
**High-level landscape
analysis of civil society
support ecosystems: China**



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High level landscape analysis of civil society support infrastructure in China

Executive summary

China's nonprofit support ecosystem operates within significant external constraints, including political limitations and a lack of core funding. Many support organizations are small, restricted by challenges such as resource and talents, common challenges faced by the non-profit sector in China. Additionally, the support sector lacks a coherent network or infrastructure, making collaboration and resource-sharing fragmented.

Despite these challenges, the support sector is creative and innovative, developing low-cost, scalable models that serve a broad community. Some organizations are also tackling structural issues, such as experimenting with new fundraising mechanisms and shifting societal perceptions of nonprofit careers.

Key observations highlight a sector that is both constrained and dynamic—a case of “dancing in shackles.” The ecosystem is surprisingly vibrant and diverse yet lacks established consulting services and large-scale business operations. Many organizations are blending business principles with nonprofit work, exploring hybrid models that challenge traditional philanthropic approaches.

More widely, China's nonprofit landscape is complex, evolving, and non-conclusive, functioning as an ecosystem of its own. A deeper analysis is needed to unpack its dynamics and explore strategic interventions (see recommendations).

1. Summary of target audience and scoping/sampling strategy

Methodology

This research is designed for an international audience with limited familiarity with China's civil society. It aims to provide a high-level overview, helping readers understand the landscape of Chinese CSOs and their support ecosystems, while offering top-line insights for improving organizational development within this context.

The research employed a snowball sampling approach, starting with Chinese CSO actors and gradually expanding to encompass the broader support ecosystem:

1. **Snowball sampling and sample expansion** The study began with leaders of environmental and climate organizations, focusing on small to mid-sized grassroots organizations and grasstop institutions (influential leaders or organizations at the grassroots level). From this initial group, the sample expanded to include domestic Chinese foundations specializing in organizational development and CSO infrastructure, as well as a variety of support organizations
2. **Building trust and sample characteristics** Conducting interviews remotely required significant trust-building. Consequently, the research started with organizations with pre-

existing relationships. Within China's third sector¹, many organizations have strong ties to government or business entities. This study, however, focused on organizations that are comparatively more independent, grassroots-oriented, or adopt grassroots approaches

The final sample included:

- **Six grassroots organizations** representative of China's civil society
- **Two domestic foundations** that have a focus on organizational development (OD) support and CSO infrastructure building
- **Ten support organizations** providing diverse forms of assistance to CSOs across a range of issues in China

3. **Limitations of the study** Due to time constraints, the study prioritized exploring the more "independent" section of China's civil society. Consequently, several significant areas were excluded, such as international donors, international NGOs, and related support structures. The study also did not delve deeply into entities closely affiliated with or serving the state and business sectors. Additionally, only one support network based in Southwest China was examined, limiting perspectives from local contexts. Overall, the study aims to look at actors active in China, it therefore has left out almost entirely the often called right-based groups.

¹ Drawing from a U.S.-based framework, China's civil society often calls itself the "third sector," distinct from the first sector (government) and second sector (business).

2. “Setting the scene”: CSOs’ needs, development, and access to support

“Funding, talent, and operations are the three core challenges identified in a recent industry report...(From my perspective), these three issues are deeply intertwined—fundraising difficulties put organizations on the brink of survival, while staff attrition, particularly the departure of key personnel, further exacerbates challenges in fundraising and operations. However, money and talents are just surface-level symptoms; the real question is whether organizations are strategically and operationally adapting in a timely manner”

- CEO of a grassroots NGO in China

Key characteristics of China’s civil society sector

A strong government presence China is a nation where the government exerts significant control and influence across various sectors, including civil society. Over the past decade, the government has tightened its management of the sector, constraining the operational and survival space for many organizations. Space for rights-related organisations has significantly diminished².

Late start but diverse development China’s environmental movement, one of the earliest civil movements in modern China spurred by industrialisation and international support, shows that, China’s civil society sector began developing relatively late. Currently, government-backed organizations are primarily active in the fields of charity and disaster relief, with their focus shifting from early poverty alleviation efforts to rural revitalization. Civil society organizations primarily address livelihood-related issues, such as education and child welfare, medical care, and health assistance. In recent years, newer topics have emerged, including diversity and equality, such as disability rights and gender issues, as well as climate mitigation and adaptation.

Large in scale yet still lacking professionalization Despite the large number of organizations in China’s civil society sector (900,000 registered social groups³, which includes almost 10,000 foundations, excluding others not registered), the overall level of professionalization remains relatively low with some limited exceptions. Geographically, most leading organizations are concentrated in the capital and coastal cities.

CSO Needs

Legitimacy

- **Survival issues**
CSOs in China face numerous challenges in registration, approval, and maintaining relationships with government authorities. In general, the more an organisation is considered ‘independent’ or the less affiliated or (considered) aligned with the government, the more likely it will face such challenges
- **Operational issues**
Informal interventions such as being summoned for a “chat” by state entities create expectations for organisations to align its activities with the government’s priorities

² Mar 2022, EU Roadmap for Civil Society in China for Period 2021-2025

³ China Development Brief, Nov, 2022, China Social Organization Report (2022), 《中国社会组织报告 (2022) 》, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/L-00pMhTSFX_z7cGRSJMyg

Compared to many other countries, the nonprofit sector in China wields relatively limited “power”

Fundraising

- **Declining sources of funding**
The overall income of civil society organizations has declined significantly, driven by the economic downturn and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (data suggested to support this claim). Government procurement still constitutes a major source of funding. However, with tightened fiscal budgets and reduced corporate profits, donations from businesses and the public have also decreased sharply. In 2022, the total number of registered CSOs is stagnating for the first time since records started in 2008 according to a nation-wide study⁴
- **Uneven distribution of resources**
The current trend is that funding is flowing towards a small number of leading organizations and specific issues. Among environmental organisations, those well-resourced groups tend to work on international coop and companies green supply chains and climate⁵
- **Restrictions on international funding**
As international funding decreases, organizations are exploring ways to secure resources domestically, including tapping into domestic foundations, businesses, the public, and even government procurement. As of 2023, government and domestic foundations are reported to be main sources of funding for environmental groups⁶
- **Lack of unrestricted funding**
A repeatedly mentioned main challenge is the shortage of unrestricted funding for organizational development and capacity building. CSOs spoke about the restricted funding acquisition process being often complex, reporting requirements are burdensome, or funding disbursement is significantly delayed, making it particularly challenging for smaller organizations to cope

Talent

- **Challenges in recruitment and retention**
With limited funding, constrained development opportunities, and even survival pressures, nearly all organizations face difficulties in recruiting, retaining, and motivating staff. The median staff size in the sector is approximately three people, with an average annual income of 100,000CNY⁷

⁴ China Development Brief, Nov, 2022, China Social Organization Report (2022), 《中国社会组织报告（2022）》，https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/L-00pMhTSFX_z7cGRSJMyg

⁵ SEE et al, 2023, Report on the Status of China’s Environmental Protection Public Interest Organisations, 2023 中国环保 组织现状调研报告, link: [https://www.vankefoundation.com/upload/file/2023-12-25/1562dcb7-a8ec-4a03-9fcb-95e3ac7dcf1a/2023%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E7%8E%AF%E4%BF%9D%E5%85%AC%E7%9B%8A%E7%BB%84%E7%BB%87%E7%8E%B0%E7%8A%B6%E8%B0%83%E7%A0%94%E6%8A%A5%E5%91%8A\(1\).pdf](https://www.vankefoundation.com/upload/file/2023-12-25/1562dcb7-a8ec-4a03-9fcb-95e3ac7dcf1a/2023%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E7%8E%AF%E4%BF%9D%E5%85%AC%E7%9B%8A%E7%BB%84%E7%BB%87%E7%8E%B0%E7%8A%B6%E8%B0%83%E7%A0%94%E6%8A%A5%E5%91%8A(1).pdf) (Accessed on Feb 10 2025)

⁶ ibid

⁷ SEE et al, 2023, Report on the Status of China’s Environmental Protection Public Interest Organisations, 2023 中国环保 组织现状调研报告, link: [https://www.vankefoundation.com/upload/file/2023-12-25/1562dcb7-a8ec-4a03-9fcb-95e3ac7dcf1a/2023%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E7%8E%AF%E4%BF%9D%E5%85%AC%E7%9B%8A%E7%BB%84%E7%BB%87%E7%8E%B0%E7%8A%B6%E8%B0%83%E7%A0%94%E6%8A%A5%E5%91%8A\(1\).pdf](https://www.vankefoundation.com/upload/file/2023-12-25/1562dcb7-a8ec-4a03-9fcb-95e3ac7dcf1a/2023%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E7%8E%AF%E4%BF%9D%E5%85%AC%E7%9B%8A%E7%BB%84%E7%BB%87%E7%8E%B0%E7%8A%B6%E8%B0%83%E7%A0%94%E6%8A%A5%E5%91%8A(1).pdf) (Accessed on Feb 10 2025)

- **Lack of professional appeal**
Compared to countries with more developed nonprofit sectors, professionals in China's civil society may find it harder to derive a sense of honor or accomplishment from their work

Operations and management

- **Limitation in vision, strategies and approaches**
Grassroots organizations tend to focus on local or specific issues, the lack of unrestricted funding and fear for legitimacy limit their appetite for bold or innovative approaches . For example, China's local environmental organizations often started with pollution-related topics and have not yet gained deep insights into climate issues and are often still grappling to effectively pivot in the short term
- **Shortage of professional skills**
With the exception of a few organizations, most lack more technical capabilities in areas such as digital tools, compliance, finance, human resources, and communication. Some organizations rely on outsourced services, while others require their staff to take on multiple roles
- **Other challenges**
Seen from the corporate or support sector's perspectives, many organizations face difficulties in areas such as leadership (inc. transition), organizational management, performance evaluation, branding, network building, and follower or funder relationship maintenance

Current State of CSO development

Self-exploration driven by passion: The smaller the organization, the more likely it is to rely on passion-driven, ad-hoc learning and development efforts.

Leader-driven development: Mid-sized CSOs typically depend on the preferences of their leaders to determine whether resources and time are allocated to staff and team development. This is more common among organizations with access to flexible, unrestricted funding.

Peer learning and mutual support: Some organizations with similar years of establishment form informal networks to exchange experiences, discuss challenges, and support each other's development. One interviewee spoke about a group of women founders of organisations of 5-10 years develop by mutual support.

Outsourcing specialised services: Instead of hiring, many organizations outsource work deemed to require certain expertise, such as communications and finance.

Strategy and program development: The interviewed organizations exhibit strong independence, with all of them handling strategy development and iterations internally. Larger organizations are more likely to collaborate with aligned support providers, typically a small consultancy company, to co-develop projects, such as a community-building initiative or an AI-supported public education tool.

Talent and leadership development: Founders and senior leaders often have greater access to fellowship programs and other training opportunities. Larger organizations may provide executive coaching or mentorship through board members. Peer-learning opportunities also exist among some organization leaders. However, training programs for new and mid-level staff remain limited.

Organizational management and development: Most interviewed organizations rely on their leaders to drive organizational management and development. However, insights from support organizations suggest that some CSOs procure external services to enhance their organizational management and operational capacity/efficiency.

Access to support

Political environment is a primary factor. All the interviewed organizations, regardless of size, mentioned the issue of restricted space for operation to varying degrees, which indirectly reflects the reality of CSOs "dancing with shackles."

When compared to the rapid rise of the business sector since China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), the ecosystem and development space for CSOs remain relatively barren. Due to political constraints, not all types of CSOs are able to fully exercise and grow.

Furthermore, there is limited public understanding and by extension support to CSOs.

Funding constraints, especially the lack of unrestricted funding is also a limiting factor. Apart from the overall decrease in funding and the concentration of resources in a few organizations and specific issues, even organizations with some resources may not have sufficient time or freedom to focus on institutional building and long-term development.

In the past, international donors provided relatively flexible funding (i.e. unrestricted or core) support. However, with China being considered a wealthier country hence not suitable for development funding, coupled with increasingly strict process to comply with China's foreign NGO law introduced in 2016, some international foundations (Parker and Ford Foundations) have reportedly withdrawn or plan to reduce their funding. In addition, domestic organizations receiving international funds may face greater scrutiny, making the acquisition and use of funds more difficult.

Mismatch between supply and demand has its own cultural roots. This is first because in China's relationship-based society, resource matching often relies on personal networks and trust. While there have been recent efforts to build nonprofit infrastructure, the COVID-19 pandemic has weakened social bonds, trust, and the sense of community, making access to support even more challenging.

Also due to limited capacity and resource, many organizations hesitate to seek support until they face severe challenges. This "crisis-driven" approach limits opportunities for proactive organizational development.

3. The ecosystem of support

Existing support, accessibility and effectiveness

What kinds of support exist for strengthening CSOs? Who is providing this support?

This second part of the research, conducted over a one-month period in early 2025, included interviews with two domestic foundations that provide support to CSOs and ten organizations offering various forms of support across different issue areas within China's nonprofit sector.

Main support organization types: funders and small companies

From a legal registration perspective, support organizations primarily operate as foundations or companies. Among those registered as businesses, some follow social enterprise standards despite the absence of an official social enterprise registration category in China. Others, which could have been registered as nonprofits, opted for a corporate structure due to accountability considerations. Additionally, some organizations are formally registered as nonprofit entities. Support organizations are generally small in scale.

Regional support underexplored but potentially weak

This research included very few regional support organizations, with only one called Yunan Xieli Public Interest Support Centre (云南协力公益支持中心), based in Yunnan serving the grassroots groups based in Yunnan Province and the wider Southwest region. Therefore, further research is needed to assess regional coverage comprehensively. Overall, it seems that support systems in regional areas, particularly in western China, remain relatively underdeveloped.

Does the supply meet the demands of CSOs' needs? If not, what are the gaps in this support?

The current support ecosystem falls far short of meeting the needs of Chinese CSOs. While there are 900,000 registered social groups (broadly like CSOs) across the country in 2022,⁸ the number of support organizations is estimated to be only a few dozen. Furthermore, each of these organizations operates with limited personnel and resources.

- Key gap: challenges related to legitimacy remain unresolved

The biggest challenge facing CSOs is their survival and operational space, which is largely determined by the political and policy environment. Since support organizations also exist within this environment, they have limited capacity to drive systemic change, especially outside of government's priority areas.

Despite these constraints, some support organizations are working to improve public perception of the nonprofit sector. For example, Moderator (墨德瑞特), a consulting firm specializing in human resource management, identified a critical gap: the general public has limited awareness and understanding of the nonprofit sector. To address this, they have been experimenting with embedding positive portrayals of nonprofit professionals into short video content.

- Key gap: The persistent challenge of funding

Apart from a few foundations providing limited financial support, CSOs still face severe constraints in accessing unrestricted funding, a fundamental issue that remains unsolved.

In response, some organizations have begun exploring new fundraising models. For instance, A Better Community (ABC 美好社会咨询社) is developing a donor circle targeting individuals who fall

⁸ China Development Brief, Nov, 2022, China Social Organization Report (2022), 《中国社会组织报告 (2022)》, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/L-00pMhTSFX_z7cGRSJMyg

between high-net-worth donors and the general public, with expected annual contributions ranging from 1,000 to 100,000 RMB.

Is the support available both accessible and of high quality?

Due to high demand and limited supply, many support organizations have explored **low-cost, scalable operational models to maximize service coverage**. Below are some models used by interviewees:

Volunteer-based support model: Several support organizations operate with a small number of full-time staff managing a large pool of volunteers, ensuring cost efficiency while serving as many CSOs as possible. Examples include ABC and SEE Foundation.

Standardized and scalable training model: Standardized courses and structured processes are used to scale services at a lower cost. That Spark is one example.

Self-replicable organisation model: Some organizations streamline its own operations so it can easily replicate more support entities to reduce operational and expansion costs. One example is Gong Yi Fang.

Unclear effectiveness and quality in the support system

To some extent, the existing support system has alleviated the talent shortage in the nonprofit sector and improved management and operational capabilities of organizations. However, interviewees generally believe that the quality of support is difficult to measure, and the extent of alignment in supply and demand also remains unclear.

Some support organizations have some ad-hoc assessment of the quality of their support, for example, ABC's statistics show that about 50% of its clients will purchase services again after their first experience, with a few clients continuing to buy, while a small number are dissatisfied with the services.

The market and development of local consultancy support

How would you describe the market for local consultancy support for organisational development provision to CSOs?

Given the vast and complex nature of China's CSOs and its support market, it is challenging to capture its full scope, especially within the constraints of remote and preliminary research.

Similarly, actors in both the nonprofit sector and its support system experience this fragmentation, making it even more difficult to define a clear landscape. In a constrained civic space, individual actors often experience isolation, and this is further compounded by the dynamic shifts in the political and economic landscape.

In China it seems that the independent consultant model is almost non-existent, with the smallest support teams typically operating as small partnerships of individuals. Additionally, some support organizations do not publicly disclose their official name, website, or registration status, yet they are well recognized within the sector. For example, one organization, led by experienced business professional(s), provides mentorship to hundreds of nonprofit organizations (e.g., Yuan Gongyi, 元公

益). Others have been established by teams with extensive experience in nonprofit communications, such as Ji Chuan Communications(汲川传播), founded by former senior Greenpeace communication professional(s).

What are the opportunities for consultants to develop their skills, connect with other consultants or networks, and have a collective voice?

Establishing a shared understanding of success, develop/iterate roles and approaches

It seems that while there have been some recent efforts to map the CSO infrastructure in China, there has not been much effort in mapping the CSO support ecosystems yet. In order to build a strong and coherent support ecosystem, the first step should be for the support organizations, their counterparts, and the broader ecosystem to come together and work towards establishing a common definition of what "success" looks like. This shared understanding will serve as the foundation for determining development priorities and potential areas for collaboration. When it comes to building partnership and wider networks, there is still much potential in further coordination. Specifically, organizations must clarify their roles within the ecosystem and ensure that their development strategies align with the actual needs of nonprofit organizations.

The support groups in China may also benefit from a deeper analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches used by peers in and outside China. If they choose to do so, they must also be mindful in adapting learnings to the China context.

More investment and coordination needed develop an 'ecosystem' of support

Finally, the infrastructure for the nonprofit support sector is still in its early stages. While there has been increasing interaction within the sector, a systematic and coordinated mechanism that effectively connects support organizations with the needs of nonprofit institutions has yet to take shape.

Additionally, there does not yet appear to be a dedicated network or infrastructure specifically for the nonprofit support sector. These efforts will be critical in fostering a more efficient and sustainable development ecosystem.

How is organisational development and strengthening resourced and by whom?

From the interview sample, most support organizations primarily rely on commercial services for revenue, with only a few receiving supplementary funding from domestic and international philanthropic sources. Some platform-based organizations, such as China Development Brief and Yunnan Xieli – a regional hub that supports groups in Yunnan or Southwest region to help different groups to think and test a climate approach in their work, mainly depend on grants, with little to no reliance on commercial services. Additionally, some larger nonprofit organizations, such as Friends of Nature, have established talent development programs in specific fields, such as climate action, which are largely funded through grants.

Within China's nonprofit sector, interviewees generally believe that the largest sources of funding currently include government procurement, followed by corporate donations and public donations channelled through commercial platforms. However, these funding sources typically do not provide

financial support for organizational development and are instead directed toward specific programmatic activities.

Yuan Gongyi, an entity founded by a well-known businesswoman who has been dedicating herself to mentor countless CSOs over the past two decades (partially via SEE Foundation, see annex case study), is currently looking to explore ways to channel funding from the business sector.

Currently, the main domestic providers of funding and other resources for developing the infrastructure for the nonprofit sector in China are grantmakers, grantmaker-initiated platforms and initiatives, nonprofit organizations, and nonprofit support organizations (*the following list is not exhaustive*).

Chinese funders supporting sector infrastructure

- Nandu Foundation (OD support, sector research)
- Dunhe Foundation (philanthropy governance, talent development)
- One Foundation (sector support, talent development)
- SEE Foundation (environmental philanthropy infrastructure)
- Leping Foundation (social innovation, social enterprises)

Chinese funders Focused on supporting the growth of nonprofits:

- Gingko Foundation (supporting leaders of small and medium-sized organizations)
- Sany Foundation (philanthropy innovation incubation)
- Shanghai United Foundation (support for small local organizations)

Talent and capacity building in climate and environmental issues:

- Friends of Nature - Linglong Program (incubating and fostering climate-focused nonprofit communities)
- Yunnan Xieli (introducing grassroots organizations in Southwest China to climate issues and perspectives)
- Tao Hua Yuan Foundation - Blue Pioneers Program (cultivating local talent in marine conservation)

Chinese funders' platforms:

- China Donors Roundtable (CDR): A peer-learning platform for funders. (<http://cdr4impact.org.cn/>)
- China Foundation Forum (CFF): A voluntary platform for foundations dedicated to institutional and sector development. (<https://www.cfforum.org.cn/>)
- China Foundation Centre: A platform for information disclosure on foundations in China. (<https://www.foundationcenter.org.cn/>)

Events

China Foundation Grantmaking Development Forum (2019) – A three-day event focused on enhancing the effectiveness of domestic grantmaking foundations amid the decline of international funding and the increasing role of local funders.

4. Conclusion

"The current state of the nonprofit support sector is a market failure within a market failure. (Due to the lack of unrestricted funding), many organizations can only allocate 10% of their raised funds to institutional development (which also limits how much they can procure from support organizations). As a result, while the sector appears diverse and vibrant, in reality, no single organization can scale significantly. Some have attempted to expand through volunteer-based models, which allow for some degree of scalability, but overall, the demand far exceeds the available support."

President of a support provider

"For climate-related issues, I feel that there is still insufficient communication between organizations occupying different niches. A report we are currently preparing indicates that while climate-focused organizations interact frequently among themselves, cross-sector exchanges remain limited. (As a platform organization facilitating these discussions, we have observed that) different organizations have various concerns—some may question whether discussing climate issues aligns with their target audience, while others may feel it falls outside their registered scope of work. What is still lacking is a true integration of climate thinking, where organizations actively incorporate it into their work and daily practices, making it a natural and effortless part of their approach."

Executive Director of a Civil Society platform

This research suggests that domestically in China, to build a stronger CSO ecosystem, there is a clear need to support the development of a stronger support ecosystem. More specifically, there are these areas to focus to dive deeper in the second phase of the study to understand the best interventions:

- Increase the visibility and understanding of the available support
- Fill existing gaps, related to addressing huge demand; matching supply and demand, as well as monitoring and improving quality of support
- Ways to increase core funding, via domestic foundations, new fundraising models such as targeting companies and the public, so more resources can go to OD for CSOs and support groups
- Identify and support active local players to build and nurture a support ecosystem, this includes building a common understanding of success for the support ecosystem in order to define different roles and better coordination

Related to this, there is the possibility of engaging with the organisations in the case study profile (see Annex), especially to understand how they have innovated to address some of the systematic challenges related to funding, talent, social acceptance of CSOs etc. One possibility is to explore if this can be tailored to the emerging climate movements in China.

- Since the study is focused on CSOs within China, there is potentially also a possibility to carry out a follow up study to understand the groups based outside China, or in generally work on the intersection of China and the world, in terms of different aspects of climate transition and clean energy. The focus will be to understand what such CSO's needs are, who supports them and what their needs are in terms of development and networking. This study potentially is more relevant for any international stakeholders that are interested in understanding key players in the China in the world space and their learning needs

- Another possibility is to dive deeper into the climate focused section of the CSOs and their support networks and identify intervention points that help scale them up or address their key challenges

Annex 1: case studies

Objective: to showcase/highlight a particular actor that is part of the ecosystem.

This should be a significant actor that illustrates the development needs of local consultants/service providers and an actor we can engage with more deeply in Phase 2 of the work.

Provide a snapshot including: the type of actor (consultant, organisation, etc.), location, strengths, weaknesses and learning needs, a couple of examples of their work.

SEE FOUNDATION, Beijing based, with regional hubs across China

Strength: community, resources, funding, support to key individual/teams

Weakness: varied quality of mentors, mismatch between mentors/mentees, misalignment between business mindset and non-profit leadership, limited staff

Learning needs: how to keep growing the medium sized groups to become a beacon and key support for others in the system

A major Chinese philanthropy dedicated to environmental issues. In addition to giving grants, SEE foundation has also dedicated significant resources in building environmental CSO infrastructure, especially by identifying and nurturing talent in the sector. It does so by running two fellowships/mentorship programmes, known as Green Innovator (创绿家) and Strong Grass (劲草项目) Programme. The first is dedicated to identifying and supporting early-stage environmental nonprofit teams in order to foster the emergence of more new players. Like angel investors in the business world, the purpose is to create competition to improve and iterate offerings and help the truly fitting ones to thrive. The second is designed to support medium sized groups in order to scale and grow them, often matching them with mentors in the business, research and other sectors. Like a venture capitalist, the approach is to provide three years' funding and mentorship, to help the groups 'exponentially grow'. The Strong Grass programme has over the past decade supported 103 groups with 223 mentors volunteering over 30,000hrs⁹. In addition, it's also looking to develop another programme to further grow a few selected groups to become leaders in the industry – but hasn't managed to develop this programme due to capacity and external factors.

A Better Community (ABC, 美好社会咨询社), Beijing based

⁹ <http://www.hyi.org.cn/news/program/416.html>

Strength: Affordable service and an accompanying team of 10 over three month period, expertise from major business consulting companies, innovative approach to address structural challenges such as exploring new funding models

Weakness: Limited capacity to meet the huge demand; resource intense in terms of volunteer management, small in size (8 staff)

Learning needs: it's thinking of expanding to potentially also support CSOs working on Chinese overseas investment

ABC runs with a theory of change that if the not-for-profit sector can have high-quality, low-cost management consulting service, they will thrive and help create a better society. Their core business is then to recruit and manage pro-bono expertise, often from the business field to help advise on strategy, organisational management, etc. With a team of 8, they manage around 800 volunteers from various industries, providing affordable management consulting services that typically cost 10,000-60,000CNY (1120-6720GBP), while commercial services can be 20-30 times of this prices. ABC is also innovating new funding models, such as developing a funding circle amongst a group of medium net-worth individuals. ABC helps to loop together the donation and help channel to CSOs as core funding.

Gong Yi Fang (English translates as Ant Workshop, 工蚁坊)

Strength: Strong mission, clear roles that fill a gap, providing transparency and accountability

Weakness: Can't meet all the needs, still relatively small

Learning needs: Explore opportunity to expand overseas such as to Singapore

Gong Yi Fang (can translate as Ant Workshop, Chinese: 工蚁坊) provides accounting and financial compliance services for the NGOs, and due diligence, auditing, and quality control for donors. It's also developing a financial management digital tool that it's piloting with its clients. Founded by a retired accountant, its workforce is mostly female. Initially focused on training female migrant workers in accounting for NGOs, it has since transitioned to empowering women with flexible schedules (e.g., stay-at-home mothers, individuals unable to work full-time due to illness, and returning overseas professionals). These women are trained to provide financial, audit, and due diligence services for the nonprofit sector. The initiative has over 30 branches and serves 1,000 CSOs. It is still considered as a drop in the ocean, as there are only about 10% of CSOs with a dedicated finance department. Not-for profit sector's rules are being refreshed so are the financial compliance requirements, therefore the service is difficult to be as standardised as in the commercial sector – for example, a similar commercial company would typically have a few hundred thousand commercial clients. It's registered as a company but operates as a social enterprise as it invests all its surplus income to grow more hubs to serve more CSOs, develop its staff, but do not give out any dividends.

Moderator (莫德瑞特)

Strength: Filling a main gap, innovative

Weakness: very small, business mindset, perhaps can be more connected to the wider landscape

Learning needs: curious to know more peers, especially in the US and in the tech sector; how to address key constraints that limit the flow of talents into the non-profit sector in China

To cater to the fact that most small scale groups do not have a dedicated HR staff, Moderator is a human resource focused consulting firm that offers three services mainly: 1. Training related to managing human resources and organisational operations, as well as management; 2. HR management services – a senior advisor will be stationed in-house to solve key issues; 3. AI product (in development), to address common questions that organisations have about HR.

In the coming years, it is innovating to explore areas that it believes are limiting the flow of talents to the non-profit sector. For example, it's developing partnerships with universities and colleges with degrees in the charity/social work sector so they can be trained and matched with organisations, similar to the corporate trainee programmes; it is also working with video makers to embed a non-profit/social worker role into short videos in an effort to change the wider public's perception of the career.

That Spark (悦想新知)

Strength: accessible, low-opportunity cost, human centred

Weakness: not personalised, small in size (6 staff)

Learning needs: curious to get to know more peers in other countries; how to address structural challenges that limit the development of individuals, such as salaries, job satisfaction etc

That Spark specializes in coaching mid-level nonprofit staff (3-10 years of experience), primarily through online training programs. Each coach supports 100 participants at a time, with teaching assistants available to provide one-on-one guidance to 10 individuals for follow-up questions. It plans to grow the participants to 200-300 over the coming years. The participants are required to pay for the training themselves to encourage a sense of responsibility and to align interests between trainer and trainee. The training was originally paid for by the organisation, or its funder, however, That Spark quickly adjusted so to solely be accountable for the participants' development needs.

In addition to this they are engaged in two regular operations: one is an open-invitation to online discussions, where they will talk about key common challenges faced by individuals on a day-to-day basis; and the other is annual event where they hope to dive deep into some structural limitations and work with others in the sector to help address them.