



Tools and mindsets to scale your impact

Lessons from the Volunteering Scaling Programme

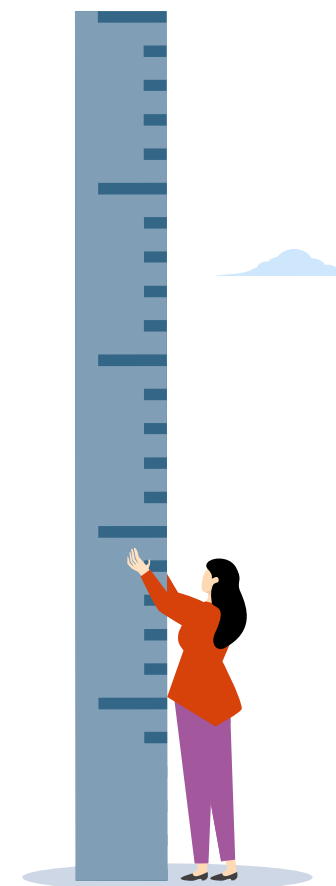
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In partnership with



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Introduction

In 2020, we funded five organisations to take part in the [Volunteering Scaling Programme](#).

As part of the initiative, each organisation also received support from our partner [Spring Impact](#) – a non-profit organisation that works with mission-driven organisations and funders to scale their impact sustainably.

Our Volunteering Scaling Programme was born of a challenge identified in the [Volunteering Fund, which closed in 2023](#).

We realised that within the fund there were successful projects with great ideas, but the teams behind these efforts didn't feel confident in their knowledge of how to scale up their impact.

They also lacked the time and resources to plan effectively in a way that'd be sustainable in the long-term.

Spring Impact brought their **experience and expertise to support organisations to develop the plans, tools and mindsets needed to scale their impact sustainably.**

The Volunteering Scaling Programme was designed to help participants achieve this through the key phases and activities outlined on [page four](#). In this document we've distilled the learnings that followed.

Our aim is to **share practical tools and approaches** to help organisations develop **their own actionable plans to expand their reach and create lasting impact.**



Volunteering Scaling Programme – Key phases and activities

Phase 1

0-6 months

Design

- Create an ambitious strategy for scaling impact.
- Design a scale model (how the solution will be scaled).

Phase 2

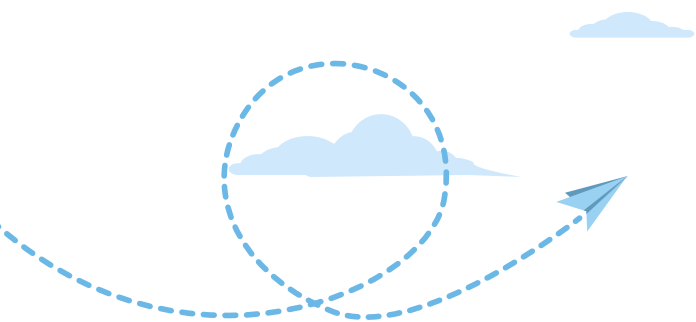
6-18 months

Systemise

- Ensure the right systems are in place to deliver the scale model.

Pilot

- Test key assumptions in the scale model, pilot the model in new locations and iterate based on learnings.

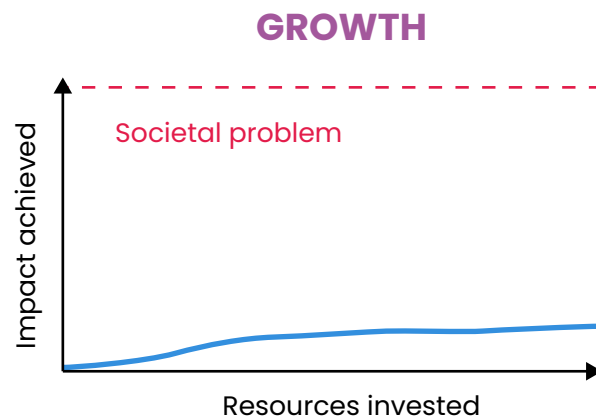


What do we mean by 'scale'?

In this context, scale means increasing impact to better match the size of the problem.

Scale often doesn't mean scaling the organisation itself and this is because the focus is on impact, not on any given organisation.

Instead, we should understand scaling as **dramatically expanding impact** in a way that's operationally and financially **sustainable**.

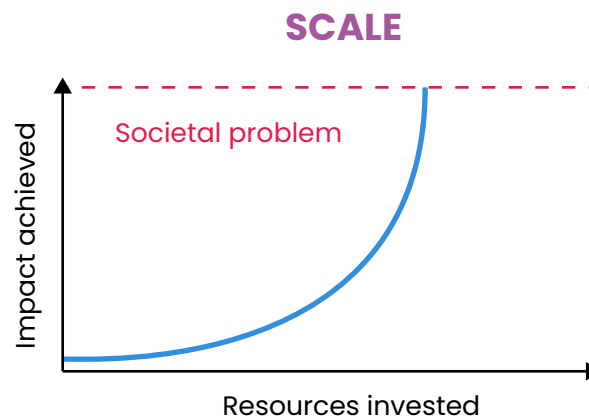


The core principle behind this definition is that 'scale' isn't the same as 'growth', and it isn't organisation-centric either.

It's about scaling impact to match the size of the problem.

Real scale requires reimagining our approach, diversifying solutions and transforming the way we tackle problems to better meet the size of the need.

The Volunteering Scaling Programme focussed **on supporting five organisations working with diverse volunteers** as a key part of their delivery.



These supported organisations also had a focus on **delivering benefits** to the volunteers and the participants taking part.

Organisations were also selected based on their **potential for success at scale**.



These five organisations were:



Cheshire Wildlife Trust

Part of a nationwide movement to improve places for wildlife and people's connection to it.

Its accessible development programme – '[Go Wild Get Fit](#)' – gives disadvantaged people opportunities to be active and volunteer in nature to support others to improve their wellbeing.



YMCA

Their programme, '[G.I.R.L.S Move](#)' aims to enable Black and Asian girls from culturally/ethnically diverse backgrounds to develop the skills, confidence and motivation to release their own potential and goals through peer support, non-traditional physical activity and social action.



Wheels for All (previously Cycling Projects)

A charity with a mission to make cycling accessible to all.

It engages people with physical and/or mental disabilities in cycling across many regions of England. Volunteers are an integral part of supporting participants and in delivering their activities.



Active Life for a Healthier You

An organisation that delivers physical activity and emotional wellbeing programmes to women of all ages and abilities in its local community of Southend, Essex.

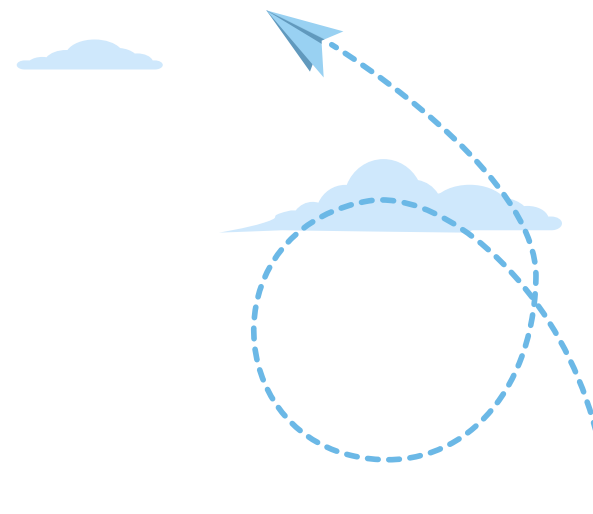
Their '**She's Ready**' programme, which doesn't run anymore, aimed to empower more women to become active and to support others through volunteering.



British Blind Sport

This charity represents people with a visual impairment in sport and physical activity across the UK.

Their '[See my Voice](#)' programme offers young people a leadership qualification, supports them to develop a range of skills and to take up volunteering and leadership roles in sport.



The Six Scaling Mindsets

Having supported over 700 organisations on their journey to scale – including those on the Volunteering Scaling Programme – Spring Impact has identified Six Scaling Mindsets that are crucial to scale impact successfully and sustainably.

Mindsets underpin our behaviours and actions – as individuals, teams and organisations – but we know changing them can be difficult as it involves altering ingrained organisational practices.

However, we believe these mindset shifts are essential for impacting problems at scale.

The Six Scaling Mindsets were crucial for the organisations taking part in the Volunteering Scaling Programme and we've therefore used these to frame and help unpack some of the **wider learning and experiences** of the organisations that took part in the programme.



This video series from Spring Impact provides an overview of the Six Scaling Mindsets one by one, substantiated by real-life stories.

Watch videos



The mindset shifts needed to achieve sustainable impact at scale:

1 Impact before growth



I used to think ... Scale is about growth.

Now I think ... Scale is about reducing the size of the problem.

2 Problem over solution



I used to think ... How can I scale up my solution?

Now I think ... How can we solve the problem at scale?

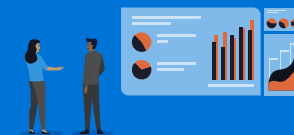
3 Never scale alone



I used to think ... How can we maximise our own achievements?

Now I think ... What's the best role for us to play?

4 Testing before investing



I used to think ... We'll make a detailed plan and stick to it.

Now I think ... We'll rapidly test, learn and adapt.

5 Relentlessly strategic



I used to think ... We want to do everything that's impactful.

Now I think ... We're willing to make difficult choices given limited resources.

6 Long-term commitment



I used to think ... We want to achieve results for this year.

Now I think ... We're investing in long-term lasting impact.

Let's look at each of the Six Scaling Mindsets one by one:

1 Impact before growth



We used to think:

"Scale is about growth."

Scale is about impact, not about growing organisations or solutions.

It often seems intuitive to grow your organisation and your reach, but just focusing on this can make you lose sight of **your ultimate goal** – to reduce societal problems so that your beneficiaries have better, more equitable outcomes.

Mission achievement means putting yourself out of business.

// *My learning has been that there are many ways to scale and sometimes it's not with us."*

Wheels for All

Now we think:

"Scale is about reducing the size of the problem."



2 Problem over solution



We used to think:

"How can I scale up my solution?"

Your solution is important, but the problem you're addressing is even more important and liable to change as the context shifts.

You must be **tightly focused on the problem and hold your solution lightly**, adapting it as the situation evolves.

Now we think:

"How can we solve the problem at scale?"



3 Never scale alone



We used to think:

“How can we maximise our own achievement?”

Now we think:

“What’s the best role for us to play?”

You can’t usually make a dent in a social problem on your own.

Instead of being in service of your organisation, you need to be **in service of addressing the problem.**

To do this you need to understand how other actors are working, choose the area where you can be most effective and coordinate with other groups to achieve the greatest overall impact.

// An objective of scaling up was to give ownership to partners. Changing our mindsets to this helped us explore ideas from the other partners.”

British Blind Sport

// We need to always continue to test the value proposition to partners.”

Wheels for All

Start by identifying how others in the sector can **support your goals**, centring their role from the outset.

Ensure you’re **creating enough value** for them to want to partner with you and consider that solving a problem at scale requires tapping into expertise, capabilities and resources beyond your organisation.

To attract the best partners, develop something they’d **genuinely want to engage** with.

Putting this into practice:

- Shift your mindset from ‘*what do we need from partners?*’ to ‘*how do we **create something that the best organisations want to be a part of?***’
- Co-create partnerships and offer your partners **greater opportunities** to shape the relationship.
- **Never lose sight of your North Star!**
If a partner’s demands take you away from this, they aren’t the right partner.

Strong partnerships are essential and it’s crucial to **balance offering a compelling value proposition** with clearly defining roles, responsibilities and expectations.

Empower partners to take ownership in delivering your intervention in new locations by giving them the autonomy to lead.

This approach not only **ensures quality** but also provides **valuable insights** into how the solution may need to adapt across different contexts.

// *We don’t need to be 100% actively involved in all aspects of delivery. We’ll just need to track the data collected by other organisations.”*

British Blind Sport



Putting this into practice:

- Have clarity on the ‘**core**’ of your **intervention**, that’s the foundational elements of your intervention that need to remain consistent to deliver impact.
- It’s essential that your partners know what they’re scaling.
- Allow room for **local adaptation** based on your partners’ expertise of their community.
- Develop **support packages** that offer training, resources and ongoing support.
- Invest in **clear quality standards** and **reporting guidelines** for partners and effective processes and mechanisms for monitoring these.

Tools:

- [Design your core toolkit.](#)
- [Scale model toolkit.](#)

4

Testing before investing



We used to think:

"We'll make a detailed plan and stick to it."

Now we think:

"We'll continuously test, learn and adapt."

We love to plan, but to have any chance of creating impact at scale, you must be alert.

You must constantly test out ideas in the real world ensuring you're scaling impact **with** your beneficiaries or participants, not for them.

Plus you've to experiment to **reduce the risk of failure** and shift towards a process of testing, learning and adapting as you go.

You can help to de-risk your strategy by **testing assumptions** quickly before investing resources.

Our default approach is to spend significant time planning, but the more we plan, the more we're building up risk, because **the real risk lies** in not learning what parts of our plans aren't working until it's too late.



// *I will now use small tests to see how an activity would work. For example, to see if someone will engage in webinars. I would now run a welcome/intro webinar before creating the content to get an idea of numbers and see if it will be worth running."*

British Blind Sport

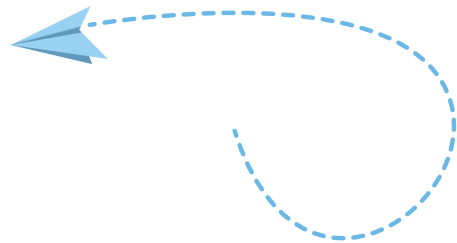
Putting this into practice:

- Design **quick and cheap real-world tests** that can be set up and delivered within days to find answers to key questions, uncertainties or assumptions.
- Define the **success of tests** in advance and be curious about what's not working.
- Use **learnings and feedback** to inform the ongoing delivery approach and make necessary adaptations.



Tools:

- [Test, Validate and Learn toolkit.](#)



5

Relentlessly strategic



We used to think:

"We want to do everything that's impactful."

Now we think:

"We're willing to make difficult choices given limited resources."

In order to tackle intimidating social problems, you must be relentlessly strategic in how you deploy resources.

This can be difficult and the trade-offs may have a very real effect on people's lives, but these adjustments can also help deliver impact at scale and enhance your overall capability to address the problem.

Setting a **clear ambitious strategy for scale** upfront is critical.

This is your long-term vision for how you'll tackle the problem at scale and will make strategic decision-making easy later down the line.

// *We [...] have a clearer vision on what the organisational direction is and how to align the impact of this work with it."*

Cheshire Wildlife Trust

// *We don't just take opportunities, we look at opportunities and are more inclined to say no to things if they don't fit with our organisational strategy."*

Active Life for a Healthier You

Putting this into practice:

- **Step back** and create space for strategic planning.
- Use it as your North Star – it should **focus what you're trying to achieve** and guide all your activities.
- Use it as a tool for saying no. It can be tempting to accept every opportunity that comes our way, especially when it involves funding, but **we've finite resources and time**.
- Instead ask – **does this opportunity fit my strategy and can I deliver on it?** That'll make the decision much simpler.

Tools:

- [Strategy toolkit](#).



6 Long-term commitment



We used to think:

"We want to achieve results this year."

Now we think:

"We're investing in long-term lasting impact."

Scaling impact takes time. It often involves numerous phases as you test and iterate, cultivate partnerships, gather evidence and build buy-in.

Amidst the constant pressures of the urgent needs of the organisation, it can be hard to focus on the future, yet **shifting your focus towards the long-term** will help ensure you make the right decisions in the short-term.

// *The process gave us the tools to evaluate how we were managing the programme and how we may need to change delivery."*

Active Life for a Healthier You

Remain agile and nimble by constantly **monitoring your progress** to achieving your long-term ambitious plans and **adapt** to ensure you're on course.

Putting this into practice:

- **Stay rooted in the real world.** Use insights and learnings from stakeholders and your intervention to inform changes in your scaling approach.
- **Monitor and track progress** towards your long-term ambition to ensure you stay on course.
- Hold your plans lightly. Adaptation is a constant process!
- Communicate to your funders that **scaling requires long-term investment**. While you'll have learning questions, the final scale model may evolve over time.

Tell us about your journey

We'd love to hear from you, so please tell us whether you've found this guidance useful or if you'd like to share your journey to scale with us.

You can email us at volunteering@sportengland.org.

If you want to explore more tools, go straight to Spring Impact's [Scaling Impact Toolkit](#).





Sport England
SportPark
3 Oakwood Drive
Loughborough
Leicestershire
LE11 3QF

sportengland.org

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