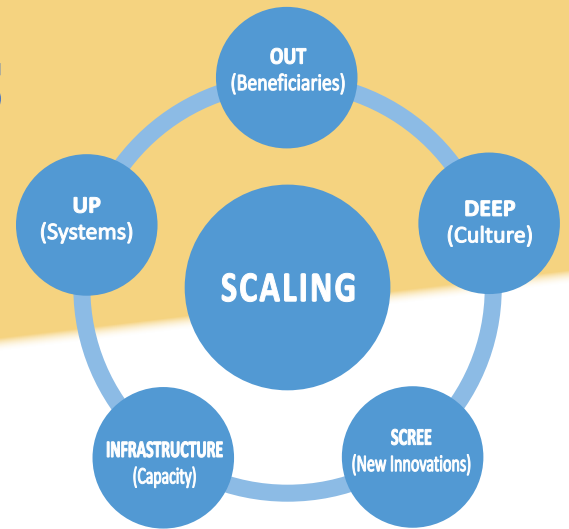


# WHAT WE KNOW SO FAR ABOUT

# Evaluating Efforts to Scale Social Innovation



## PREFACE

Social innovators who set out to solve a complex social, economic or environmental challenge often have one great hope: if their new approaches turn out to be effective, they can then be “scaled” to a larger level and have an even greater impact.

In reality, scaling is far more complex than we thought. There are countless social innovations that have proven their worth, yet have not moved beyond the experimental stage. Therefore they have had limited impact.

There is a variety of reasons for this. An important one is that social innovators, evaluators, policy makers and funders are not always clear on what scaling means nor how efforts to scale should it be properly evaluated. This intent of this brief is to shed some light on both topics.

## UNDERSTANDING SCALING

The most up-to-date and comprehensive framework for scaling innovations recognizes five distinct but interdependent dimensions of scaling.

**Table: Five Dimensions of Scaling**

DIMENSION	DESCRIPTION
<b>Scaling Out (Beneficiaries)</b>	The expansion of an innovation and/or its replication and adaptation in different contexts. As result, it has more beneficiaries.
<b>Scaling Up (Systems)</b>	Changing institutions’ policies, regulations, laws, working relationships, resource flows and practices in ways that enable (rather than undermine) the performance and expansion of the innovation.
<b>Scaling Deep (Culture)</b>	Changing the “hearts and minds” of people, the organization, system or community (e.g., in terms of narrative, values, beliefs and identities) so that the idea underlying the social innovation is supported and embedded in the cultural DNA.
<b>Scaling Scree<sup>1</sup> (New Innovation)</b>	Encouraging, legitimizing and cultivating other ideas and innovations that seek the same outcomes as the original innovation, but in different ways.
<b>Scaling Infrastructure (Capacity)</b>	Improving the capacity of a system or community to scale the work through such things as capital, data, talent, knowledge, networks.

<sup>1</sup> Scree: a mass of small loose stones that form or cover a slope on a mountain (Wikipedia)

All five dimensions of scaling represent important social innovations in themselves.

Take, for example, the example of the blue box recycling system. This model for curbside collection and centralized separation of renewable waste is now mainstream in Canada. Inspired by earlier pilot projects, the City of Kitchener worked with 1,500 residents in the mid-1980s to test four ways to encourage the general public to collect and organize waste. The blue box container we know so well today was found to be the most effective. That innovation was scaled in multiple ways:

- City officials expanded the program to cover the entire community, and the program was eventually picked up by municipalities across Ontario and then Canada (scaling out).

- This was made possible, in part, to a variety of government policies and regulations, such as Ontario’s Waste Reduction Action Plan (scaling up). A boost also came from new bodies dedicated to promoting municipal recycling, such as Ontario Multi Material Recycling Inc., an industry-based organization (scaling infrastructure).
- Since then, the blue box model has triggered more innovations in recycling (scaling scree). In addition, recycling itself has become broadly accepted by the general public and across political party lines (scaling deep).

The Blue Box program also illustrates another important characteristic of scaling: the process is rarely a linear enterprise in which change-makers finalize the conditions for scaling in one big “push.” Instead, it is likely to be a relentless, long-term process of adaptation and change.

## Distinguishing Measures to Support Experimentation Versus Scaling

Social innovators and evaluators should distinguish between measures required to support the experimentation phase of an innovation, and measures taken to scale that innovation once it has proven itself worthy of scaling.



Take, for instance, the case of Northern Navigator initiative. This compelling social innovation in British Columbia’s Peace River region provides couples going through separation or divorce with information about programs and services, legal services, as well as the support of a mediator. The hope is that this emphasis on mediation and social supports will enhance the well-being of families. The alternative is legal resolution, which may contribute extra stress and conflict to sensitive family issues.

The idea behind the model is a fairly simple one. Yet those keen to experiment with it had to take measures to ensure the pilot project could even get off the ground. These included:

- The introduction of the British Columbia Family Law Act of March 18, 2013, which encouraged family law litigants to resolve their disputes through agreement and appropriate

“family dispute resolution” before applying to the court. This institutional change created the conditions in which ideas like Northern Navigator could be developed and tested.

- Addressing the concerns of some local lawyers, who wondered what effect the model might have on their legal practice. Some of their concerns were rooted in convictions about the superiority of rights-based conflict, and about the authority of the formal legal process (cultural change).

The advocates of Northern Navigator addressed these institutional and cultural factors sufficiently well to permit the implementation of the pilot project in three northern communities. When Northern Navigator wraps up in August 2018, given sufficiently positive results, the next move will be to create the organizational, institutional and cultural conditions required for scaling the model.

For more information on Northern Navigator, see: <http://www.bcfamilyinnovationlab.ca/initiatives/northern-navigator/>, as well as Garton, Nicole. (2017). Family Justice Reform in British Columbia & The Northern Navigator Initiative: A Preliminary Review. Faculty of Graduate Studies, York University.

## EVALUATING

The following table is an “inquiry framework” that lays out sample questions, indicators and methods. Social innovators and their evaluators can use it to design and implement an evaluation of an effort to scale a social innovation.

Dimension	Sample Questions	Sample Indicators	Sample Methods
<b>Scaling Out</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What parts of the innovation are context-sensitive and not easily replicated? What “minimum specifications” (e.g., program features, principles) can be replicated and adapted in different contexts? How has our understanding of this changed as we scale out this innovation?</li> <li>• How “far” has the innovation spread? How many beneficiaries have been affected?</li> <li>• What are we learning about how to scale out this innovation? What are the implications for our strategy?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in size of the original innovation.</li> <li>• Increase in the number of organizations or communities replicating the intervention.</li> <li>• Increase in the number of beneficiaries of the innovation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case studies that include quantifiable measures of change</li> </ul>
<b>Scaling Up</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What institutional and systemic factors – policies, regulations, resource flows and administrative practices – need to be in place in order to support, expand and sustain this innovation?</li> <li>• To what extent are we making progress on creating these institutional and systemic conditions?</li> <li>• What are we learning about the systems we are trying to shift? What are the implications for our strategy?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number, variety and “significance” of institutional changes that support the performance and scaling of the original innovation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most Significant Change</li> <li>• Outcome Harvesting</li> <li>• Outcome Mapping</li> </ul>
<b>Scaling Deep</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What cultural attributes – beliefs, narratives, values and identities – are required for the innovation to thrive? Where do they exist and where do they meet resistance?</li> <li>• To what extent are we making progress on engaging people and organizations in exploring, understanding and embracing this cultural shift?</li> <li>• How have these shifts affected efforts at scaling out the original innovation?</li> <li>• What are we learning about the cultural landscape we are trying to change? What are the implications for our strategy?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number, variety and “significance” of behaviour changes that illustrate support for the innovation and the ideas underlying it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcome Harvesting</li> <li>• Bellwether Evaluation</li> <li>• Surveys &amp; Polling</li> <li>• Critical Incident Analysis</li> </ul>
<b>Scaling Scree</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What additional ideas, discussions and experiments have been triggered by the original innovation?</li> <li>• In what ways did the original innovation contribute to the efforts?</li> <li>• To what extent do these new ideas or innovations complement – or weaken or detract from – the original innovation? What are implications for our strategy?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number, variety and “significance” of innovations that emerge in parallel with – or after – the original innovation and focus on the same idea or outcome.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key Informant Interviews</li> <li>• Case Studies</li> <li>• Environmental Scans</li> </ul>
<b>Scaling Infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What resources, skills, networks and knowledge are required in our systems or communities to support the scaling of the innovation?</li> <li>• To what extent are we making progress on creating this infrastructure?</li> <li>• How useful is this infrastructure to the scaling? How can it be improved?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number, variety and usefulness of new or strengthened infrastructure elements to support the scaling of the innovation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case studies</li> <li>• Community Outcomes Reporting Technique</li> <li>• Sector Scans</li> </ul>

Like all frameworks, this table is meant to offer guidance in the evaluation of scaling efforts, and not a detailed recipe. Social innovators and their evaluators will need to craft initiative-specific evaluation designs that reflect their unique context. Here are five things to keep in mind as they do.

1. **Be clear about what is being evaluated.** Take time to make sure the team is clear about the following:
  - What is the “it” of the social innovation to be scaled (e.g., a program, a regulation, a particular practice a set of principles, etc.)?
  - What is the focus and strategy for scaling (e.g., training to scale out to would be early adopters, a campaign to change a shift in policy, social marketing to promote a culture shift, etc.)?
  - How does the scaling group define success (e.g., hitting a specific quantifiable target, getting support from an important organization or leader, etc.)?
2. **Design a “user-focused” evaluation.** Do not begin to think about choosing methods until the following questions have been answered:
  - Who are the primary users of the evaluation information?
  - What questions would like they answered?
  - What constitutes “credible evidence” for them? Do they have preferences for the methods used in the assessment?
  - How would they like the results of the evaluation communicated? When do they want the information?

- What time, resources and expertise is available to invest in this evaluation? Given that, what questions can be answered well, not so well, and not at all?
3. **Employ mixed methods.** Use a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods (i.e., no numbers without stories, no stories without numbers) in order to get a complete picture of progress.
  4. **Be learning oriented.** Scaling is a complex process full of successes and failures. Focus on understanding success and failure and build on those insights moving forward.
  5. **Adapt the evaluation design.** As social innovators learn new things, and the context in which they operate shifts, their questions and demand for evaluation feedback will change as well. The evaluation design should co-evolve in “real time” alongside the social innovators’ strategy for scaling.

While the table and these five principles can help scaling teams design an evaluation, it is important that evaluation be focused learning, rather than a mechanical exercise to ensure that teams meet their original objectives. As the researchers of four in-depth case studies on scaling social innovations conclude, “Scaling may be even harder and more demanding for organizations than innovation.” This is because so many things that shape the success of their efforts are outside their control (Seelos & Mair, 2018, p. 228.) It is critical, therefore, that evaluation help would-be scalers track progress, surface and understand lessons learned and uncover ways to strengthen and adapt their strategy over the long term.





**What We Know So Far** is a series of documents that summarize some of the latest thinking or developments in the field of social innovation and community change. This particular document was developed in cooperation with Access to Justice British Columbia.

## RESOURCES

Riddell, Darcy and Moore, Michele-Lee (2015). *Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep: Advancing Systemic Social Innovation and the Learning Processes to Support it*. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation & The Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement. Retrieved from: [https://mcconnellfoundation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ScalingOut\\_Nov27A\\_AV\\_BrandedBleed.pdf](https://mcconnellfoundation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ScalingOut_Nov27A_AV_BrandedBleed.pdf)

Gord Tulloch (2018). *Expanding Conceptions of Scale Within the Social Sector*. See his blog at: <https://inwithforward.com/2018/01/expanding-conceptions-scale-within-social-sector/>

Seelos, Christian & Mair, Johanna (2017). *Innovation and Scaling for Impact*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.