Designing
for Scale

Introduction

The Nature Conservancy has been working for decades to achieve "leverage" or produce "highly-leveraged outcomes." While we have great examples of effective "leveraged" strategies that have yielded "tangible lasting results at scale" (e.g., Debt for Nature swaps, US conservation bond initiatives, Parks in Peril) and many newer strategies that show great promise (e.g., REDD+, Development by Design), we haven't been consistent at illuminating the paths taken or consciously designing for achieving outcomes at the scales we aspire or the scale that is needed to make significant progress towards our mission.

The Conservancy's smart and motivated staff often has great ideas and they work incredibly hard to make them real but, again (with notable exceptions) we don't always think as carefully or methodically about how to bring our idea to scale. Instead we have often been guilty of an "if we build it they will come" notion of how our great innovation will meet its potential.

In this paper we advance some basic ideas and conceptual approaches to help us be more purposeful and intentional in designing our projects to have greater scale impacts. We have borrowed heavily from an exciting body of literature coming out of the social services sector and the philanthropy community, both of which are actively exploring, researching and writing about what they call "scaling up" or "scaling impacts." We find their ideas very valuable and applicable to our field; understanding and building from some of their work as well of our history may help us get better at designing for impacts at greater scales.

This paper has three parts. Each is designed to stand alone. In Part One, we define a small set of basic "scaling approaches" or pathways that we believe apply in the conservation world.

Part Two is a table including the scaling approaches defined, a checklist for teams to consider in their application of each approach, examples of projects that typify each, and links to other articles and materials that allow the reader to delve deeper into each scaling approach.

In Part Three, we suggest six "fundamental factors" key to designing a project to provide impact at the desired scale. We distilled these factors from interviews, literature, experiences and the paper trail left by others in TNC who have wrestled with summarizing "best practices" for achieving "leverage." We present these fundamental factors not to be the last word on this subject but to launch a conversation on the idea of essential building blocks for successfully designing a project to achieve greater impact. For whatever planning framework you use, we believe that if not these exact factors, than some similar group must be in place to succeed in designing well for scale. We hope that you will consider, test, and evaluate these factors and propose additional or alternative ones, and help us build our collective knowledge about how to intentionally design for large scale impact.

Part One. Scaling Approaches

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is facing the same challenges that most NGO's face— how can we dramatically increase our impact without also dramatically increasing our resources? The social sector has begun to develop and implement models and frameworks for distinguishing different pathways for spreading an innovation, idea or product, or influencing social change. They call these "scaling approaches" and the literature is rich with discussions about "scaling approaches."

Scaling approaches can be thought of as having two core purposes: "scaling up" and "systemic change." Scaling up refers to the "processes linking the origin of an innovation, idea or product on the one hand to the universe of users, clients or beneficiaries on the other."   Replication is one way of scaling up that we can all easily envision. Just think about Starbucks or the U.S. Public Library system both of which are examples of replication of a great product and a well-designed idea reaching the "universe of users."

Propagating a new concept for how to address a problem or making systemic change in an industry, social system or governing body may require different scaling approaches. In the case of system change, your "scaling approach" becomes the mechanism(s) one uses to create social change, to change the way a system operates and how major actors make decisions or behave. For example, changing tax laws to allow people to deduct charitable giving from their income taxes was a "scaling approach" used to inspire more philanthropic giving. By consciously articulating what you want to "go to scale" and investigating, comparing and evaluating possible scaling approaches, you can identify the approach (or approaches) you think is likely to work best to achieve the scale of impact you seek.

We think of scaling approaches as falling into three categories or "orientations."

Scaling approaches with a "Product" orientation are focused largely on getting a known successful program, tool, method, etc. to a targeted group of potential users.
A "Partnership" orientation relates to a set of circumstances where you have a common problem that is likely to be best addressed if different parties work together or you have a general concept that you believe will work well and gain real traction if people work together to adapt and spread it across multiple organizations or geographies.

An orientation that focuses on "Influence" fits situations where the required knowledge is largely in-place but there are impediments that must be removed or conditions that needs to be in place to enable and unlock the will to change and motivate key people to change.

It is important to note, that while we are describing these scaling approaches as separate and singular mechanisms, in practice, to achieve our desired outcomes we will often deploy more than one, sometimes in succession and sometimes simultaneously as our project evolves. In fact for many projects your path to scale will likely require that you not only consciously consider your scaling approaches but also the sequencing and timing of them as you build towards you desired impact.

EXAMPLES OF SCALING APPROACHES DEFINED PRODUCT ORIENTATION

1. **Replication.**

   Replication is defined as copying a "model" or program that has been shown to be effective, with the expectation that it can or will produce the same or comparable results in different places. It requires a thorough understanding of the original situation and the core elements that will lead to successful replication if applied under different cultural, social, political or economic situations. A model or program should be widely applicable as it is, or flexible and adaptable to a broader set of situations to be replicated widely.

2. **Dissemination.**

   Dissemination is the act of spreading a specific tool, method or concept that has been shown to improve conservation by leading to better informed decision making or conceptual breakthroughs through actively providing information, materials and targeted "marketing." In this lexicon we suggest that dissemination differs from replication in that your initial efforts are more likely to rely fully on one-off distribution techniques like placing articles in key journals, giving talks, distributing literature, posting content on the web, and other avenues that should lead to "viral" spread. Equally important for dissemination to be effective, prospective adopters need to be able to understand the core ingredients for success and these need to be adaptable to their unique circumstances.

PARTNERSHIP ORIENTATION

1. **Networking for a strategic purpose.**

   In this scaling approach, parties from different places or organizations are intentionally convened and linked through loose or tight affiliations for the purpose of achieving a common social good or needed change which may include solving a problem, spreading solutions, influencing policy, lobbying large funding sources and/or building constituency. The network can be designed in ways that will encourage and affirm individual efforts, share and fast track advances, distribute needed R&D, create bigger "buzz", recognize a larger potential goal and/or connect the pieces to create larger solutions. Networks may initially self-organize, but typically require leadership, staffing and funding to evolve and remain viable over time.

2. **Strategic affiliation** is the purposeful act of choosing and forming a relationship with an influential public or private sector partner. Affiliations can be either formal or informal collaborations aimed at achieving mutually defined outcomes. Forming strategic affiliations differs from networking in that they are usually formed around a specific set of "deliverables" and often have a prescribed time horizon, while networks are usually more organic in nature.

Influence Orientation

1. **Policy or Procedure Change.**
   Because of their size and influence, most governments have broad and deep impacts on society. This mechanism focuses on the "levers" managed by governments that are the root source or driver of a given conservation problem or potential solution. These levers take many forms and are too numerous to mention here, but include for example, tax policy, development policy, regulation, public funding, agency rule-making, performance indicators, public decision processes, new government programs or adoption of new practices. By identifying and modifying the key policy or procedure levers, you are "Influencing" the enabling conditions that will result in modifications in the conditions under which an institution or other key actors operates, thus setting the stage for behavioral changes or changes in practice norms.

2. **Motivating and Mobilizing.**
   The purpose of this scaling approach is to build awareness, momentum and the will for change to occur. This approach usually deploys strategic communications and requires clarity around the problem, knowledge of key actors and recommendations for change/solutions that are actionable. In this scaling approach it is critical to find or create opportunities (in ways that resonant with key actors) for actors to embrace the need for change, recognize their role/responsibility and see what they can do to make a difference.

3. **Changing the Rules of the Economic Game.**
   This mechanism focuses on the way private for-profit markets work and largely involves either creating incentives or removing obstacles in the market to unlock the will and direct changes in consumer preferences and/or producers' and/or supply chain practices in order to reduce impact on the environment or ensure a more sustainable use of resources.

Part 2. Scaling Approaches for Conservation

Scaling Approaches/ Mechanisms	Check list of core considerations Things we suspect are critical to keep in mind	Examples	Want to delve Deeper? Articles we found useful
Product Orientation – getting a known successful program, tool, method, etc. to potential users.			
1. Replication Copying a "model" or program that has been shown to be effective, with the expectation that it can or will produce the same or comparable results in different places.	√ Does the model work? √ Do you have data or can you show that it works? √ Do you know why and what the core essential ingredients for success are? √ Can you codify these ingredients in a way that is transferable? (Can you create a "cook book?") √ Do you know who needs it and/or who you want to adopt it? √ Do you know anything about their receptivity? √ How complicated is it to do? Will your target adopters ("users") need training or will simple manuals or handbooks be sufficient? √ Are there administrative or financial barriers that could keep your potential adopters/users from applying this new program even if they like it or want to use it? √ Are there places where you can seed the idea that are really visible and will get the attention of influential constituencies? √ Do you have a financial model for your replication approach?	A Bond initiatives B. NOAA Oyster Reef Restoration Partnership C. Debt for Nature Swaps	*Going to Scale:* The challenge of replicating social programs *Getting Replication Right:* The decisions that matter most for nonprofit organizations looking to expand
2. Dissemination Spreading a specific tool, method or concept that has been shown to improve conservation through actively providing information, training, and targeted marketing.	√ Has the tool, method or concept been employed and found successful under real conditions? √ Is it possible to share the essential ingredients for success succinctly in easily distributable training or outreach materials? √ Are you sure there is a need or "market" for this innovation? √ Where and in what forms are your target users/adopters likely to seek most of their information? √ What will it take to get the information to them in these venues and forms? √ Are there visible "thought leaders" or highly collaborative leaders that you might get to engage as early adopters and champions? √ Bear in mind that the originators of these new methods may or may not be the best people to think through, lead or promote the dissemination.	A. Marine Spatial Planning Decision Support Tool B. Ecoregional Assessments C. Conservation Action Planning	*Scaling Social Impact:* Strategies for spreading social innovations

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Scaling Approaches/ Mechanisms	Check list of core considerations Things we suspect are critical to keep in mind	Examples	Want to delve Deeper? Articles we found useful
Partnership Orientation – When one or more partners work in a purposeful, agreed upon way to address a shared problem and/or promote the evolution and spread of a proven approach to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.			
3. Networking for a strategic purpose Intentionally convening and linking parties from different places or organizations for the purpose of achieving a common social good or needed change.	√ What is the purpose of the network? If the purpose is to develop a solution to some specific time-bound problem the structure, information management and affiliation is likely to be different from a network whose main purpose is spread and promote a known solution. √ Are there existing relationships that you can build upon to start your network? Networks flourish where there is trust and recognized credible participants. Given this, already formed relationships can be ready "nodes" from which to build and grow a network. √ Will the network need to be more formal with defined responsibilities and membership terms and rules of engagement or can you still achieve a more focused strategic outcome with a more informal community of practice? √ What types of information will need to flow and what are the best ways for this information to flow? What is the mix of virtual, in-person or high touch ways that will be needed to move this information and ensure key participants are truly using the information and engaging? √ What roles are essential to ensure that the conditions are in place for maintaining and evolving the network connections and vibrancy?	A. Fire learning network B. Coral Reef Resilience Network	*How Do Networks Support Scale?* *Working Wikily 2.0: Social change with a network mindset Communities of Practice – Quick Start up Guide*

Scaling Approaches/ Mechanisms	Check list of core considerations Things we suspect are critical to keep in mind	Examples	Want to delve Deeper? Articles we found useful
Partnership Orientation – When one or more partners work in a purposeful, agreed upon way to address a shared problem and/or promote the evolution and spread of a proven approach to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.			
4. Strategic Affiliation Purposefully choosing and forming a relationship with an influential public or private sector partner aimed at achieving mutually defined outcomes.	√ Why would it be valuable to form an affiliation? √ Who are the logical partners with whom to affiliate? √ Will the partner fill strategic gaps, provide new/required skills, open up access to key stakeholders, expand geographic reach? √ The aims, objectives and operating norms (especially communication and decision making "ground rules") of the partnership are important to define and agree upon as early as possible in the collaboration? √ Be open about any real or perceived hierarchy or imbalance of power that may exist among the affiliates and look for ways to consciously structure your affiliation's "ground rules" in ways that minimize hierarchy. √ A shared implementation plan with roles and responsibilities defined is an ideal way to minimize conflict, keep everything in the open, and create benchmarks for measuring and celebrating progress, and evaluating future status of the partnership. √ Real results and the celebration of them are absolutely key to sustaining momentum and maintaining healthy partnerships.	A. TNC/Dow Agreement B. TNC/USDA/ DOI Promoting Ecosystem Resilience through Collaboration Cooperative Agreement C. The Great Rivers Partnership D. Responsible Asia Forestry and Trade	*WWF Partnership Toolbox* *TPI's The Partnering Toolbook* *TPI's Talking the Walk* *TNC's Conservation Partnership Center*

Scaling Approaches/ Mechanisms	Check list of core considerations Things we suspect are critical to keep in mind	Examples	Want to delve Deeper? Articles we found useful
"Influence" Orientation – scaling approaches that relate more to addressing conditions that needs to be put in place to enable and unlock the will to change or motivate key actors to change.			
5. Policy or Procedure Change This mechanism focuses on effecting the "levers" managed by governments that are the root source or driver of a given conservation problem or potential solution thus setting the stage for behavioral changes or changes in practice.	√ Identify the potential levers that could be useful (policy change, new funding program, legislative initiative, procedural interpretation of existing policy, etc.) √ Consider the scope and type of impact that you would anticipate different levers could generate. √ Identify the decision-makers who move the levers and get clarity on what would motivate them. You need to be sure you identify the correct issues to address for the lever to function appropriately. √ Map out the pathway from policy statement to funding, implementation, and impact. Understand the details of each, and how they work. Some policies sound too good to be true - you still need to think through what the path to real impact on the ground looks like after the policy victory has been won. If you change policy but there is no funding or real motivation or will to implement the policy at the administrative or field level or the skills to implement the desired changes in practice doesn't exist at the field level is- it may not matter in the end. √ Evaluate whether impact is being maximized through current policy approaches and mechanisms and identify potential approaches to improve efficiency, if needed. √ Demonstration projects have to be designed with desired policy/ practice change in mind (in some cases you might be able to harvest good examples from things already underway). Be clear what is being demonstrated to which "lever" and why.	A. Brazil Forest Code B. UN Convention on Biodiversity C. Clean Water Act D. Farm Bill E. Water Resources Development Act	*Straight No Chaser: Puff the Magic Lever*

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"Influence" Orientation – scaling approaches that relate more to addressing conditions that needs to be put in place to enable and unlock the will to change or motivate key actors to change.			
6. Motivating and Mobilizing This scaling approach focuses on building awareness, momentum and the will for change to occur. This approach usually deploys strategic communications.	√ What is the change you want to see? √ Is this even vaguely possible to achieve? √ Who needs to "change" or be mobilized to realize this change? √ What would you have them do? √ Working backward from key actors' motivations, needs, current beliefs, etc. identify what could get their attention and inspire different behavior. √ Once you understand who you need to reach and what messages you need to get to them, remember that a credible messenger who speaks the language of the target audience is key to the message being heard and believed. √ Marketing is going to be an important component of this, but marketing alone doesn't change behavior. It can create awareness – but is almost never sufficient to create new behavior – or ensure "stickiness." Your campaign can't just raise awareness it needs to also include a "call to specific action." Don't just shout fire, show people the exit routes.	A. Sustainable Seafood campaign B. All Hands on Earth	*Gladwell, Malcolm. 2000. The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. Little, Brown and Company, NY*

Scaling Approaches/ Mechanisms	Check list of core considerations Things we suspect are critical to keep in mind	Examples	Want to delve Deeper? Articles we found useful
"Influence" Orientation – scaling approaches that relate more to addressing conditions that needs to be put in place to enable and unlock the will to change or motivate key actors to change.			
7. Changing the rules of the Economic Game Creating incentives or removing obstacles in the market to unlock the will and direct changes in consumer preferences and/or producers' and/or supply chain practices in order to reduce impact on the environment or ensure a more sustainable use of resources.	√ What is the "value chain"* for the product and market you want to influence? √ Where are the points of concentration in the value chain where you could have the most potential for efficient impact? (e.g., in fisheries, processing is concentrated while sales is more diffuse.) √ Are there points along the value chain where decision making power is most concentrated and you are likely to be able to gain access? √ Are there links in the supply chain that could be subject to public or consumer pressure (e.g., in fisheries, large seafood restaurant chains; in forest practices, well recognized paper product brands)? √ Do key market actors believe there is a problem or could they be convinced there's a problem? √ Can you find early adopters who are credible market actors who themselves can move the needle enough to gain attention or create some competition in the market (e.g. home depots focus on sale of certified lumber?) √ Can you explicitly define the "sustainable behavior" you want actors to adopt? √ Is what we are asking of the actor in this stage of the value chain reasonable? √ Can you communicate this in terms that the key actors understand? √ If you achieve this change will it really have impact?	A. Forest Certification B. Influencing Insurance markets C. Catch Share-based Fisheries Management	**Check list of core considerations note** *The business model for how a raw material is used as input and through various processes and steps value is added to the raw material until it finally sells as a finished product to the customer. (Coconut tree plantations to coconut harvesting to coconut oil processing to sell of oil to thousands of different products using coconut, etc.)

The following six factors represent things we suggest are key to successfully design a project to have impact at "scale." These factors will not be new to you nor will they surprise you, they are things that you probably know intuitively. What we hope is that they will stimulate your thinking to see them laid out in this way and prompt you to consider how you might apply these factors purposefully to new or ongoing strategies and projects. It is our hypothesis that all of these factors are essential to designing well for scale.

FACTOR 1. DEFINE THE END GAME.

"With impact as its central focus, successful scaling begins with a clear sense of purpose."

Perhaps nothing can be more helpful in designing for scale than describing and imagining with as much clarity as possible the large ambitious impact/change you want to see happen as a result of the actions you will take. Yes, it is true, that if your aim is to replicate a specific approach to coral reef conservation, you must have a "bottom up" detailed understanding of how and why this approach will work. However, to successfully "bring it to scale" having this "top down" angle of vision of where you want to end up enables one to see where your approach really needs to get traction first in order to generate the most influential support and continued funding. And this view helps you to see what is really at the root of any problems in order to address the impediments that might exist to adoption by key stakeholders and partners.

FACTOR 2. MAKE SURE OTHERS CARE.

"It is never enough to build a better mouse trap. Demand for the mouse trap has to [exist or] be cultivated... people may even need to be persuaded that mice are worth catching in the first place."

To have large scale impact, whatever you are trying to bring to scale (a new approach, idea, program, value) has to address a need/problem/desire that others have. Even if they don't see the benefit or understand why it matters to them right away– it must be possible to make the connection in a way that resonates with them. For example, something like sea level rise has huge implications not just for coastal wetlands but to the safety of coastal human settlements and to insurance companies that underwrite property, and to fisheries that depend on wetlands as nurseries for replenishing fishing stocks. If you have a remedy that you think will soften the impacts of sea level rise to coastal wetlands you are going to be much more successful getting that funded and implemented if most (or the most powerful) of these constituencies see their interests somehow furthered in your remedy.

It is vital to tell your story of change in ways that resonate for those who need to adopt the change because ultimately your success will depend on key people caring enough to "talk to each other." You need to give them the words. You need messages that key stakeholders will be able to hear, the messenger needs to be credible to those you want to reach, and the messages need to be shared in places

the key stakeholders will likely be listening. For example: if to replicate your method, you need scientific validation, you may need to implement your project using scientific principles that allow you to publish your results in peer reviewed journals. If the main actor for implementation is government, can you demonstrate and clearly communicate how your project can avoid litigation or speed up the NEPA process or reduce costs? If the key stakeholder is a major industry, can you show that what you are proposing will resonate with consumers or regulatory bodies, improve their bottom line or reinforce their brand?

And do be vigilant about showcasing promising wins and small successes and celebrate them along the way. Some of these "wins" may not be as important to you as they are to your key stakeholders and partners but positive press and promising trends will keep key stakeholders engaged, attract the interest of new parties and encourage more partners to join the caravan.

Factor 3. Going to Scale is a Play with a Large Cast of Characters.

You already know about the importance of having good project leadership and a diverse team to succeed in any project at any scale but that is the starting point. For any idea to go to scale you must know who needs to be influenced and who you need to work with and what level of engagement is needed. Early adopters, champions, decision makers or "gate keepers," and donors or funders are some of the other key roles that have to be scripted and filled. And for each of these key actors, you must be clear on their needs and motivations and what they need to know, do, not do or do differently in order to get the change you seek.

We looked at a number of projects that didn't result in the kind of scaled impact that the originators desired and in most of the cases, the new approach, idea, concept or recommended change was great (even brilliant) and timely but they didn't really understand and address the needs of key actors as

they rolled the project out . For example, in one situation an innovative practice had buy in from high levels in an agency but field staff didn't have capacity to implement and the practice never got off the ground. In another case, there was a great new way to use conservation land acquisition as an investment but the innovators didn't understand who the right investors were, they pitched it to the wrong partners and the idea never got traction.

Especially when you expect a great deal of resistance initially, the best possible scenario for scaling an innovation or inspiring change is to develop your project with an "open ownership scenario" or partnership orientation where key actors own the idea as early as possible. In this scenario, you engage key partners in solving the problem or the evolution of the design and the actual work as much as possible or you get funding from key partners to fund the "experiment" or implement the trials. In this way you seed awareness of the problems and build the solution with as many of these key actors as possible and mechanisms for communications can be built in to start early and often.

Factor 4. Identify, take advantage and/or create the necessary conditions for success.

"Social innovations.....are born in a certain context, under certain circumstances, and in response to certain needs or problems. [Their]...emergence and diffusion are dependent on existing frameworks and opportunities."

In this world of scaling, much depends upon timing and whether enabling conditions exist, or you can create the conditions for your well-timed idea to blossom. Sometimes these conditions can be something like having the right policy framework in place. Looking for lynch pin policies that are either going to unlock an impediment or inspire new behaviors is often an essential ingredient for going to scale. An easy example would be the relationship to having a tax policy and history of charitable giving that enabled the birth of conservation easements as a strategy in the later part of the 20th century in the US.

Another type of enabling condition is a precipitating crisis either obviously looming or recently preying on people's minds. Crisis is often the time where people can be very open to change if the "right" idea surfaces. Finding and taking advantage of crisis to introduce your new idea can be a valuable way to get uptake – to "strike while the iron's hot." An example of this is the infamous British Petroleum Deep Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico providing an opportunity to direct billions of new dollars to restoration and conservation in the Gulf States.

For scaling up an innovative project or concept, or gaining adoption of a new tool or method, there are specific key conditions you can look for that will more likely foster your success. You may gain traction on your idea faster if you seed the idea where there is receptivity. For example, where a champion for change is already active or parties are already trying to do something similar, or where the core mechanisms and capacities for implementation are largely in place. An example of this is changing the Farm Bill policy through politically aligned support to more efficiently and effectively implement agricultural BMPs through existing programs.

Factor 5. Shift your thinking from "Can we?" to "HOW can we?" achieve scale.

A psychologist once showed a picture of a person in a wheelchair to some young students and she asked, "Can this person drive a car?" The students uniformly answered no, and they had no trouble coming up with reasons why. In another classroom, she showed the same picture and asked a slightly different question, "How can this person drive a car?" After some silence, the students started to offer ideas. A whole different kind of conversation ensued - creative, energized, and constructive."

Often in conservation we have thought long and hard about the innovative project or solution itself. We have great examples of specific things to do. We will think very well about the problem from a "what" angle and sometimes even about the "who," but not apply the same discipline to our thinking about "how" you will spread this great idea. This is where thinking about "scaling approach" or the path to scaling fits.

Thinking explicitly about and articulating the approach or approaches you think will work to have the impacts you seek we believe is key to creating not only a more disciplined way forward but also to enable you to benefit from the work of others who have walked a similar path. The social services literature is full of examples of scaling approaches or mechanisms related to different things that could be scaled and in the previous section of this paper we proposed some plausible "pathways" for scaling that we believe may be most suited to the types of projects and challenges we face in conservation.

By starting with defining your end game and double checking that what you want to do matters to others and then thinking through who the key actors are in the theatre of change, you can now consider which of the scaling approaches might work best. There are inherent limits to different approaches and conditions that lend themselves better to one or another, but by looking deeper into these approaches you will be able to try different ones on for size and develop your "theory of scale."

It cannot be emphasized enough that to achieve your desired outcome it may take nested approaches and mechanisms. For instance, federal policy change may include networking with partners, policy makers and their staff, dissemination of a set of tools and replication of a new approach to restoration, motivating and mobilizing land owners, and changing the economic game to incentivize the process. Thinking well about the scaling approaches and their sequence represents the full path to scale.

Factor 6. Bringing Projects to "Scale" takes commitment.

Almost everyone we talked to and everything we read emphasized this point, designing and implementing strategies that result in major change takes an on-going investment in time and money. It would be great if all it took to make the change we seek was to start painting the fence like Tom Sawyer and all of a sudden the whole world was painting with us and we could go fishing! But more often than not a project that aims to have large scale impacts that endure over time will have a complex life cycle with different phases and will require sustained commitment of some type and different skills along the way. In fact, when we investigate most projects that have had large scale impacts, we often, if not always, find that the project is at least a decade in the making and has gone through a number of different iterations with a suite of different smart motivated people involved. Those people with the experience or skills needed to figure out the nuts and bolts of the "how," are often different from those with the skills and relationships necessary to roll out the product or influence systemic changes in policy or other enabling conditions that may be necessary to foster receptivity or gain funding at the scale you aspire.

Jeffrey Bradach, one of the most active thinkers on scaling social impacts, notes in his article, Going to Scale: The Challenge of Replicating Social Programs that one of the biggest problems social innovators face is getting the sustained investment that they need to go the distance. In the perfect world, we could predict and plan for this life cycle and carefully budget for the resources we need at the beginning. In the real world, we need to at the very least, understand and attempt to predict in our theory of change where TNC's commitment and investment is likely to be critical to maintain momentum. And we can try to articulate and anticipate the signs that tell us that the innovation is going to reach - if not the stars than at least the moon - and it is safe to reduce our engagement and let the process unfold.

Footnotes

[1] This paper is the work of a team that included Jora Young, Jeff Hardesty, Robin Cox, Jonathon Higgins and Susan Anderson. The team was chartered by The Nature Conservancy's Conservation Strategies and Learning Unit. Your feedback on these ideas is welcome and wanted. Please send feedback to Jora Young (jyoung@tnc.org) and/or if would like to be kept informed about revisions or additional content about *Designing For Scale,* contact Jora. The team acknowledges and thanks Jonathon Hoekstra, Alan Holt, Jeanette Howard, Andrew Soles, Bob Searle, Mandy Taft-Pearman, Joe Fargione and Kristen Sherwood for their contributions.

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