

Adaptation Tracker:

Learning from changes throughout
a scaling process

Purpose

This tool is designed to help education actors¹ in the process of scaling an initiative to plan for, document, and learn from adaptations made to the model and/or the scaling approach during implementation.

Scaling is an iterative process that requires ongoing adaptation and learning that includes modifications (and often simplifications) to the initiative being scaled and the scaling approach. While this is not a new concept, too often adaptations being tested are not systematically planned for or well documented, and the learning is lost. Further, scaling processes often do not build in enough time to pause, reflect, and course correct based on data and changes in the broader environment. This tool is intended to support practitioners (those innovating and adopting) to regularly plan and document adaptations and periodically pause and reflect on these changes as part of an iterative learning cycle, in order to strengthen efforts to scale and sustain an education initiative.

Instructions

This tool should be used in conjunction with a broader scaling strategy and/or theory of change.² Individuals and institutions who are expanding and deepening the impact of an initiative can use this tool to:

1. Identify key challenges or opportunities as they arise during the scaling process and develop a plan to test adaptations in response;
2. Implement those adaptations and collect the related data;
3. Document spontaneous or unplanned changes taking place; and
4. Reflect on the results and make decisions accordingly.

Individuals should consult the tool throughout different stages of this iterative learning cycle. The duration of these cycles is not fixed and will depend on the adaptations being tested, the measures collected, and the stage of the process (early testing of an idea might be quicker than later refinements). However, it is important that the cycles be short enough that the data collected remains timely, relevant, and useful to inform quick learning and decisionmaking.

To start, **identify** the overall scaling goal for the initiative, and determine a priority scaling driver³—a key lever, force, or factor that is critical for making progress toward the scaling goal—to focus on. An illustrative list of scaling drivers or levers is included in Annex I for reference.⁴ Once the key drivers are selected, use the tool to assess related challenges or opportunities and **plan** actions for responding to them. Next, **test** the planned adaptation during implementation of the broader scaling strategy—documenting any problems that arise, spontaneous changes made, and early results. Finally, analyze the information collected and **reflect** on the adaptation—how did the results differ from predictions and whether the adaptation should be continued, refined, and tested again or abandoned in favor of something else. Make a plan for the next cycle of testing and begin the process again. In many cases, each adaptation will go through multiple cycles of tests. An example is included in Annex II.

Source

This tool is based on the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) templates employed in improvement science, adapted by the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at Brookings to support scaling processes. The tool also draws from the Implementation Mapping Tool developed by ExpandNet,⁵ and was further informed by other related tools (see citation for full list).⁷ It is not meant to replace the broader monitoring and evaluation of an initiative, nor does it track other important aspects of scaling, such as impact and quality; ideally, it should be complemented by other scaling metrics.



1 IDENTIFY

What is the scaling goal (including initiative or components of the initiative being scaled, size and scope of proposed scaling goal, intended beneficiaries, timeline, and intended impact)? The scaling goal should be specific, measurable, and time bound. What is the priority scaling driver to focus on for this cycle?



2 PLAN

What key challenge or opportunity related to this scaling driver do you want to address and why?

What proposed adaptation(s) will you test to address this challenge or opportunity and why? What is the plan to execute this adaptation (who will enact it, what they will do, when, where, and how)?

How will you measure if this adaptation led to an improvement in addressing the challenge or opportunity?⁸ What information will be collected and how, by whom, and how often? How will this data be used for decisionmaking?

What do you predict will happen?



3 TEST

As the adaptation is being tested, are there any observations or unexpected circumstances to document? Were any changes made to the planned adaptation while it was being tested? If yes, detail the changes and the intention behind them.



4 REFLECT

What are the results of testing the adaptation? Did the adaptation lead to an improvement? What worked and did not work? Were any spontaneous or unplanned adaptations made to the original plan? How did the results compare to the predictions? What lessons were learned?

Based on this learning and reflection, what's next? Will you maintain or expand the adaptation, make any other changes to it, or abandon it to try something else? Is this driver still a priority? Begin a new "plan" section to flesh out the proposed next steps.

Annex I

Examples of scaling drivers and sub-drivers

Designing for scale

| | SCALING DRIVER | SUB-DRIVERS |
|----|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. | Addressing local education needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate advantage and/or perceived advantage over existing practices or other related models• Respond to a clearly identified problem prioritized by government and/or affected community(s)• Build local community engagement/buy-in/demand |
| 2. | Demonstrating cost effectiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determine full cost of implementing initiative at scale• Establish how existing structures can support (elements of) initiative |
| 3. | Undertaking flexible adaptation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify initiative’s core elements essential to impact/leanest model for achieving intended impact• Refine initiative or scaling strategy for cost, effectiveness, scalability, equity, and sustainability• Contextualize initiative |
| 4. | Engaging teachers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foster engagement and buy-in of teachers, school directors, and other educators• Foster engagement with teachers’ unions• Secure human and financial resources for training and professional development |

Delivering at scale

| | SCALING DRIVER | SUB-DRIVERS |
|----|---|--|
| 5. | Building and sustaining education alliances | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foster government buy-in and engagement• Develop partnerships with key stakeholders and/or existing coalitions with shared goals and aligned incentives• Ensure sufficient institutional/organizational capacity for implementation, adaptation, scaling, and sustainability |
| 6. | Fostering and engaging learning champions and leaders | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify and engage key champions at local, regional, and/or national level• Foster public support from key decisionmakers at local, regional, and/or national level• Engage potential opponents/those who stand to lose |

| | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|---|
| 7. | Leveraging appropriate technology | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use appropriate technology in design, delivery, and/or scaling, which may include M&E, finance, human resources, etc.• If technology is crucial to initiative, ensure equitable access for all in the system |
| 8. | Utilizing relevant data | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish evidence of impact with credible, relevant data• Leverage observable results to build and sustain buy-in• Share results to inform decision-making and/or build and sustain buy-in |

Financing for scale

| | SCALING DRIVER |
|-----|---|
| 9. | Accessing flexible education financing that focuses on outcomes and allows for making course corrections based on learning |
| 10. | Accessing middle-phase financing between pilot and national scale |
| 11. | Securing long-term financing, such as through inclusion of initiative in government budget or implementation within system using existing resources |

Enabling environment for sustainable scale

| | SCALING DRIVER | SUB-DRIVERS |
|-----|--|---|
| 12. | Leveraging a supportive policy environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Align with supportive policies, regulations, and/or other legal frameworks for scaling• Leverage cultural, social, political, financial, and/or institutional facilitating factors for scaling |
| 13. | Seizing windows of opportunity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Align with existing global, national, regional, and/or local government education priorities and timelines• Leverage unanticipated changes to broader environment (such as changes in leadership, natural disasters, and health pandemics) |
| 14. | Pursuing a culture of Research and Development (R&D) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use data to inform real-time learning, course corrections, and decisionmaking• Strengthen capacity and/or utilize structures in place for experimentation and continuous improvement |

Annex II

Example of completed tool

STEP 1

What is the scaling goal (including initiative or components of the initiative being scaled, size and scope of proposed scaling goal, intended beneficiaries, timeline, and intended impact)? The scaling goal should be specific, measurable, and time bound. What is the priority scaling driver to focus on for this cycle?

SCALING GOAL

Reach 75,000 primary-school students with “Mother-tongue Literacy Initiative” (MTLI) by 2030 through a phased rollout in primary schools.

SCALING DRIVER OF FOCUS

Foster government buy-in and engagement
Example context: Government is aware of MTLI and allows it to be delivered in public primary schools in two regions by the originating organization, but MTLI is not a government priority, and knowledge of the initiative at the national level is limited. Reaching the scaling goal will require strong government buy-in and engagement and a clear prioritization of this initiative over other competing priorities.

STEP 2: PLAN

What key challenge or opportunity related to this scaling driver do you want to address and why?

Outside of the regions where it is currently delivered, MTLI is low profile and lacks high-level champions. Cultivating several champions at the national level will help build engagement and buy-in for the initiative and foster government prioritization for scaling MTLI.

What proposed adaptation(s) will you test to address this challenge or opportunity and why? What is the plan to execute this adaptation?

The positive results of MTLI are striking when seen in person. Plan to test new approach to cultivate champions by inviting key government stakeholders to participate in classroom visits (followed by 30-minute discussion). Classroom visits for government stakeholders will be incorporated into existing monthly team field visits. Office director will invite 5-7 key stakeholders to the first visit approximately two weeks in advance. Field officer will lead visits. Aim is that several key national-level champions will emerge, leading to concrete action/commitment to MTLI.

How will you measure if this adaptation led to an improvement in addressing the challenge or opportunity?⁹ What information will be collected and how, by whom, and how often? How will this data be used for decisionmaking?

Test three rounds of visits before assessing data. Collect information on:

- # of classroom visits planned, # conducted
- # of government stakeholders who participate, # invited
- Role/level of participants (junior, mid, high)
- # of participants who express positive takeaways in discussion after visit
- # of concrete actions and/or commitments made by participants to MTLI after visit
- Cost of visit per participant

Data collected monthly by field office following each visit.

What do you predict will happen?

Visible results of MTLI on students’ learning outcomes, confidence, and participation will result in strong positive impressions of the initiative for at least 60% of participants, which will build interest, engagement, and buy-in. This will lead to concrete actions and commitments in support of scaling MTLI and to a few key champions for MTLI emerging.

STEP 3: TEST

As the adaptation is being tested, are there any observations or unexpected circumstances to document? Were any changes made to the planned adaptation while it was being tested? If yes, detail the changes and the intention behind them.

Lots of interest in participating in the field visits from target stakeholders, but it is challenging to get stakeholders to commit to the specific date when monthly field visits are held. Had to change the plan from relying on the pre-existing visit dates to scheduling new visits to better work with stakeholders’ schedules. Monthly visits are challenging to organize for staff and more costly than expected.

STEP 4: REFLECT

What are the results of testing the adaptation? Did the adaptation lead to an improvement? What worked and did not work? Were any spontaneous or unplanned adaptations made to the original plan? How did the results compare to the predictions? What lessons were learned?

Field visits seem to be an effective way to build enthusiasm and interest for MTLI among national government stakeholders (85% of invited participants attended one of the planned visits). However, visits are costly (~USD\$5k) and time consuming for staff, so important to consider frequency.

Immediately after visits, saw high level of enthusiasm and interest in MTLI by government stakeholders, many of whom did not have prior knowledge of it. However, it is unclear if this interest will last beyond the visit and if it will lead to any key champions (78% of participants had positive takeaways about MTLI following the visit but none made firm commitments to support MTLI scaling).

Scheduling visits for government stakeholders can be challenging and needs to be done further in advance and with more flexibility for high-level stakeholders. Had to abandon idea of aligning with existing visits to be more flexible to their schedules (held 100% of planned visits, but not always on original date).

Based on this learning and reflection, what next? Will you maintain or expand the adaptation, tweak or adapt it, or abandon it to try something else? Is this driver still a priority? Begin a new “plan” section to flesh out the proposed next steps.

In the next three months, we will hold one field visit (instead of three), inviting more stakeholders and giving more notice. We will plan a separate date for the visit, not tied to existing plans. Need more follow up with key stakeholders after visit—not clear if short-term impressions will translate into longer-term support or the development of champions. In addition to holding discussion immediately after classroom observation, will set up individual follow-up meetings with participants approximately two weeks after the visit to help maintain engagement and translate interest into concrete action and sustained commitment to implementing MTLI more widely—and to help identify potential champions to cultivate further.

Endnotes

1. These education actors might include the originating institution that developed and piloted the initiative, the adopting institution that is expected to implement the initiative at large scale, or an intermediary organization—a neutral third party assisting with the scaling process. Here “institution” can refer to a state or nonstate organization, agency, or department. See: Ruth Simmons, Peter Fajans, and Laura Ghiron eds., *Scaling up health service delivery: from pilot innovations to policies and programmes*, (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2007), https://expandnet.net/PDFs/Scaling-Up_Health_Service_Delivery-WHO-ExpandNet.pdf.
2. “Scaling Strategy Worksheet” can be a useful resource. See: Jenny Perlman Robinson, Molly Curtiss Wyss, and Patrick Hannahan, “Scaling Strategy Worksheet: Planning for scale,” (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, July 2021).
3. CUE defines scaling drivers as core ingredients or key levers that contribute to and advance the process of scaling and sustaining an education initiative. The importance and role of various scaling drivers depend on the context and the initiative.
4. These illustrative drivers are organized around the Millions Learning “14 core ingredients for scaling quality education” framework developed by CUE at Brookings, published in: Jenny Perlman Robinson and Rebecca Winthrop with Eileen McGivney, “Millions Learning: Scaling Up Quality Education in Developing Countries,” (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2016). These 14 core ingredients were initially developed through a research study of 12 in-depth cases of scaling in education, and further tested in the Millions Learning Real-time Scaling Labs. Their importance is frequently reinforced from evidence in the broader scaling literature.
5. Anthony S. Bryk, Louis Gomez, Alicia Grunow, and Paul LeMahieu, *Learning to Improve: How America’s Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2015); Institute for Healthcare Improvement, “Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Worksheet,” <http://www.ihl.org/resources/Pages/Tools/PlanDoStudyActWorksheet.aspx>
6. “Implementation Mapping Tool,” *ExpandNet Secretariat* (October 2020), <https://expandnet.net/PDFs/ExpandNet-IMT-Updated-Oct-2020.pdf>.
7. Michele Cummins, Chelsey Goddard, Scott Formica, David Cohen, and Wayne Harding “Assessing Program Fidelity and Adaptations Toolkit,” *Education Development Center* (2003); Shannon Wiltsey Stirman, Ana A. Baumann, and Christopher J. Miller, “The FRAME: an expanded framework for reporting adaptations and modifications to evidence-based interventions,” *Implementation Science* 4, 58 (2019); United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Maternal and Child Survival Program (MCSP), Management Systems International (MSI, a Tetra Tech Company), and the ExpandNet global network, “Tool 7: Plan Scale-Up Strategies for Institutionalization and Service Expansion,” in *Basic Toolkit for Systematic Scale up: A Companion to the Scale-up Coordinator’s Guide for Supporting Country-led Efforts to Systematically Scale-up and Sustain Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health Initiatives* (June 2019).
8. Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu, *Learning to Improve*.
9. Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu, *Learning to Improve*.

Adaptation Tracker July 2021

This tool was developed by Jenny Perlman Robinson, Molly Curtiss Wyss, and Patrick Hannahan, with contributions from our many Real-time Scaling Lab partners, Advisory Group members, interns, and other colleagues, including Gabrielle Arengé, Grayson Clapp, Karen Clune, Larry Cooley, Laura Ghiron, Joe McCannon, and Kristian Wengen.

We also express our gratitude to Katie Portnoy and Esther Rosen for their editing and design support. To share your experience using the tool or offer any feedback for future editions, please email CUE@brookings.edu.

This tool is part of a series on scaling made possible by support from the Bernard van Leer Foundation, BHP Foundation, ELMA Philanthropies, Inc. through the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED), the International Development Research Centre, Canada through the Foundation for Information Technology Education and Development (FIT-ED), the International Rescue Committee, and the Jacobs Foundation. The views expressed in this tool are those of its authors and do not represent the views of the donors, their officers, employees, or Boards of Governors.