, a day with a state education department, a writing day for board slides and interviews with NGOs. Foundation clients usually allow time for a strategy to take shape over several months.

Senior consultant, six years in

A ministry engagement

A senior consultant is one of four people designing a new national scheme with a central ministry over six months. The work happens in a shared deck, a budget model and a folder of precedents, with regular briefings for the Secretary. Within a year, a version of the design may be approved by the Cabinet. The credit belongs to the ministry and its leadership, which is how the work is meant to be.

5.1 Access and independence

Across all five, more access to decision-makers usually comes with less freedom to publish. A consultant in a ministry meeting cannot write publicly about the scheme; a researcher writing about it has full freedom and less access. Embedded roles sit in between.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Choose the kind of work, and the balance of access and independence, that you will still enjoy in ten years.

DO THIS NEXT Hear practitioners describe their work on Policy Panchayat.

6

CHAPTER 6

Six public programmes

What impact looks like in practice

IN BRIEF

1. These six programmes are documented in government records, independent reviews or research.
2. They show different shapes of impact, from measurement systems to national scale-up.
3. Good results often lead to bigger programmes and new funding.

Case 1 SATH-E in three states

Strategy support for state education reform

NITI Aayog launched Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital in Education in 2017 across Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, with Boston Consulting Group and the Piramal Foundation as knowledge partners. The programme combined remedial learning, teacher support and school consolidation, with more than 42,000 schools merged across the three states. NITI Aayog reported learning gains in all three states, and Jharkhand saved about Rs 400 crore by merging 4,380 schools.

WHAT THIS SHOWS

Several reforms combined in one programme, with strong state backing, improved learning and saved money at the same time.

Case 2 Saksham Haryana

An embedded team and a single target

Haryana launched Saksham Haryana in July 2017, run from a cell in the Chief Minister's Office with Samagra, building on school quality work the state had done with the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation since 2014. Good Governance

Associates in the districts tracked block results against a clear target, and by mid-2019 107 of the state's 119 blocks had been certified "Saksham", meaning at least 80% of students tested at grade level.

WHAT THIS SHOWS

An embedded team with regular assessment cycles can change processes that occasional reviews cannot reach.

Case 3 The Aspirational Districts Programme

Measurement that drives improvement

Since 2018, NITI Aayog has tracked 112 districts on a fixed set of indicators across health, education, agriculture, infrastructure and financial inclusion, and published regular rankings. Partners, including Tata Trusts and the Gates Foundation through IDinsight, ran household surveys to check the data behind the rankings. An independent UNDP appraisal in 2021 found that aspirational districts outperformed comparable districts, and cited Bastar's malaria campaign, which cut malaria cases by 71% in Bijapur and 54% in Dantewada. The programme's results led the government to launch the Aspirational Blocks Programme in January 2023 across 500 blocks.

WHAT THIS SHOWS

Clear indicators, regular ranking and independent checks can lift outcomes across many districts, and success can seed a larger programme.

Case 4 School-based deworming

From one state to a national programme

In 2011, Bihar ran a state-wide school-based deworming campaign, then the largest in the world, reaching about 1.7 crore children with Deworm the World, now Evidence Action, as technical partner. In 2015, the Government of India launched National Deworming Day, which has grown to reach about 26 crore children a year, at a cost of under half a dollar per child.

WHAT THIS SHOWS

A simple, low-cost intervention with clear evidence can move from one state to a national programme in a few years.

Case 5 The Quality Education India impact bond

Paying for learning results

Between 2018 and 2022, a USD 11 million development impact bond funded education programmes for about 2 lakh children in Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. An investor provided upfront capital and was repaid by outcome funders on verified learning results, which exceeded targets.

WHAT THIS SHOWS

Funders can pay for results rather than activities, at meaningful scale, when partners agree on clear outcomes and strong measurement.

Case 6 The Utkrisht impact bond

Paying for better maternal care

The Utkrisht impact bond, launched in Rajasthan in 2018, paid for small private health facilities to meet national quality standards for maternal and newborn care. UBS Optimus Foundation provided upfront capital, USAID and MSD for Mothers paid for verified results, and Palladium managed the bond. An independent review by Mathematica found that quality improved in participating facilities.

WHAT THIS SHOWS

Outcome-based funding has now worked in both education and health in India, which suggests a pattern rather than a one-off.

6.1 Lessons across the cases

- **Simple designs scale.** Deworming and the district rankings reached the most people because they were easy to run.
- **Senior support matters.** Most of these programmes had a committed champion in government.
- **Measurement lasts.** Systems for tracking results often outlive the original engagement.

- **Results lead to more.** Bihar's deworming became a national programme; the Aspirational Districts led to the Aspirational Blocks; early impact bonds paved the way for later ones. Evidence of results is often what unlocks the next round of funding.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Impact takes many shapes. The most durable often comes from systems that are simple to run, easy to measure and strong enough to earn the next round of support.

DO THIS NEXT Find the data behind a programme you care about with Sarani.

PART III

III

Careers and pay

How pay works, common career paths, and how each type of firm hires.

7 Pay and career paths

8 How to get in



7

CHAPTER 7

Pay and career paths

How pay works, and four common paths

IN BRIEF

1. Pay depends mostly on who funds the work.
2. Published stipends give firm anchors; ranges for firms are indicative.
3. Careers grow through depth in a subject, a visible body of work and a strong network.

7.1 Pay depends on who funds the work

Pay usually depends on who funds the work. This is the typical pattern, not a rule: individual offers vary with the organisation, the city and your experience.

Government-funded roles pay published rates, which makes them the easiest to check. NITI Aayog pays Young Professionals Rs 70,000 a month, and state Chief Minister fellowships paid between about Rs 40,000 and Rs 1.5 lakh a month in 2026. Our companion careers guide lists published stipends programme by programme, in Question 6.

Roles funded by philanthropy and CSR often pay in a similar range or a little more. What members of our community reported to us between 2024 and 2026, checked against public job postings, suggests entry pay of about Rs 10 to 12 lakh a year at Indian governance consultancies, rising to Rs 18 to 28 lakh after three to five years. Entry roles at think tanks typically pay Rs 6 to 10 lakh.

Privately funded roles pay the most. Professional services firms typically pay analysts Rs 8 to 14 lakh at entry, and global strategy firms pay hires after an MBA Rs 25 to 35 lakh. Heads of public policy at large companies, usually with ten or more years of experience, earn the highest salaries in the field.

These ranges are indicative. They come from what people told us and from public postings, not from a survey, and individual offers vary.

7.2 Four common career paths

PATH	TYPICAL ROUTE	WHAT IT OFFERS
Research	Research associate, then fellow, then senior fellow, with a public profile in one subject	Strong reputation and influence on ideas
Implementation	Governance consultancy or fellowship, then state PMUs, then a senior role at a foundation or delivery organisation	Close contact with results, often outside the metros
Corporate policy	Government advisory work, then public policy at a technology, finance or consumer company	The highest pay and deep regulatory knowledge
Lateral	Moving across think tanks, government, foundations, multilaterals and consultancies over a decade	Breadth and a wide range of options

7.3 Paying for early roles

Some well-known early roles pay modestly or not at all; NITI Aayog's internship is unpaid. Several entry routes pay from the first month: state fellowships, NITI Aayog Young Professional roles, PMU roles funded by philanthropy, remote research roles, and professional services firms that hire from campuses across India.

7.4 The middle level

Organisations need experienced managers as they grow. In a Bridgespan survey of about 250 Indian NGOs, more than half were not confident that someone inside could lead if their senior leader stepped away. People who build management skills alongside subject depth are in demand.

7.5 What helps careers last

- **Depth in one or two subjects,** such as health, education, climate, data protection or public finance.
- **A visible body of work:** articles, analysis, talks and projects you can point to.
- **A strong network,** especially people a few years ahead of you and in state governments.
- **Financial planning,** so you can choose roles for what they teach.

Building the map

CHAPTER 7 ADDS ROLES AND CAREERS

KIND OF WORK	WHAT IT PRODUCES	TYPICAL FIRMS	ENTRY ROLES	WHERE CAREERS LEAD
Governance consulting	Redesigned systems, launched schemes, dashboards and PMUs	Indian governance consultancies, professional services firms, global strategy firms	Associate or analyst in an embedded team or PMU; Chief Minister fellow; NITI Aayog Young Professional	Implementation, lateral or corporate policy paths
Social impact consulting	Strategies, programme designs and monitoring frameworks for funders	International development consultancies, social impact firms, CSR advisory teams	Analyst or associate at a development or social impact consultancy; CSR analyst	Senior roles in foundations and CSR, or the lateral path
Research and evaluation	Evaluations, impact studies, surveys and policy briefs	Evaluation and research organisations, think tanks	Research associate, field manager or data analyst	Research, policy advisory roles or academia

Highlighted columns are new in this chapter. The full map is in Chapter 11.

KEY TAKEAWAY

By year three, choose the kind of work and the subject you want to build depth in. Those choices shape a career more than any single offer.

DO THIS NEXT Compare roles and paths on the Policy Career Navigator.

8

CHAPTER 8

How to get in

What firms test, and how each type of firm hires

IN BRIEF

1. Consulting hiring tests structured problem-solving, data and writing most directly.
2. Each type of firm runs a different hiring process.
3. Evidence of work already done counts most.

8.1 What consulting hiring tests

The six skills that matter across the policy field are set out in Question 8 of our companion careers guide. Consulting interviews test three of them most directly.

- **Structured problem-solving,** through case interviews: breaking a question such as how to improve learning in a district into parts, hypotheses and the evidence needed. It improves with practice.
- **Data fluency,** through tests and take-home tasks: cleaning, merging and charting government datasets such as NSS, PLFS, NFHS or UDISE+. Interviewers also check that you notice when a merge quietly drops districts.
- **Writing,** through written diagnostics and take-home decks: explaining a scheme to a senior officer in a few hundred clear words.

Firms also look at how you work with people, and whether you use AI tools well: checking every source and figure they produce. Subject depth matters more after two or three years.

8.2 How each type of firm hires

- **Global strategy firms:** case interviews and a conversation on why government work appeals to you. Campus hiring follows the business school calendar.
- **Professional services firms:** campus hiring, experienced hires based on past work and references, plus specialist hiring for sectors such as health, energy or digital

government.

- **International development consultancies:** four or five rounds, usually with a take-home strategy document or deck defended before a panel. Hiring follows project wins.
- **Indian governance consultancies:** often four rounds: a written diagnostic or short video, a governance case, a conversation about past work, and an interview on why you want government work.
- **Evaluation and research organisations:** a cover letter, a take-home exercise such as designing or critiquing an evaluation, and two or three interviews. Expect questions on sampling and inference.

8.3 Routes into government

- **Young Professional schemes** at NITI Aayog and many ministries are a major channel. NITI Aayog now recruits through its Work for Viksit Bharat portal.
- **Chief Minister fellowships** run in more than a dozen states (see Chapter 3). Application windows vary by state.
- **The LAMP Fellowship** places a small cohort of graduates with Members of Parliament each year, for about an academic year.

8.4 Building in from outside the metros

- **Build a portfolio:** published articles, a newsletter or a data project shows your thinking before an interview.
- **Use remote routes:** remote research roles and writing programmes are more common than before.
- **Choose a subject that suits where you are:** rural livelihoods, agriculture, district health and tribal affairs reward local knowledge.

8.5 What AI changes

AI now handles much first-pass work: literature scans, data cleaning, formatting and first drafts. The World Bank's World Development Report 2026 estimates that 4.5% of jobs in low and middle-income countries are at risk of automation from generative AI, against 14.2% in high-income economies. The gap largely reflects the mix of jobs: richer economies have more office work, the kind generative AI affects most.

Three kinds of skill remain hard to automate, and are worth building on purpose.

- **Fieldwork.** Spending time in districts, villages and offices shows how a scheme works in practice. Volunteer for field visits, accompany surveys, and write up what you see.
- **Judgment.** Deciding which numbers to trust, what to recommend and when to raise a concern. It grows when you write down your reasoning before decisions and compare it with what happened.
- **Relationships.** Trust with officials, partners and communities is built over time. Follow through on small commitments, share credit, and stay in touch after a project ends.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Show evidence of work already done: one published piece, one analysis of a dataset or one talk counts for more than many cover letters.

DO THIS NEXT Talk to people a few years ahead of you at a Policy Circle.

PART IV

IV

How the sector works

Who pays, how work is won, and what good engagements leave behind.

9 Clients, funding and how work is won

10 Building capacity that lasts



9

CHAPTER 9

Clients, funding and how work is won

Who pays, and how contracts are awarded

IN BRIEF

1. Four kinds of clients fund this sector: central government, states, multilaterals, and philanthropy and CSR.
2. Most government work is won through quality and cost based selection or empanelment.
3. The source of funding shapes the timelines, reporting and style of the work.

9.1 Four kinds of clients

- **Central government.** Ministries hire through long-term empanelments, project-specific procurement under the Manual for Procurement of Consultancy Services (Second Edition, 2025), and direct hiring of Young Professionals and consultants.
- **State governments.** Work takes three forms: embedded teams in a Chief Minister's or Chief Secretary's office, defined projects, and PMUs that run centrally sponsored schemes at state level.
- **Multilaterals and bilaterals.** The World Bank, ADB, AIIB, UN agencies and bilateral donors. The World Bank's India Country Partnership Framework, agreed in January 2026, plans USD 8 to 10 billion a year in financing.
- **Philanthropy and CSR.** About Rs 1.43 lakh crore of private giving in FY25, including Rs 40,794 crore of CSR; families give about 42% of it.

9.2 How work is won

Quality and cost based selection (QCBS) is the standard route. Government tenders usually weight technical against financial scores at 70:30, sometimes 80:20. Bids are scored on experience, team, work plan and understanding of the assignment, then on price. **Empanelment** is a parallel route for repeat work. Smaller firms often start through services procurement on the **Government e-Marketplace**, by sub-contracting to an empanelled firm, or by joining a consortium bid.

9.3 What the source of funding means for the work

- **Government:** government rates, government timelines, formal accountability rules.
- **Foundations:** longer planning horizons, more reporting, and more room to shape the design.
- **Corporate and CSR:** tighter deadlines, defined deliverables and attention to visible results.

9.4 The scale of the need

India's social sector funding was about Rs 27 lakh crore in FY25, around 8% of GDP. Measured against NITI Aayog's norms, Bain and Dasra estimate a funding gap of about Rs 16 lakh crore, which puts total need at roughly Rs 43 lakh crore. Consulting is a small part of the response; its role is to help institutions use the money they have well.

Building the map

CHAPTER 9 ADDS THE CLIENTS

KIND OF WORK	WHAT IT PRODUCES	TYPICAL FIRMS	ENTRY ROLES	WHERE CAREERS LEAD	MAIN CLIENTS
Governance consulting	Redesigned systems, launched schemes, dashboards and PMUs	Indian governance consultancies, professional services firms, global strategy firms	Associate or analyst in an embedded team or PMU; Chief Minister fellow; NITI Aayog Young Professional	Implementation, lateral or corporate policy paths	Central ministries, state governments, NITI Aayog
Social impact consulting	Strategies, programme designs and monitoring frameworks for funders	International development consultancies, social impact firms, CSR advisory teams	Analyst or associate at a development or social impact consultancy; CSR analyst	Senior roles in foundations and CSR, or the lateral path	Foundations, family offices, CSR teams, large NGOs, multilaterals
Research and evaluation	Evaluations, impact studies, surveys and policy briefs	Evaluation and research organisations, think tanks	Research associate, field manager or data analyst	Research, policy advisory roles or academia	Governments, foundations and multilaterals

Highlighted columns are new in this chapter. The full map is in Chapter 11.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Understand the funding map before an interview. The source of the money explains much about how a role will feel day to day.

DO THIS NEXT Read one live consultancy tender on the Government e-Marketplace to see how work is specified.

10

CHAPTER 10

Building capacity that lasts

What good engagements leave behind, and what is changing

IN BRIEF

1. The best engagements leave governments more capable after the consultants leave.
2. Good practice runs across an engagement: before it starts, while it runs and after it ends.
3. Several shifts are already under way, from state-level work to climate and AI.

10.1 Capacity that stays

A recurring question in this sector is whether outside teams help governments build capacity or stand in for it. The answer depends on design. A contract that fills posts for a fixed period adds hands while it runs. An embedded team that redesigns processes alongside officials, and trains the people who stay, leaves systems that keep working; Saksham Haryana is a widely cited example.

Matt Andrews, Lant Pritchett and Michael Woolcock, in Building State Capability, warn that a new authority, dashboard or strategy can look like capacity without creating it. Their alternative, problem-driven iterative adaptation, starts from local problems and short feedback loops. Vijay Kelkar and Ajay Shah, in In Service of the Republic, add that serious reform moves through a pipeline of data, research, debate, law and delivery. It takes years. Nikhil Menon's Planning Democracy shows that institutions built to produce trusted data, such as the National Sample Survey, outlast individual plans.

10.2 What consulting teams can do to leave capacity behind

STAGE	PRACTICES THAT HELP
Before the work starts	Take on work where the question is still open, so analysis can shape the decision. Agree what success looks like and how it will be measured.
While the work runs	Work alongside officials rather than in parallel. Document processes as you build them. Build data systems and dashboards that the department owns and can maintain. Train the staff who will stay.
When the work ends	Agree a written handover plan. Report honestly on what the engagement did and did not achieve. Support independent evaluation of the results.

A practical test for any engagement: could someone inside government do this again next year without you?

10.3 Shifts already under way

- **More work at state level,** through fellowships, delivery units and funding linked to performance.
- **Climate as a major field,** as India's carbon market creates demand for measurement, reporting and verification.
- **Stronger Indian firms:** a government committee set up in 2025 and the Corporate Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026 aim to help Indian professional services firms grow.
- **AI in delivery:** governments and firms are building AI into their work, creating new roles.

10.4 By career stage

- **Entering:** pick a subject where being early helps, such as climate, GovTech or evaluation.
- **Mid-career:** build a recognised voice in one subject.
- **Senior:** mentor others and help build shared standards.

KEY TAKEAWAY

When an engagement ends, ask what it leaves behind. Work that leaves stronger institutions builds the strongest careers.

DO THIS NEXT With five or more years of work, join PPI Executive; otherwise, join your PPI city chapter.

11

CHAPTER 11

The sector at a glance

Kinds of work, clients, firms, roles and skills on one page

IN BRIEF

1. This chapter brings together the tables from across the guide.
2. Read each row from left to right to follow one kind of work from client to career.
3. Three skills matter in every kind of work: writing, using AI well and subject depth.

Chapters 1, 4, 7 and 9 each added a column to this map: the kinds of work, the firms, careers and pay, then the clients.

Governance consulting

WHO PAYS	WHO DOES THE WORK	WHERE YOU START	WHERE IT LEADS
Ministries and states	Governance consultancies and professional services firms	Associate, PMU analyst or Chief Minister fellow	Implementation or corporate policy

Social impact consulting

WHO PAYS	WHO DOES THE WORK	WHERE YOU START	WHERE IT LEADS
Foundations, CSR and family offices	Development and social impact consultancies	Analyst or CSR analyst	Foundation leadership or a lateral path

Research and evaluation

WHO PAYS	WHO DOES THE WORK	WHERE YOU START	WHERE IT LEADS
Governments, foundations and multilaterals	Evaluation and research organisations	Research associate or field manager	Research, advisory or academia

The full map

ALL CHAPTERS

	GOVERNANCE CONSULTING	SOCIAL IMPACT CONSULTING	RESEARCH AND EVALUATION
Main clients	Central ministries, state governments, NITI Aayog	Foundations, family offices, CSR teams, large NGOs, multilaterals	Governments, foundations and multilaterals
Typical firms	Indian governance consultancies, professional services firms, global strategy firms	International development consultancies, social impact firms, CSR advisory teams	Evaluation and research organisations, think tanks
What it produces	Redesigned systems, launched schemes, dashboards and PMUs	Strategies, programme designs and monitoring frameworks for funders	Evaluations, impact studies, surveys and policy briefs
Entry roles	Associate or analyst in an embedded team or PMU; Chief Minister fellow; NITI Aayog Young Professional	Analyst or associate at a development or social impact consultancy; CSR analyst	Research associate, field manager or data analyst
Where careers lead	Implementation, lateral or corporate policy paths	Senior roles in foundations and CSR, or the lateral path	Research, policy advisory roles or academia

11.1 Skills by kind of work

KIND OF WORK	SKILLS TO BUILD FIRST
Governance consulting	Structured problem-solving, data fluency, working with officials, patience with budget cycles
Social impact consulting	Clear storylines, financial modelling for social investment, communicating with boards, knowledge of a sector
Research and evaluation	Research methods and statistics, survey management, careful writing
All three	Writing for busy readers, using AI well and checking its output, depth in one subject

11.2 How to use this map

- **If you are starting out,** start from the kind of work that appeals most, then read the matching scenes in Chapter 5.
- **If you are applying,** match the firm type to the row, and prepare for that type's hiring process in Chapter 8.
- **If you are a few years in,** look along the row to "Where careers lead", and decide which subject to go deep in.

DO THIS NEXT Join your PPI city chapter and bring this map to your next Policy Circle.

AFTER YOU READ

Next steps and resources

What to do after you close this guide, and where to find help

Here are some next steps people often find useful, by where they are now.

In college

Join the PPI city chapter in your city and come to a Policy Circle. Read one book from the reading lists each term, and apply for one internship at a think tank, foundation or state PMU.

Early career

Pick a subject within your first year and build a small body of writing or analysis in it. Meet one person a month who is a few years ahead of you, and consider a structured fellowship.

Two to five years in

Decide which of the three kinds of work you want to deepen, and which subject. Weigh whether a policy degree fills a real gap before you apply.

Senior

Build a public voice in your subject, mentor people a few years behind you, and help your organisation leave capacity behind in every engagement. You can join PPI Executive.

Scan to stay connected

All resources
Every PPI and STRIDE tool and database

Career Navigator
100+ careers, 1,500+ pathways

The Policy Post
Weekly openings and policy news

City chapters
Join people in your city

Free resources from Public Policy India and STRIDE

RESOURCE	WHAT IT GIVES YOU
All resources	Every PPI and STRIDE tool, database and publication in one place
Policy Career Navigator	100+ careers and 1,500+ pathways across 12 domains
Fellowships and scholarships	Current state and national fellowships and scholarships
Hiring organisations	Organisations that hire in policy and social impact

RESOURCE	WHAT IT GIVES YOU
Sarani	STRIDE's guide to 240+ Indian public data sources
The Policy Post	A free weekly newsletter with job openings and the week in policy
PPI City Chapters	WhatsApp chapters in India's 25 largest cities, and the Policy Circles they host
Policy Panchayat	Conversations with practitioners on their work and paths
PPI Executive	The network for people with more than five years of work
The State of Policy in India	STRIDE's annual report on the people entering the field
Understanding Policymaking and Building Meaningful Careers	Our companion guide to the whole policy and social impact field

FOR STUDENT SOCIETIES, CITY CHAPTERS AND TEAMS

Discussing this guide in a group

Ideas stick better when they are argued over. If you lead a student society, a PPI city chapter or a team, you can use this guide for a ninety-minute discussion. Ask everyone to read the chapters beforehand, then use these six prompts.

Chapter 2 lists six forces raising demand. Which one would change least under a different government, and why?

Chapter 4 describes five kinds of firm. Which fits the work you want to do?

Case 3 shows measurement driving improvement. What would you measure in your own district or city?

Chapter 7 links pay to who funds the work. How should that shape a first job choice?

Chapter 10 asks what an engagement leaves behind. Pick a programme you know and answer.

Use the map in Chapter 11 to trace one path from client to career. What would you need to learn first?

METHOD

How this guide was checked

We use primary sources wherever we can: laws and notifications, government data and the reports of public bodies. We also draw on secondary sources, such as published books, research and independent reviews, and on news reports where they were the clearest public record. Every source is linked in the text. Facts were checked in October 2026; programmes, stipends and figures change, so check the official page before acting on any detail.

What is our own

Pay ranges for firms in Chapter 7 come from what members of our community reported to us between 2024 and 2026, checked against public job postings; they are indicative, not a survey. The scenes in Chapter 5 come from real engagements, with names and identifying details left out. The map in Chapter 11 and the frameworks throughout are our own synthesis of public sources and our community's experience.

How examples were chosen

Organisations and programmes are named to illustrate a point, and many others could have been named. Naming one is not an endorsement, and leaving one out is not a judgment. PPI's own tools are mentioned because they are free and built for the readers of this guide.

A habit worth building: five questions for any number

Consultants are handed numbers every day, by clients, reports and the news. These five questions help you judge them quickly.

1. What does it measure?
Read the definition before the number.

2. Is it for one year, or many?
A cumulative total and an annual figure tell different stories.

3. Compared with when?
A change depends on the starting year chosen.

4. Who is it about?
A survey describes its respondents, not everyone.

5. Who produced it, and why?

Knowing the source helps you judge how closely to look.

Where to find current figures

Figures that change often are dated where they appear. These are the places to check for the latest ones.

FIGURE	WHERE IT IS UPDATED
Fellowship and stipend details	Each programme's current advertisement, and PPI's fellowships database
Bills, Acts and rules	PRS Bill Track and the ministry's website
Tax sharing with states	Finance Commission reports and the Union Budget
Philanthropy and CSR	Bain and Dasra's India Philanthropy Report, and the National CSR Portal
Who is entering the field	STRIDE's State of Policy in India

No organisation funded or reviewed this guide before publication. To suggest a correction, write to contact@publicpolicyindia.com.

ABOUT US

Public Policy India and STRIDE

Public Policy India (PPI) is India's first and largest pan-India community of public policy and social impact professionals, students and institutions, 150,000+ members strong. Founded on 15 August 2020, it runs 40+ city chapters across India's 25 largest cities and The Policy Post, a weekly newsletter with 22,000+ subscribers, and has held 80+ in-person sessions across 40+ universities. More than half its members are women, and more than half live outside the largest metros. Everything in the community is free for its members.

STRIDE (Strategic Research and Impact Development Enterprise) is a new age policy think tank that inculcates and enacts the perspectives of India's youth into policymaking and the impact sector, working in cohesion with partners across the ecosystem. It grew out of Public Policy India and was launched on 14 August 2026 at the first National Policy Forum at the India International Centre, New Delhi. Both are guided by a Board of Advisors of senior practitioners.

Community

Policy Circles, city chapters, The Policy Post, Policy Panchayat and PPI Executive.

Capacity building

Workshops and academic engagements, the Policy Career Navigator, career databases, Sarani and Polis.

Consulting and research

The State of Policy in India, pulse surveys, policy communication, youth engagement and programme design.

Stay in touch

WEBSITE
publicpolicyindia.com

EMAIL
contact@publicpolicyindia.com

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REFERENCE

Glossary

Terms used in this guide

ADP/ABP
Aspirational Districts Programme and Aspirational Blocks Programme, NITI Aayog's programmes covering 112 districts and 500 blocks.

Block
The administrative unit below a district, through which many rural schemes are delivered.

CMGGA
Chief Minister's Good Governance Associates, Haryana's fellowship programme since 2016.

CSR
Corporate social responsibility. Under Section 135 of the Companies Act 2013, qualifying companies spend 2% of average net profits on defined social activities.

DIB
Development impact bond. An investor funds delivery upfront and is repaid by outcome funders if verified results are achieved.

DPI
Digital public infrastructure: shared digital systems for identity, payments and data exchange.

Empanelment
A pre-approved list of firms a government department can hire from for repeat work, without a fresh tender each time.

FCRA
Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, which governs foreign funding of Indian organisations.

GeM
Government e-Marketplace, the Union government's procurement platform.

LAMP
Legislative Assistants to Members of Parliament, PRS Legislative Research's fellowship.

PDIA
Problem-driven iterative adaptation, a method for building state capability through local problems and short feedback loops.

PMU
Programme management unit: a team placed inside a ministry or department to run a scheme or reform.

QCBS
Quality and cost based selection, the standard procurement route for consultancy services.

Randomised evaluation
A study that compares groups chosen at random, some receiving a programme and some not, to measure its effect.

UDISE+
The Ministry of Education's school-level database.

VB-G RAM G
Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025, which replaced MGNREGA on 1 July 2026.

YP
Young Professional, a common contractual entry role in central ministries, NITI Aayog and state governments.

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Now do the work

This guide is free, and meant to be shared. If it has been useful, pass it to a classmate, a junior colleague, or anyone weighing a move into policy or social impact work.

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MAP YOUR CAREER	Policy Career Navigator
EVERY WEEK	The Policy Post
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