

Spring Impact Scale Accelerator

2017 Programme Evaluation

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Background & Objective

The Scale Accelerator is an innovative programme created in 2015 by Spring Impact, which aims to help participating organisations create an ambitious yet realistic plan to accelerate social impact to scale.

The programme is managed by Spring Impact, formerly known as the International Centre for Social Franchising. In 2017, four UK funders came together to sponsor a second cohort of six participants in their journey to scale.

Funders: The Big Lottery Fund, City Bridge Trust, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and Unbound Philanthropy.

Participating Organisations: Alexandra Rose Charity, Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit, Mayday Trust, Spark Inside, StreetDoctors, and WEvolution.

The programme offers support to create an ambitious scale strategy, design a model for implementation, create a financial model to test the implications, and outline a two-year acceleration plan for scale. It is complemented by monitoring and evaluation support provided by The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP) and training from the School for Social Entrepreneurs (SSE).

Each year, Spring Impact commissions an independently conducted evaluation of the programme to understand:

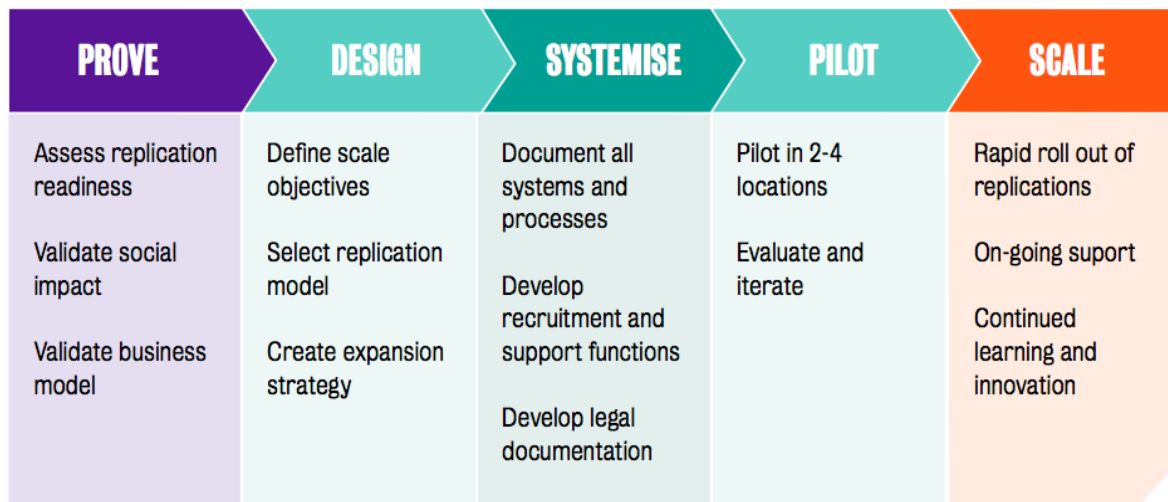
- How effective the programme has been to support organisations to take the next steps of their scale journey,
- Which elements of the programme were the most impactful and why,
- Which elements of the programme were least impactful and why, and
- The individual journeys each organisation has gone through on the programme including key decisions that had to be made and any turning points.

This report details the findings for the 2017 Scale Accelerator Programme Evaluation conducted by independent qualitative researcher Lizzie Laundy of The Flying Collective. Lizzie has 10 years' experience as a researcher and strategist helping clients uncover user insight and apply that learning to deliver business results. After spending most of her career working for a range of different qualitative research shops, she recently founded her own group of freelance consultants called The Flying Collective. She now enjoys partnering with start-ups and small businesses, and is passionate about helping underserved sectors use commercial tools for greater impact.

Programme Scope and Summary

Scale Accelerator is structured around the five stages of social replication based on Spring Impact's research and practical work, specifically focusing on the **prove** and **design** phases:

Figure 1: Spring Impact's 5 Stage Process to Scale



To help each participant determine the social replication strategy that is right for their organisation, Scale Accelerator covers the most important strategic elements of the first two stages of the process outlined above and includes:

- **Selecting Scale Accelerator Participants:** Building on the experience of Scale Accelerator 2015-16, Spring Impact developed the selection process for participants. They worked with funder's grant officers to develop a shortlist of candidates and then assessed the candidates against their replication readiness criteria. Some applicants attended a two-day training session delivered by Spring Impact prior to being selected.
- **Cohort-based activities:** The programme launched with a kick-off event facilitated by Spring Impact, with sessions also led by the partnering organisations. Throughout the programme the cohort have had the opportunity to meet through optional Action Learning Sets and a further two-day training event, both of which have been delivered by the School for Social Entrepreneurs (SSE). The programme wrapped with a closing event hosted by Spring Impact, which provided additional networking opportunities.
- **Individual diagnostics and scale workshops:** Spring Impact conducted individual organisational diagnostics to help each venture understand its potential and the barriers to scale. They then used that information to run 3-4 scale workshops for senior leadership, considering the different potential replication strategies to develop the optimum bespoke approach for that particular organisation. Next, they developed a detailed replication model

design including financial modelling, to forecast the model's financial sustainability.

- **Monitoring & Evaluation support:** TSIP conducted individual organisational diagnostics to identify each participant's current level of evidence. Based on the gap between their current and desired level, TSIP provided a bespoke package of support to help organisations move towards their desired level, whether that was developing a clear Theory of Change, refining their evaluation plans, or helping them to identify new tools and approaches to collecting their required evidence.
- **Acceleration Plan:** Finally, Spring Impact worked with each participant to create a plan mapping out the specific steps needed to implement the scale strategy and any additional resources or capacity required. From Spring Impact's experience, the Acceleration Plan provides a clear structure that organisations often need to enact the internal changes important to replicating successfully. The organisation will be able to enact many of the acceleration recommendations themselves, although some may require additional funding.

Upon completion, the programme aims to leave participating organisations with:

- An ambitious but realistic plan on how they can replicate their successful project,
- Increased confidence and capabilities to deliver this plan,
- Clarity on how they will evaluate their social impact as they scale, and
- A support network of other organisations experiencing the same journey.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation approach was centred around evaluating the **impact of the programme*** with the following objectives:

1. Understand impact of the current programme, and
2. Highlight opportunity areas for improved impact in future iterations.

A combination of qualitative and quantitative research was utilised to offer a holistic view by providing both breadth and depth to feedback.

**** Please note:** This research set out to evaluate the impact and success of the programme, not the impact of the organisations themselves. How they have scaled will be measured separately and on an ongoing basis by Spring Impact.*

Journey Interviews (Qualitative)

Methodology:

- 12 people in total (two representatives from each of the six organisations)
- 1 hour 'Journey' interviews conducted via video or phone

We utilised an open-ended participant-led style of interview to address some key challenges faced by researchers when conducting evaluations:

- People have a very difficult time accurately reflecting on their own behaviour,
- In practice, people rarely act in structured or rational ways, and
- Hindsight and post-rationalisation are powerful, significantly affecting how events are recalled and interpreted.

This format allowed us to contextualise interpreting the effectiveness of the programme through understanding each organisation's 'journey' from their point of view (pre-programme, throughout the Scale Accelerator programme, and following their exit from the programme). During the interview, their journey and experience is first outlined in their own words before we probe into the effectiveness of various components of the programme, so allowing us to consider feedback through the lens of their experience, behaviour, and perceptions rather than forcing a top down evaluation of the programme offerings.

During analysis, we used an experiential '5E framework' (entice, enter, engage, exit, extend) to focus on impact and impact opportunities at each stage in the programme process.

Baseline Surveys (Quantitative)

Spring Impact developed quantitative pre-and post programme surveys for the Scale Accelerator. The surveys were designed to measure the desired impact of the programme based on the Scale Accelerator's Theory of Change.

Metrics captured by the survey include the organisation's:

- Confidence in measuring and demonstrating social impact,
- Confidence in scale strategy,
- Understanding of social replication,
- Understanding of which replication model is most suitable to scale their impact,
- Confidence in the design of their replication model,
- Confidence in their ability to lead their organisation to replicate, and
- Confidence in their ability to mitigate any risks to replication.

The surveys were sent to participating organisations via email and all six organisations completed the surveys. For the pre-programme survey, one representative from each organisation completed the survey. For the post-programme survey, ten individuals completed the survey in total.

This report will be divided into two sections:

- **Impact Insights** – which highlights learning around the programme's performance and ability to deliver impact, and
- **Best Practices** – which outlines the lessons learned, to improve impact and the programme experience in future iterations.

Impact Insights

1. The Programme's unique selling proposition is multi-faceted, incorporating a combination of strategic thinking, the process itself, and the team that leads it:

It forces the organisation to slow down and focus on important strategy. Using a process that starts with 'end-game' but ends in immediate next steps. Facilitated by an expert team that questions and pushes their own thinking.

"Establishing our vision, mission, end game, and problem definition [were the most important components of the project]. Developing our Theory of Change. Identifying a model for replication and what this would mean for us to develop it. Having the time out to focus on this with our Board and having consultants that actually got under the skin of our organisation, tailored responses to our specific position and really challenged us to get to the right conclusion."

"We were flying. They slowed us down. Took us through a formal process thinking about down the line. Made us look at financials and re-think what we were doing. It was hugely helpful."

"Our vision about scaling was all down to us moving it forward. It was the first time that there was an awareness that there was someone like Spring Impact that could move us through this. Plan for that vision."

2. The Scale Accelerator Programme demonstrated impact for all organisations despite their unique scaling need and readiness:

Each organisation was at a unique stage in its scale journey and therefore facing unique challenges. Across the cohort, Spring Impact found three key themes that categorised their scaling needs:

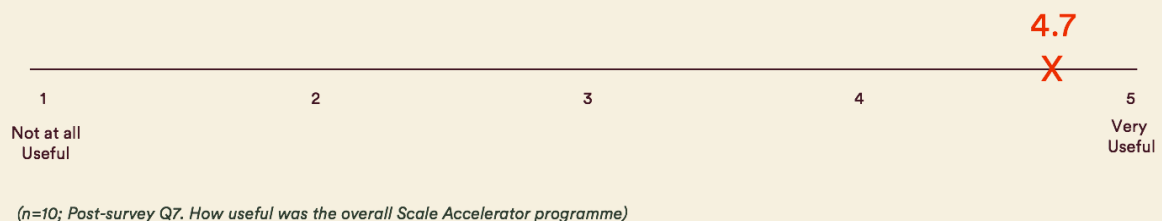
Organisations in early stages of replication requiring significant organisational change

Organisations that need another approach beyond replication

Organisations with previous replication experience that requires iteration

All participating organisations, despite the type, reported marked impact through the Scale Accelerator.

'Usefulness' of the overall programme:



*“The process has been **enlightening**. They understand us sometimes better than we understand ourselves and that is quite impressive. It’s **given us a much clearer vision** of how we should develop the project in future.”*

*“Our **thinking has changed quite a lot**. You know, you get involved with one person or family. [The programme] made me think about impact, I see it daily, but how do we do it in the big scale.”*

*“I didn’t imagine it would be as **transforming** as it has been. I was really impressed. I think it’s one of the first packages of support or consulting based support I’ve actually really taken a lot of value from.”*

3. The programme’s ability to guide organisations through systematic strategy and design processes tailored for their specific need was crucial to its success:

“They have a really good understanding of the process. They understand scaling and therefore understand what questions you need to ask at what time in the process. I think that came through time and time again.”

“Every workshop felt like we were moving forward. There was a sense of divergence, but then we would come back together and we’d make decisions.”

“The process is very structured and really investigated different routes to scale. I liked the way of doing a 360 on the organisation and felt it would be helpful as we were coming up to our next strategic plan. We were slightly different because we had already scaled. We were facing a different dynamic

to some of the other teams. Spring Impact was able to understand that and adapt their program.”

3a. Spring Impact strategy sessions were seen as a foundational first step that many were unknowingly skipping over:

“I could see where we were but couldn’t see how we were going to get there. And they talked about designing from front-end first. I found that really illuminating just thinking let’s think of the front and then backwards. Really straight-forward really but you need people to say those things to you.”

“This was one of the best aspects of the programme. Really picking apart and reassessing what our vision, mission were given our new strategic priorities was enlightening and gave a great grounding to the wider decision making around the scale options. It allowed me to get a very clear understanding of our place in the world and exactly what our work aims to achieve.”

Responses from the baseline and end line survey illustrate that all six organisations left the programme feeling *confident to very confident* across the key 5 strategy components:



It is interesting to note that self-assessment of confidence and readiness was notably high to start. This may be for a couple reasons:

- Previous attempts and experience with a replication model,
- Underestimating the difficulty to achieve scale prior to exposure to the complexity and depth of a thoughtfully crafted out strategy. (Simply put, ‘you don’t know, what you don’t know.’), and/or
- Natural growth which has been successfully ‘reacted to’, so providing a false sense of confidence.

Following the programme, even those who scored themselves confidently in the pre-survey, showed increased confidence in their scaling strategy.

*“It was like **holding up a light in a sea of darkness**. It put tangible steps in place and we can see very clearly the enormity of the task ahead. It has galvanised us to move forward faster, but we are still a long way away.”*

“It was interesting to me as we came to a conclusion that I hadn't considered for us but absolutely made sense.”

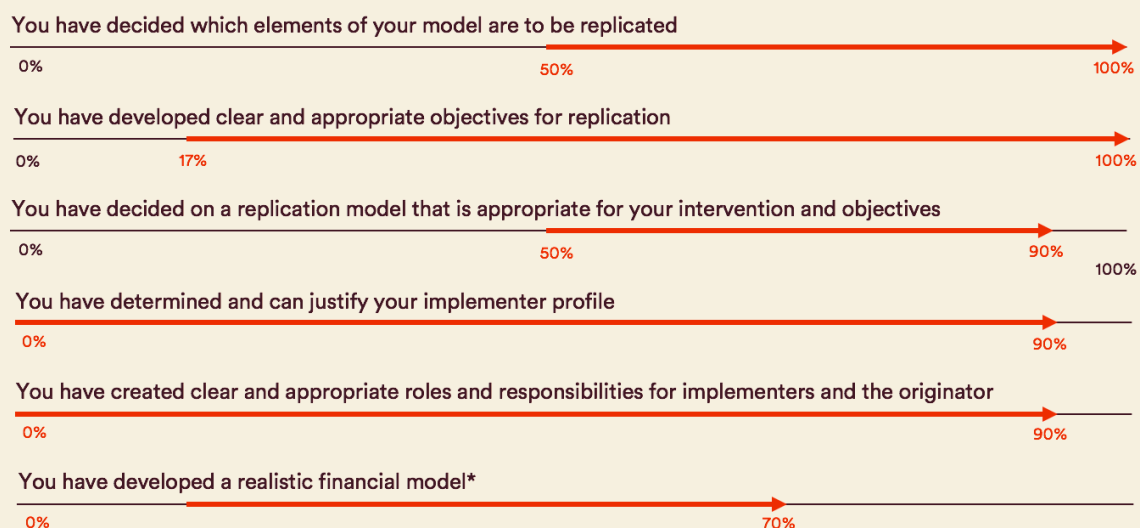
3b. Output from Spring Impact Replication Model Design sessions left organisations with a codified action plan:

The ability to pair practical design with high-level strategic planning was very important to leave participants with confidence.

“The programme has allowed us to be more process-driven, less about gut feeling. It has given us the tools to safe guard as we scale and become more time efficient. We don't have to depend on us for everything. I feel quite sad that its over!”

“We were pretty much clear about the why and how of our work. Having had the opportunity to spend the time and receiving the support from Spring Impact meant that we were better able to articulate this.”

Replication model design ('Yes')



(Pre-survey n=6, Post-survey n=10; Options for each statement: Yes, no, unsure. The above shows 'Yes' responses)

** Organisations found the financial modelling to be a very useful exercise, providing a benchmark that still allowed for flexibility. They report lower responses than in other categories because they feel it needs to be tested before they will have full confidence, and for some it is quite theoretical given the number of uncertainties they were facing.*

3c. Theory of Change workshops lead by TSIP paired well with ‘end game’ thinking started in Spring Impact Strategy sessions:

Understaffed and overloaded organisations acknowledge that they are so busy making day-to-day decisions that they don’t get a chance to step back and think about how their daily activities impact long-term outcomes. Theory of Change workshops offered this opportunity to stop, slow down, and create complex and tactical plans for action.

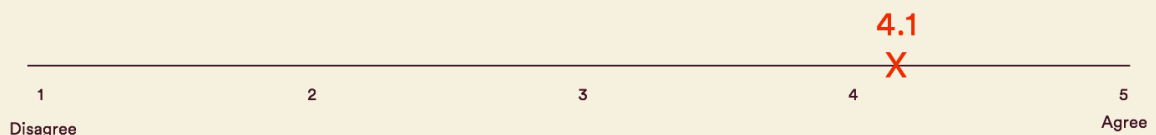
Practicality of the output varied by organisation, but the conversations with key stakeholders prompted from the sessions were universally valued and for some just as important as the output itself.

“For me, the importance of the time spent with TSIP, even if not important for us – we can jump on the bandwagon of doing a TOC – but it was the first time we were sitting down and thinking about the structure of our organisation and impact. We spent a lot of time thinking through practical stuff.”

3d. Flexible add-ons from TSIP allowed for more tailored executorial support:

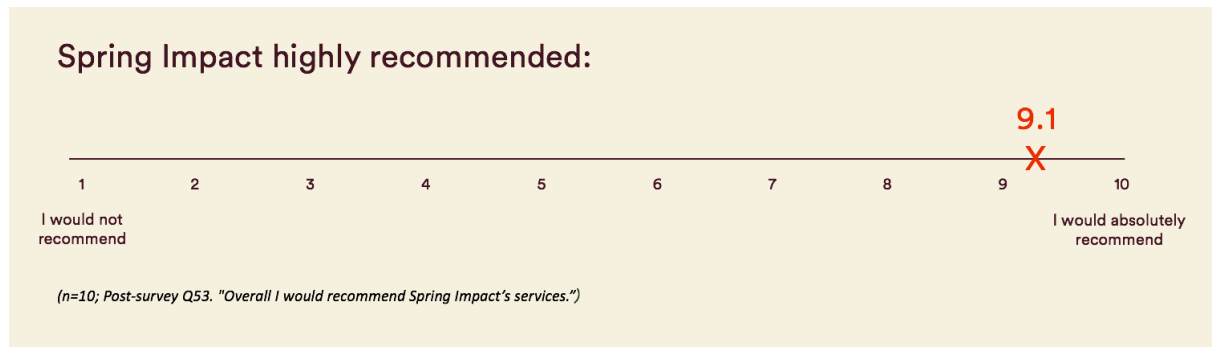
TSIP’s flexibility and tailored support was important, as each organisation had different evaluation needs and internal capabilities. Communications workshops helped translate Theory of Change goals into Marketing & Communications strategies, and for some provided valuable skills not currently available in their organisation.

Increased confidence in communicating organisation’s outcomes and goals:



(n=10; Post-survey Q38, “I have increased confidence in my ability to communicate our organisation’s outcomes and goals to different audiences”)

4. Spring Impact's team and expertise seen as a unique component in the programme's ability to offer impact:



Spring Impact is seen as an expert in scaling, with a wide breadth of knowledge and experience. This expertise, paired with their ability to understand, challenge, and push the thinking of organisations, was seen as especially rare and valuable. Many participants noted their impressive investigative and consultative approach, getting to the heart of each organisations unique need and identifying holes. Ultimately, they became invaluable partners, offering rare guidance, and helping drive stakeholder and board alignment.

"I felt that Spring Impact was at the forefront of the delivery and that was the core piece of what we were receiving and the core help."

"The way they questioned us and talked to us as partners. It was clear they wanted to take us on a journey with our thinking, but also really grasp our work and understand it. So there was that dual sense to those questions that made us realise they are the experts in that work."

"There are tons of consultants and they are very superficial and they come and go, but there is something about their ability to really get under the skin of what we're doing and not just saying this is the way it's done. Actually looking at what works for us, our culture, what we are trying to achieve and then challenging that really well with us and our board."

"The team accompanying us throughout the journey felt like a really important element. We felt supported and challenged in equal measure, which was very good for us. And the end product was there to see after every workshop."

"[The most useful part was] Every minute with the Spring Impact team. So, so so helpful and I'd love more."

Best Practices and Lessons Learned*

** Please note all recommendations in the following section have been established through the evaluator's analysis and are not necessarily in response to direct feedback from a specific organisation.*

1. Cohort design creates additional opportunity for valuable 'peer learning,' but not in the ways initially intended:

The cohort structure was intentionally designed to encourage organisations to build relationships and feel motivated by meeting others, and as a result drive confidence and the skills needed for scaling. The types of cohort components that were offered included digital channels to communicate with each other (Whatsapp and LinkedIn groups), facilitated co-working sessions, and a two-day off-site residential course where organisations could come together (planned by partner SSE).

The SSE two-day residential, designed to offer leadership development through a mixture of panel sessions and open discussions, was seen as the most prominent and valuable cohort and peer learning engagement. Overall, panel sessions were seen as interesting and informative (all scoring between 7.5 – 8.8 out of 10 in terms of its usefulness). There was varying response across the cohort as to which sessions and topic areas were most relevant to their own organisation, needs, and interest, which highlights the difficulty in offering content that is perfectly suited to everyone. Opportunities for informal discussions with others in the field and cohort were highly appreciated, especially through open Q&A and the group dinner.

“The time and space to reflect and share with those in similar positions and those who are way down the line was invaluable. I feel like I've come away with a network of support and some brilliant like-minded contacts.”

Participants found that there were certain elements of the cohort structure that were more useful than others, and, ultimately, the value that came from interactions was more about the practical benefits of relationship building than increased motivation and confidence.

The peer learning elements that were most valued were:

- Practical Q&A and learning from others who had gone through the process,
- Organic conversations and relationships built over time with other organisations,
- Ability to network with important but hard to reach people (funders, peers and mentors, and consultants),
- Co-working exercises, if needs/challenges are similar enough.

Participants stressed that opportunities for organic conversations were more useful for creating real relationships than forced or facilitated interactions. However, they acknowledged that this required time to develop naturally. The group dinner (one of the nights of the two-day offsite residential) was the

primary engagement that allowed for this type of natural relationship building and participants wished there was more of it throughout the programme, although they acknowledged reluctance to participate in too many evening events.

Recommendations:

- Consider breaking the two-day off-site residential into two full-day events separated over time. That way people will have two opportunities to engage with each other and feel less exhausted and burdened by the time commitment required of the event,
- Create more opportunities for natural networking that offer real value; include funders, peers, and wider Spring Impact team, and keep the group dinner
- Eliminate any forced channels for communication – i.e. chat groups or co-working sessions, where having peers doesn't add value,
- Consider flexibility of content modules so that each organisation can get the most out of it.

2. A well-balanced cohort makes 'peer learning' more powerful:

A common thread amongst participants was that activities and engagements between the cohort were most useful when other organisations were 'like' them. Factors to consider when thinking about likeness are: size, replication challenge, industry, and phase in scaling journey.

The importance of likeness in getting the most out of the cohort was consistently called out by participants across the range of types of interaction, from informal networking style sessions to more formal and structured shared workshops.

Recommendations:

- When selecting organisations for the cohort, consider screening for similarity and creating programme themes to maximise impact of each Scale Accelerator, and
- Consider how to bring 'like' organisations together for relevant group activities, and avoid co-working when organisations can't offer each other added value.

3. Uncertainty about time commitment underpins excitement

From the outset of the programme, time poor organisations felt nervous and uncertain about the time commitment required of them and their board members. After completion, all appreciated the rigor and acknowledged that the time spent was important and necessary to achieve what they needed to. This dynamic is inevitable as organisations are already overwhelmed with a full workload, but there are certain things Spring Impact can do to mitigate the initial feelings of time shock, pressure, and reluctance.

Recommendations:

- Continue to set expectations very clearly upfront, outlining the time commitment required for each step and explaining why it is important,
- Make sure to contextualise each engagement, re-iterating objectives, expectations, and how it fits into the bigger picture,
- Highlight the time spent by the Spring Impact team. (This was something that many were surprised by and very appreciative of afterwards.), and
- Illustrate the value and impact of the programme upfront: the two-day training did an excellent job illustrating the value of the programme, curbing scepticism, and building excitement (for team and board members who attended).

4. A careful selection process is crucial for success:

The 2016-2017 Scale Accelerator had a multi-stage selection process for screening applications put forward by the four contributing funders, which included:

- Spring Impact's Scale Readiness Assessment Survey,
- 1 hour interviews with each organisation, and
- A two-day training workshop (for certain funders only).

Each step proved important in setting organisations up for success and ensuring impact of the programme. Scaling is a huge endeavour for an organisation and many are not in the right position to make the most out of an accelerator programme. Spring Impact's knowledge and experience-driven scrutiny of readiness, paired with a two-day workshop which gave organisations a taste of what was to come, was the right balance to make sure both the organisations and organisers agreed that they were a good fit for the programme.

It is interesting to note that the three (out of six) participating organisations who completed Spring Impact's initial two-day training ended the programme feeling most positively about it. The working sessions provided an intimate view of what was to come in the programme, helped organisations self-select, curbed scepticism by illustrating the extent of the work to be done, built excitement, and ultimately gave them a leg up on the programme.

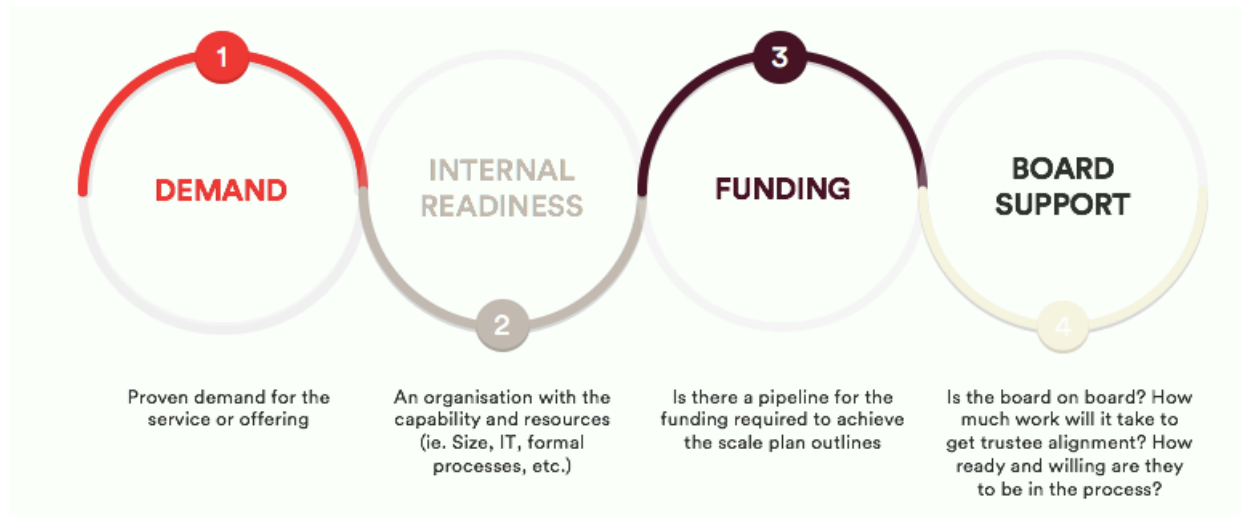
Recommendations:

- Continue to use Spring Impact's screening processes to select a short list for the training workshop,
- Make the initial training workshop a mandatory part of the selection process and consider:
 - Whether it can be shortened to one day, to encourage participation from everyone. The organisations were consistently concerned about time, so if you can get the same result from a one-day session instead of a two-day session, it may be worth shortening and moving some of it to the launch,

- How to encourage cohort ‘peer learning’ as early as this engagement, and
- Consider opening up the application process to a wider audience (not just funder recommended) to increase participating organisation’s readiness and likeness and therefore the overall impact of the programme.

5. Completion of the programme maps out a long road ahead that may require more time preparing and raising funds to undertake the actions:

Participants acknowledged that scaling success requires the right balance from multiple moving parts:



It is difficult for all these things to align at once and they leave the programme feeling excited and motivated, but also slightly overwhelmed by the task ahead. This was reflected in their perceptions of their confidence in managing and addressing the risks associated with scaling.



Recommendations:

- Consider how these external factors may influence the ability for an organisation to successfully take action from the strategy and design completed in the programme,
- Consider how the programme might help better address each factor, setting organisations up for increased success. and
- For the selection process, consider each potential participant's willingness, commitment, and motivation to do the 'hard work' needed to achieve scale.

6. Continued support following programme completion could increase impact:

Leaving the programme, organisations mention a range of challenges ahead, most notably:

- Marketing and Communications,
- IT to achieve evaluation goals,
- Funding to support resources needed for outlined scaling plan, and
- Making the internal changes necessary (i.e. 'sorting themselves out first').

Acknowledging the time and resources it will require for capacity building, they worry about where they will find this type of funding.

Additionally, they express interest in continuing to work with Spring Impact as a trusted scale advisor and support system which could take shape in a couple ways:

- Monthly check-ins for the first year (mentoring and guidance, and accountability),
- 'x hours' scoped in to use however needed in the long-run,
- Spring Impact participation in funding meetings,
- Trumpeting and cheerleading alumni (i.e. exposure on Spring Impact website, publications etc.),
- Access to the Spring Impact network, and
- Sharing resources (i.e. legal documents, partnership contracts etc.).

Recommendations:

- Encourage funders to provide continued support and invest in capacity building,
- Consider providing Spring Impact consulting hours to be used at the organisations' discretion,
- Consider other ways to continue to support alumni (i.e. events that bring funders together, press/publications that give them exposure etc.), and
- Consider a reunion where teams can come back together, leveraging cohort and peer learning impact.