



# Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep: Advancing Systemic Social Innovation and the Learning Processes to Support it

Prepared for the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and Tamarack Institute  
by Darcy Riddell and Michele-Lee Moore (October 2015)

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## Executive Summary:

How can brilliant but isolated experiments aimed at solving the most pressing and complex social and ecological problems become more widely adopted and lead to transformative impact? Leaders of social change and innovation often struggle to expand their impact on social systems, and funders of such change are increasingly concerned with the scale and positive impact of their investments. In 1998, the Montreal-based J.W. McConnell Family Foundation pursued a deliberate granting strategy known as Applied Dissemination to reframe approaches to replicating successful projects. A few years later, the Foundation began convening its grantees receiving funding from the Applied Dissemination (AD) program to accelerate the impacts of their initiatives, develop a stronger understanding of the complex systems in which they worked, and to collectively begin to address some of Canada's most intractable social problems. The *AD learning group* focused on peer-based learning and application, in an environment that created trust and respect among participants. The AD learning group was successful not only in improving individual and organizational efforts to accelerate and scale impact, but also in catalyzing a field of practice in Canada that focused on generating new social innovations, and scaling up and deepening the impact of those innovative initiatives. More than a decade later, the experience contains valuable lessons about effective scaling strategies, and about how to design applied learning approaches to support social innovators.

Part one of this report distills important lessons from a decade of practice in accelerating impact and scaling social innovations, including the strategies used to achieve success. Part two summarizes insights from this cohort of social innovators about the design elements involved in the applied, peer-based learning process and how that ultimately built their personal and organizational capacity. This successful initiative was not without challenges though, and these are also detailed in the report.

### Part One: Strategies for Scaling up, out and deep

Research in social innovation and social enterprise has focused on the strategies required to move ideas from one context to a larger scale (Bradach, 2010, Evans & Clarke, 2011, McPhedran *et al.*, 2011, Mulgan *et al.*, 2008). From a social innovation perspective, large-scale change will necessarily involve changes to rules, resource flows, cultural beliefs and relationships in a social system at multiple spatial or institutional scales. However, in social entrepreneurship and social enterprise studies, the emphasis on "scaling for impact" often reflects a product and consumer orientation, synonymous with diffusion or replication. However, scaling social innovations to effect larger-scale change involves a more complex and diverse process than simply 'diffusing' or spreading a product or model. It is important to learn about the process of how social systems and institutions can be deliberately impacted through the work of organizations, foundations, and other agents of change.

## A Typology of Routes to Systemic Impact: Scaling out, Scaling up and Scaling deep

This report builds a typology of three approaches to scaling which underscores the complexities and complementary nature of the strategies involved in advancing large systems change, opening up new avenues for non-profit leaders to consider, and illuminating the role of funders and conveners in amplifying the potential impacts of social change initiatives. Our research identified five cross-cutting scaling strategies, and five strategies associated specifically with the three types of scaling. “Scaling out” was the approach that McConnell Foundation staff and the AD learning group focused on originally, emphasizing replication of successful innovations in different communities, with the hopes of spreading those same results to more people. However, the majority of participants found that reproducing an initiative might never address deeper systems holding social problems in place. For many initiatives, the route to greater impact lay in changing institutions, policy and law - “scaling up” to change the “rules of the game”. Strategies for “scaling deep” related to the notion that durable change has been achieved only when people’s hearts and minds, their values and cultural practices, and the quality of relationships they have, are transformed (see Figure 1).

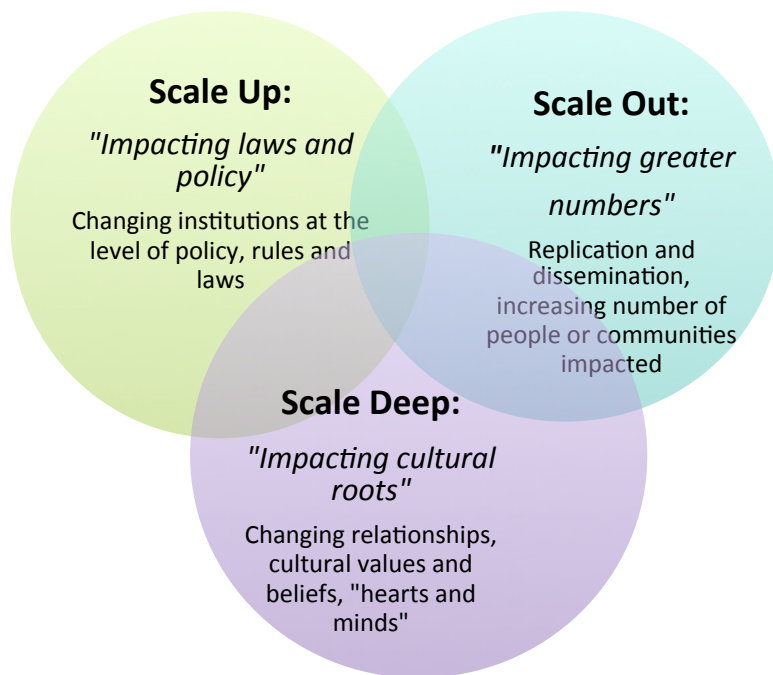


Figure 1. Scaling out, scaling up and scaling deep for social innovation

### 1.2 The *Why* and *What* of Scaling: Reframing Purpose Using Systems Thinking

In each of the organizations involved in the Applied Dissemination learning group, an initiative had begun at a community level. As organizations and their partners advanced scaling strategies, they found the need to clarify or reframe their purpose, since scaling activities often differed from the organization’s typical or previous activities. This occurred in two major ways, which we identify as cross-cutting strategies: 1) by making scale and impact a conscious choice, and 2) by analyzing root

causes using systems thinking, and clarifying the purpose of their innovation. Once they made scaling a deliberate choice, participants employed many strategies to spread their social innovations and challenge the systemic problems at the root of their issues. Their chosen strategy depended on the founding conditions of their organization, the context surrounding their issue, the resources and support they could access, choices they made about who to partner with and how to achieve impact, and the windows of opportunity - political, cultural and social - that emerged.

### 1.3 The How of Scaling: Strategies for Scaling Out, Up and Deep

Once they made scaling a deliberate choice, participants employed many strategies to spread their social innovations and challenge the systemic problems at the root of their issues. Their chosen strategy depended on the founding conditions of their organization, the context surrounding their issue, the resources and support they could access, choices they made about who to partner with and how to achieve impact, and the windows of opportunity - political, cultural and social - that emerged. The core scaling strategies associated with scaling out, scaling up and scaling deep are summarized in Table 1, along with three additional cross-cutting strategies employed by organizations involved in the AD learning group.

Table 1. Types of “scaling” and their main strategies

	Description	Main Strategies
<b>Scaling Out:</b>	<i>Impacting greater numbers.</i> Based on the recognition that many good ideas or initiatives never spread or achieve widespread impact.	<b>Deliberate replication:</b> Replicating or spreading programs geographically and to greater numbers <b>Spreading principles:</b> Disseminate principles, with adaptation to new contexts via co-generation of knowledge
<b>Scaling Up:</b>	<i>Impacting law and policy.</i> Based on the recognition that the roots of social problems transcend particular places, and innovative approaches must be codified in law, policy and institutions.	<b>Policy or legal change efforts:</b> New policy development, partnering, advocacy to advance legal change and redirect institutional resources.
<b>Scaling Deep:</b>	<i>Impacting cultural roots.</i> Based on the recognition that culture plays a powerful role in shifting problem-domains, and change must be deeply rooted in people, relationships, communities and cultures.	<b>Spreading big cultural ideas</b> and using stories to shift norms and beliefs <b>Investing in transformative learning</b> and communities of practice
<b>Cross-cutting strategies for scaling:</b>	<i>Cross-cutting strategies</i> were those approaches all participants reported using to scale their initiatives, and were not specifically associated with scaling out, up, or deep.	<b>Making scale a conscious choice</b> <b>Analyzing root causes and clarifying purpose</b> <b>Building networks and partnerships</b> <b>Seeking new resources</b> <b>Commitment to evaluation</b>

Key challenges practitioners faced in scaling included the leadership stresses involved in leading change as well as the organizational dynamics that arose when the amount of focus and cultural

shift required to scale an initiative caused disconnects and misunderstanding in the founding organization.

What becomes clear is an evolution in the way practitioners are thinking about, and attempting to achieve, scale. Most initiatives blended different types and strategies for scaling, emphasizing different types of scale at different phases of the process in order to achieve greater impact on the social issues of deepest concern to them. However, two patterns dominated for the practitioners involved in this study: i) they moved from scaling out to scaling up, or ii) they moved from scaling out to scaling deep.

## **Part Two: Applied Learning to Accelerate Impact**

Part two of the report describes the design, content and processes that were part of the Applied Dissemination (AD) learning initiative, as well as the personal and organizational value practitioners gained and some of the challenges they faced during the learning process. Specific aspects of the AD learning process and design were identified as critical for any peer-learning processes, including: a) participant selection, b) the conditions created by the convenors c) the culture and environment the learning group created and nurtured together, and d) the timely introduction of content and frameworks to support learning.

**Participant selection** for the AD learning group focused on drawing together a number of people from different backgrounds that worked on diverse social and environmental challenges. These practitioners had all initiated promising changes in their communities or fields, and faced similar leadership challenges in pioneering new approaches and desiring to increase their scale and impact. This shared context enabled mutual support towards big visions of change. But the growth in understanding about shared context was also supported by the **conditions created by the convenors**. Importantly, the McConnell Foundation staff recognized the wisdom that the practitioners brought into the learning process and used experiential, peer-based and participatory approaches. Likewise, McConnell Foundation staff also joined the learning journey, and the Foundation embraced and modeled many of the key concepts. Over time, a deeply trusting and respectful peer learning **culture and environment was created and nurtured together**. The trust, respect, and safety associated with the AD learning group was attributed to both the participants' common experience but also to the design elements of the learning sessions.

The AD learning group was enriched by **the timely introduction of content and frameworks to support learning about scale and impact** that were shared by various experts, whose contributions were applied to real-life organizational challenges. Invited experts brought credible knowledge and frameworks that were relevant to practitioners, influencing a different quality of practice, and supporting root analysis of problems. The concepts and analysis helped participants to "find vocabularies for their experience". Specific knowledge, frameworks and methods were recognized by participants as crucial in their learning about innovation, scaling and accelerating impact, including:

- The adaptive cycle and theory of resilience;
- Complexity and systems thinking;
- Development evaluation;
- Using collaborative and participatory approaches for every phase of innovation;
- Case study analysis; and
- Peer input processes.

Combining thoughtful design, a constructive and emotionally supportive learning environment, and expert and peer-driven content led to significant personal and organizational impacts. Benefits

included participants trying approaches in their problem area that had not been done before in Canada, and sometimes in the world, and giving the organizations a new sense of direction and ambition. Participants began to see themselves as resources for one another. Furthermore, a number of participants chose to use the principles of experiential group learning that they had experienced in the AD learning group within their own organization or networks, coming to view **collaborative learning as an essential part of the entire social innovation process**. For groups whose mission required the dissemination of knowledge and new models of collaboration, the convening methods, frameworks, and peer-learning processes demonstrated in the AD community of practice became central to their own engagement and scaling work.

For those designing peer-based learning groups in the future, the challenges arising from the AD learning group can also provide useful insights. Some participants acknowledged that a funder bringing grantees together increased the burden of responsibility to grow and succeed. Group transition was also a challenge both when participant organizations experienced staff turnover, and later when the McConnell Foundation faced grantee pressures to expand the group. The bonds of trust and the intensity of the learning community depended on maintaining an intimate group, which was in tension with the desire to extend its positive impact to greater numbers. This delicate balance is an important element in group learning process design.

## **Conclusion:**

We conclude with several observations. First, the practice of scaling in Canada has evolved from earlier, simpler conceptions to a much more nuanced understanding. We have identified three types of scaling associated with five associated strategies, as well as five cross-cutting strategies that supported change leaders to expand the impact of their social solutions. These practitioners not only sought to disseminate their innovations over wider geographic areas or to greater numbers, but aimed also at systemic impacts - changes to rules, resource flows, cultural beliefs and relationships in a social system at multiple spatial or institutional scales. The experience of Canadian practitioners can provide an orienting map for the complex and often isolating journey of social innovation, suggesting that multiple approaches to scaling may be needed to achieve systemic impacts.

Second, a critical part of the scaling process involved learning. Many participants also still draw on frameworks introduced, and rely on reference material they collected from the sessions when thinking through difficult decisions or when training new staff. By convening the AD learning group, the McConnell Foundation supported interconnectedness among practitioners, shifted its own practice and also created the conditions for emergence, whereby new ideas and approaches could be fostered. Many participants remain committed to the relationships developed during the AD learning group, and continue to serve as a resource and support system for each other and emerging leaders.

Third, implementing a peer-based, experiential learning forum was recognized by all who participated as extremely valuable. However, this was a resource-intensive exercise. It is difficult to achieve such impact without spending the time, energy, and financial resources to bring people together in thoughtful and thought-provoking ways. While this resource-intensiveness raises questions about the “scalability” of the impact of such learning processes, the experiences of a number of participants who have gone on to embed peer-based learning in their own organizations and networks demonstrates that the model can be scaled. Social technologies and advances in online learning platforms are making scaling of peer networks and dissemination of knowledge much more available, and while these do not replace face-to-face learning, they can complement and support learning cohorts in ever-expanding ways. Much of the early learning material used in Applied Dissemination has been systematized through the SiG Knowledge Hub, [www.sigknowledgehub.ca](http://www.sigknowledgehub.ca), as well as on Innoweave.ca, the Foundation’s learning platform.

Finally, although the journey of social innovation is never complete, this report ends on a note of celebration for successes and for new beginnings. It is clear that applied learning did help to accelerate the impacts of several socially innovative initiatives across Canada. Now, these same practitioners, along with new generations of change agents, are considering “what next” and continuing to push the boundaries of social change practice.

## Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep: Advancing systemic social innovation and the learning process to support it

### Introduction:

How can brilliant, but isolated experiments aimed at solving the most pressing and complex social and ecological problems become more widely adopted and lead to transformative impact? Leaders of social change and innovation often struggle to expand their impact on systems, and funders of such change are increasingly concerned with the scale and positive impact of their investments. As Bradach and Grindle (2014, p. 7) state, the catchphrase “scaling what works” has become “a rallying cry to direct more funding to interventions that actually get results”. But questions remain about how funders and social change leaders can work together to have an impact across scales and what “scale” or “scaling” actually involves.

We define **social innovation** as *any initiative, product, program, platform or design that challenges, and over time changes, the defining routines, resource and authority flows, or beliefs of the social system in which the innovation occurs* (Westley & Antadze, 2010). We find that process of scaling social innovations to achieve systemic impacts involves three different types of scaling – scaling out, scaling up, and scaling deep – and systemic change is likely to require a combination of these types. Although systems change processes in any complex problem domain will be emergent, we found that certain strategies are associated with each type of scaling process. This report is based on experiences from social innovation experiments conducted by charitable organizations and funded by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, over more than a decade in Canada.

In 1998, the Montreal-based J.W. McConnell Family Foundation began pursuing a deliberate strategy for moving beyond discrete project-based funding, in order to enable broader impact by their grantees. The strategy was called **Applied Dissemination** and supported social innovators in disseminating new programs, processes, skills or knowledge in their work with communities and organizations, and to apply or adapt innovations in different settings (Pearson, 2006). This work demanded that both the Foundation and their grantees work together as they became intentional in their attempts to shift broader social structures, cultures and institutions. As one part of the Applied Dissemination (AD) strategy, the McConnell Foundation hosted a learning community (or community of practice), convening diverse grantees to learn from one another, to integrate concepts of systems change into their practice, and to accelerate the impacts of funded innovations.

This study was undertaken to capture the lessons learned from participants in the AD learning community. The findings have been divided into two main categories. **Part One**<sup>1</sup> reveals insights into the evolution of practitioners’ thinking about scaling innovation and accelerating impact over time, and distinguishes the three types of scaling used by non-profit leaders, along with the specific strategies connected to each, and five additional cross-cutting strategies. These results will be interesting to foundations and organizations considering how to achieve broader and more durable impact with their initiatives. **Part Two** focuses on the design and content of the community of practice, and its impact on participants. These latter results may be of interest to foundations and philanthropic organizations seeking to increase the impact of grantees or partners by convening peer learning networks, or to those involved in designing and supporting communities of practice related to systems change and scaling.

### History of Social Innovation Funding

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<sup>1</sup> Part One contains previously published material from Moore, Michele-Lee, Darcy Riddell, and Dana Vocisano. “Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep: Strategies of Non-profits in Advancing Systemic Social Innovation.” *Journal of Corporate Citizenship* 2015.58 (2015): 67-84.



The Foundation's work on scaling and social innovation dates back to the mid-1990s when it began funding the replication of new and creative approaches. These tended to emerge at the community or local level, and in an effort to facilitate their spread from one part of the country to another, the Foundation began to invest in replication. The Foundation shifted its approach in 1998, and developed the concept of "Applied Dissemination" (AD) and published its grant application guide *Should you sow what you know?* The guide was informed by lessons from early replication grants, and identified the characteristics thought necessary for spreading initiatives including: a deliberate strategy, demonstrable demand, and the notion of 'minimum specifications' which preserved the essence of an innovation while allowing for flexibility and adaptation to different circumstance.

The Foundation began convening grantees receiving funding from the AD program. They discovered the sense of isolation and struggle these social innovators were experiencing and the source of renewal they drew from each other and the sessions. The Foundation itself was also becoming an instrument of change beyond grant-making, by creating an enabling condition or 'safe space'. Recognizing the impact of the sessions, the Foundation extended its original plan and committed staff and resources to sustain it. From 2002 to 2007, the AD learning group evolved into a community of practice and grew from 10 to 25 grantees that met annually. Building on experience from the Applied Dissemination initiative, the McConnell Foundation also created the Sustaining Social Innovation (SSI) initiative in partnership with PLAN Institute for Caring Citizenship and DuPont Canada (<http://tamarackcommunity.ca/ssi.html>). This collaboration explored the conditions that led to social innovations becoming transformative and enduring - in other words, understanding how to create impact, durability and scale.

In 2006, the Foundation released *Accelerating our Impact: Philanthropy, Innovation and Social Change*, which captured the learning from seven years of AD granting<sup>2</sup>. Social innovation thinking was taking hold and many grantees were experiencing the limits of **scaling out** (replication and dissemination) as a strategy to achieve domain-level change and were identifying the need to impact wider systems and work at multiple levels of scale simultaneously in order to address complex institutional contexts. The report also pointed the Foundation towards a new role that it could play in supporting social innovation more broadly and how it could more systematically equip practitioners with knowledge and tools.

What emerged was the Social Innovation Generation initiative (SiG), a partnership between the Foundation, University of Waterloo, MaRS Discovery District, and PLAN Institute to collaborate in creating a culture of continuous social innovation in Canada, to address entrenched social and environmental challenges. Developing of a wider range of resources than what the Foundation could provide alone, each partner undertook major initiatives to build capacity for Canadian social innovation; these can be accessed through the SiG website and a knowledge hub ([www.sigknowledgehub.com](http://www.sigknowledgehub.com)) where leading research, ideas, and practices are shared to support practitioners. Integrating these new approaches and practices with the learning from *Accelerating our Impact*, the Foundation also launched a second generation of social innovation program granting and learning activities. The Social Innovation Fund supports organizations that have proven or promising early stage innovations and need additional support to create the capacity and conditions to effectively sustain or scale them up. Innoweave helps organizations learn about, assess, and implement new tools and approaches to generate greater impact and advance their mission more

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<sup>2</sup> Other related publications include: Westley and Antadze, 2010, *Making a Difference: Strategies for Scaling Social Innovation for Greater Impact*; Moore, Westley, and Brodhead, 2012, *Social Finance Intermediaries and Social Innovation*; Brodhead, 2011, *In a world of unpredictable change, what Canada needs most is resilience*; and Westley, F., Antadze, N., Riddell, D. J., Robinson, K., & Geobey, S. 2014, *Five Configurations for Scaling Up Social Innovation: Case Examples of Nonprofit Organizations From Canada*.

quickly through on-line modules in-person workshops, and subsidized coaching ([www.innoweave.ca](http://www.innoweave.ca)).

The intention is that what has been learned through the AD community of practice can be shared through this report, as the McConnell Foundation and Social Innovation Generation partners contemplate how to support learning for the next generation of social innovators and the wider field, and the Tamarack Institute continues building its own capacity for scaling initiatives.

### **Case Study and Methods:**

This case study involves a group of grantees in Canada, funded by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation who sought greater social impact through social innovation. Organizations were awarded Applied Dissemination (AD) grants after an in-depth review. Selection criteria included showing: a deliberate strategy, demonstrable demand (McConnell Foundation, 1998), and completed evaluations that showed impact and distilled the 'minimum specifications' (Zimmerman, 1998) or variable and fixed elements of an innovation.

From 2002 until 2007, the McConnell Foundation formally convened annual meetings with this AD learning group, and many participants continued in peer-support roles beyond this period. Organizations had diverse social change missions, governance and organizational structures and strategies, but shared a focus on scaling their work. Participating organizations included Caledon Institute of Social Policy, Child Development Institute, Tamarack, PLAN, L'Arche Canada, JUMP, L'Abri en Ville, Community Health and Social Services Network, Roots of Empathy, Santropol Roulant, Meal Exchange, and Engineers without Borders.

To conduct this review, 15 of the original AD group participants were invited in July 2013 to complete a structured survey that used open-ended questions (e.g. What do you remember most from your participation in the Applied Dissemination group?) that focused primarily on the experience of the group, and how that experience shaped the dissemination or scaling of the socially innovative initiatives with which the participants were involved. Following the survey, participants were invited to participate in a small focus group session (max focus group participants = 4). Some participants chose to only complete the survey (14), but 8 did both. In total, 3 focus group sessions were held over the months of August-September 2013. Focus group participants were asked several questions, including what they have learned about increasing the impact of their initiatives, how they now think about "scale" and "scaling" in their work, what unintended consequences arose as they attempted to scale, and what leadership challenges they faced as they undertook this work. Appendix A contains names and organizational information of those interviewed. The entire data set was then coded and analyzed. Preliminary findings informed a speech given by McConnell Foundation CEO Stephen Huddart at the Communities Collaborating Institute event hosted by Tamarack in Edmonton, Alberta in October, 2013.

## Part 1 – Strategies for Scaling Out, Up and Deep

A key question on the minds of many social change practitioners and funders is “how do we scale up our impact?” Many feel overwhelmed by the fact that they have invested resources for decades into numerous local projects, which have great results, but that fail to collectively change the overall state of the system. While oversimplified tips do exist for scaling social innovation, the findings in this study reveal a new, and far more complex picture of what is entailed with “going to scale”.

Research in social innovation and social enterprise has focused on the strategies required to move ideas from one context to a larger scale (Bradach, 2010, Evans & Clarke, 2011, McPhedran *et al.*, 2011, Mulgan *et al.*, 2008). From a social innovation perspective, large-scale change will necessarily involve changes to rules, resource flows, cultural beliefs and relationships in a social system at multiple spatial or institutional scales. However, in social entrepreneurship and social enterprise studies, the emphasis on “scaling for impact” often reflects a product and consumer orientation, synonymous with diffusion or replication of a program, product, or organizational model in multiple geographic locations and contexts to maximize the number of people that a social innovation reaches (Dees *et al.*, 2004, Wei-skillern & Anderson, 2003, Mulgan *et al.*, 2008). Even authors who recognize that transformative social innovation will require more than just replicating a program (e.g. Bradach & Grindle, 2014, Ross, 2014) tend to emphasize diffusion – the process by which social innovations spread across geographies, populations, and jurisdictions. However, scaling social innovations to effect larger-scale change involves a more complex and diverse process than simply ‘diffusing’ or spreading a product or model. Specifically, it is important to learn about the process of how social systems and institutions can be deliberately impacted through the work of organizations, foundations, and other agents of change.

Westley et al. (2014) characterized the dynamics and pathways of scaling in cases of social innovation by describing five unique pathways to advance systemic change. They differentiate between two kinds of scaling: ‘**scaling out**’, where an organization attempts to affect more people and cover a larger geographic area through replication and diffusion, and ‘**scaling up**’, where an organization aims to affect everybody who is in need of the social innovation they offer, or to aims to address the broader institutional or systemic roots of a problem (Westley et al. 2014). Our research builds on the distinction between scaling out and scaling up, adding new insights by describing the associated strategies, and adding a third kind: ‘**scaling deep**’. We create a typology of these three approaches to scaling which underscores the complexities and complementary nature of the strategies involved in advancing large systems change, opening up new avenues for non-profit leaders to consider, and illuminating the role of funders and conveners in amplifying the system-wide impacts of social change initiatives.

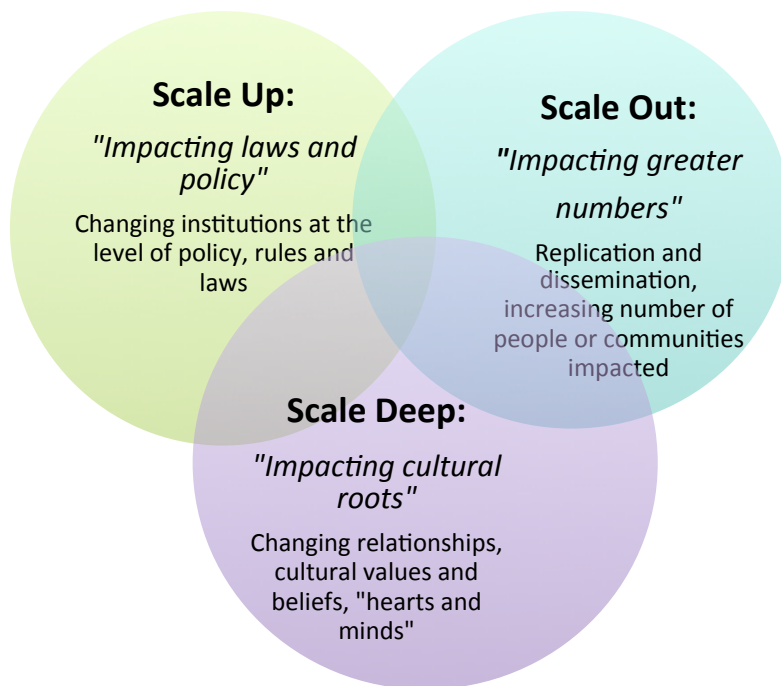
### 1.1 A Typology of Routes to Systemic Impact: Scaling out, Scaling up and Scaling deep

Our research found five cross-cutting scaling strategies, and five unique strategies that we have categorized into 3 broad types, refining Westley et al.’s (2014) distinction between scaling out and up, where scaling up refers to the breadth of changes to human social systems or institutions - in both their cultural dimensions, or their rules and policies. However, because of the unique strategies involved in these two kinds of institutional change, we suggest the third category of “scaling deep”<sup>3</sup>. “Scaling out” was the approach that McConnell Foundation staff and the AD learning group focused on originally, emphasizing replication of successful innovations in different communities, with the hopes of spreading those same results to more people. While at least one organization has found this to be an enduring means to deal with context-specific issues that affect the system they are trying to change, the majority

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<sup>3</sup> The term “scale deep” was coined by AD group participant Tatiana Fraser, co-founder of Girls Action Foundation.

of participants found that reproducing an initiative might never address the root of the problem, if its' roots lay within broader institutions. For many initiatives, the route to greater impact lay in changing institutions and laws, or "scaling up" to affect policies. Many participants described the shift in their scaling efforts to focus on the policy level because it has "the largest impact" and was capable of changing the "rules of the game". Strategies for "scaling deep" related to the notion that durable change has been achieved only when people's hearts and minds, their values and cultural practices, and the quality of relationships they have, are transformed (see Figure 1 and Table 1).



**Figure 1. Scaling out, scaling up and scaling deep for social innovation**

The following sections describe the different strategies based on these types of scaling, in addition to five cross-cutting strategies. Key lessons that emerged showed: 1) scaling an initiative to achieve a broader systemic change often requires an initial reframing of organizational purposes; 2) specific strategies are associated with the different types of scaling out, up and deep; and 3) additional cross-cutting strategies were employed including building partnerships and networks, developing new resources and financial models, and a commitment to evaluation and research. These strategies are summarized below in Table 1. Finally some of the organizational and leadership challenges that accompany scaling efforts are also discussed.

Table 1. Types of “scaling” and their main strategies

	Description	Main Strategies
<b>Scaling Out:</b>	<i>Impacting greater numbers.</i> Based on the recognition that many good ideas or initiatives never spread or achieve widespread impact.	<b>Deliberate replication:</b> Replicating or spreading programs geographically and to greater numbers <b>Spreading principles:</b> Disseminate principles, with adaptation to new contexts via co-generation of knowledge
<b>Scaling Up:</b>	<i>Impacting law and policy.</i> Based on the recognition that the roots of social problems transcend particular places, and innovative approaches must be codified in law, policy and institutions.	<b>Policy or legal change efforts:</b> New policy development, partnering, advocacy to advance legal change and redirect institutional resources.
<b>Scaling Deep:</b>	<i>Impacting cultural roots.</i> Based on the recognition that culture plays a powerful role in shifting problem-domains, and change must be deeply rooted in people, relationships, communities and cultures.	<b>Spreading big cultural ideas</b> and using stories to change beliefs and norms <b>Investing in transformative learning</b> and communities of practice
<b>Cross-cutting strategies for scaling:</b>	<i>Cross-cutting strategies</i> were those approaches all participants reported using to scale their initiatives, and were not specifically associated with scaling out, up, or deep.	<b>Making scale a conscious choice</b> <b>Analyzing root causes and clarifying purpose</b> <b>Building networks and partnerships</b> <b>Seeking new resources</b> <b>Commitment to evaluation</b>

## 1.2 The *Why* and *What* of Scaling: Reframing Purpose Using Systems Thinking

In each of the organizations involved in the Applied Dissemination learning group, an initiative had begun at a community level. As organizations and their partners began to advance towards scaling those initiatives to have broader impact, they often found that this could not be done without addressing their own internal, organizational structure or culture first. Each participant described the need to clarify and even reframe their organization’s purpose, given that they were moving towards creating change at a larger scale and were no longer a community-based or solely community-focused organization.

The clarification and reframing occurred in two major ways, which we identify as cross-cutting strategies for scaling which occurred at an early stage in the Applied Dissemination journey: **A) by making scale and impact a conscious choice**, and **B) by analyzing root causes using systems thinking, and clarifying the purpose of their innovation**. The consequence was that as they reframed their work and initiated new efforts for scaling up their impact, the “product” or the “what” that they had worked on for so many years had shifted. At times, this created tensions within the organization, and thus, managing the internal, organizational change became just as important for this group of individuals as managing the process to scale their initiative.

### 1.2.1 Making Scale and Impact a Conscious Choice

*“Being part of a large group that is thinking about dissemination and scaling in very grounded ways pushed us (our board and staff) to clarify in our own minds what exactly we should be scaling. And it gave us a container and framing in which to do that.”*

*“The process helped us to name our “agency” in creating a bigger footprint of mission impact.”*

*“We were not scaling strategically at the beginning. We were all over the place at first”.*

A key element of the learning objectives associated with the AD learning group was simply: making scaling and acceleration of impact a conscious choice. Since their previous focus had been on their community initiatives, practitioners described the importance of making scaling or the pursuit of greater impact an explicit and central part of their organizations’ strategies. Different organizations expressed their new commitment to scaling in different ways, whether it was through vision statements that were shared on public websites, or through internal communication processes that helped establish agreement amongst staff to commit to having a greater impact. Regardless of the means, each participant agreed that a process internal to the organization was required, given that this shift affected the goals of the organization.

### 1.2.2 Analyzing Root Causes and Clarifying Purpose

The organizations involved in the AD learning group began with a particular issue-focus such as girl’s empowerment, preventing youth incarceration, building networks of support around people with disabilities, and reducing poverty in communities. Their organizational strategies were most often focused on particular populations, in specific regions. However, through participation with the AD learning group, participants realized that they could not achieve their goals of scale and impact unless they reframed their purpose within a wider problem-frame.

Several participants described how adopting a systems-change perspective (using systems and complexity frameworks introduced by Westley *et al.*, 2006) was critical to building this consciousness and intention to change. Broadening their problem definition using systems thinking led several organizations to re-conceptualize their goals, as they shifted from being focused on a specific issue, to being more deliberately focused on solving the roots of the problem. For example, the Executive Director of Meal Exchange observed, *“It allowed me to evolve Meal Exchange beyond an emergency food charitable organization to a food security/food systems organization. It provided me the mental model and questions to guide the work: “how do you make access to healthy food systemic? To what end?”*

Different organizations expressed their new commitment to scaling and systemic impact in different ways. For instance, two organizations formally re-drafted their organizational vision/mission statements to incorporate clear intentions to effect systemic change rather than focusing on a single issue. Other participants used internal communication processes (both formal and informal) to establish agreement amongst staff to reorienting for greater impact.

At the heart of “applied dissemination” was the insight that in order for socially innovative ideas or practices to spread, they must be applied within new contexts, and may change as a result. “What” innovation the organization scaled often was redefined because of the practice of considering impacts on the system at the broadest scale.

### 1.3 The *How* of Scaling: Strategies for Scaling Out, Up and Deep

*“We have learned that there are many ways to scale socially innovative initiatives. One way is to add more people, groups, or communities to the effort. A second way is to document and disseminate stories of exemplary efforts so that these can be adapted and applied to other communities. A third way is to work at a policy level so that the effort can have a broad impact - whether it is local, regional, provincial, territorial or national.”*

Once they made scaling a deliberate choice, the organizations and individuals who participated in the AD learning group employed many strategies to spread their social innovations and also to challenge the systemic problems at the root of their issues. The chosen strategy was dependent on many factors - the founding conditions of their organization, the context surrounding their issue, the resources and support they could access, choices they made about who to partner with and how to achieve impact, and the windows of opportunity - political, cultural and social - that emerged. Here, we describe the core approaches these socially innovative organizations advanced, the interaction between different strategies, and the relevant learning that led to an evolution in approach. The core scaling strategies were summarized in Table 1.

Participants also articulated that these different approaches were useful for different kinds of scaling. That is, going to scale can involve: scaling out, scaling up, or scaling deep, and often the relationship among these three types is in sequence.

#### 1.3.1 Scaling out by deliberate replication

Initially, organizations participating in the AD learning group were focused on the types of diffusion activities documented in previous scaling literature (Dees *et al.*, 2004, Bradach, 2010). That is, efforts focused on expanding the geographic scale of programs or initiatives, and increasing the number of people impacted by a social innovation. Leaders made decisions about whether to grow in a centralized manner, to franchise, to pursue other “social enterprise” models, or to “seed” like-minded organizations through affiliation, branching, or accreditation systems. Important supports in these efforts included partnerships, shared learning, and developmental evaluation methods to improve impact measurement and establish robust evidence. Having clear systems-change goals helped those forging ahead with replication strategies to recognize the importance of ensuring impact and successes over the long term.

An important part of successful replication involved defining what was being spread and developing clear implementation practices to ensure ongoing quality control. Sometimes program replication was approached as a social enterprise, to tap into market forces for scaling. For programs that were going into schools - such as SNAP, which was focused on youth at risk, and the Roots of Empathy, which involved bringing babies into classrooms to teach empathy and discourage bullying - it was very important for the proponents to amass strong empirical evidence, and also to explain the concrete benefits of their programs.

*“As we learned that we were replicable and we could scale (1 site to over 100), we realized that the number was not as important as the impact and the sustainability factor. If you cannot replicate your program and ensure it is done with high integrity and fidelity (achieve positive outcomes you know the program can achieve) and ensure the program can be sustainable, then your efforts of scaling are fruitless.”*

Protecting the integrity and fidelity became referred to in the AD learning group as Zimmerman *et al.*'s (1998) “min specs” or minimum specifications. That is, leaders needed to determine what the non-negotiable aspects were, and what could vary when replicating, to ensure they were achieving a sustainable impact along with scale.

Other limitations with replication also began to be felt by leaders of some initiatives, who began to critique the isolated use of scaling out strategies and emphasize the impact and durability of a change. For example, one participant reflected:

*“Communities are unique and there are some common concepts that we must take care of if we really want any concept to be firmly rooted in a community. You can’t just transport it in a box. And I think there’s a lot of confusion in some places with the concept of scale and impact that, in some cases, impact is simply defined as the number of widgets you’ve spread.”*

So, while many of the social innovators involved in the AD learning group were successfully replicating and expanding their programs, they were also learning how to define, measure, refine and guard the positive social impacts of their innovation. For some, this meant protecting program “fidelity and integrity” and ensuring that the essence of the innovation was retained while it spread, and for others it was through gaining clarity that the goal was spreading principles rather than a specific program or policy. Still others moved beyond emphasis on scaling out strategies to scale up and deep.

### **1.3.2 Scaling out by spreading principles**

*“You can scale an idea that lives out differently in every context.”*

The leaders who decided not to scale specific programs or who moved on from replication often turned to the dissemination of principles as a strategy for broadening their impact. Disseminating principles, and not programs, introduced the challenge of protecting the original vision, often times because organizations began to rely on a larger number of staff, or on partner organizations to help scale the innovation. Some organizations that elected to scale in this way honed their capacity to disseminate knowledge, while protecting the integrity of the innovation:

*“We had to be very careful about articulating clearly the principles that were guiding our actions and that we always made sure, I think, to stick to those principles to the extent that we could. Those were our real guide-posts. And so groups could feel free to undertake whatever activity they wanted to, but they couldn’t deviate from the overarching principles that we had set that bound us together as a collective, as a group.”*

A potential drawback of this approach was the intensive work involved in scaling out in numerous different contexts, when there was no specific “product” to simply adopt. As one participant described: “obviously, they would need to do a lot of the local homework around how they could implement this idea in their own municipality or town or community, and it may or may not be possible at the end of the day.” Tamarack addressed this challenge in part by creating a national-scale learning community for anti-poverty initiatives in hundreds of communities in Canada and the United States - blending a scaling out strategy with a scaling deep strategy.

Distilling the essence of an innovation in order to scale can lead to other insights about system-level impact. One participant described how after 30 years of successful work, even the protection of his organization’s core vision began to feel like a limiting behavior, as their scaling efforts gained momentum internationally and they embraced greater “mission diversity”:

*“We are an organization that has always had a very strong vision and exceptionally high ownership of core values among a very diverse group of people. We began to see that this strength was getting in the way of thinking about the new and diversifying our model in the service of growth. The insight that we might focus on minimizing our specifications of the boundaries of growth has been important for us. This has taken several years.”*



This participant went on to emphasize how his current practice, with 50 seed projects, was about letting go of these self-imposed limits to allow new ideas to flourish.

Another participant, from Engineers Without Borders expressed a different version of this “open scaling” strategy, as their work relies on young professionals working globally:

*“Our definition of scaling out is seeing a set of cultural practices and behaviours around innovation and systems thinking in larger numbers of youth. We spend time nurturing the DNA of how we work, then give free reign. Layer on infrastructure: chapters, coaching support, programs etc. Then the DNA and infrastructure interact to create a powerful scaling out dynamic.”*

This interaction between the “DNA” of established cultural practice and infrastructure of support speaks to the importance of seeding learning environments as a key capacity for scaling.

### **1.3.3 Scaling up by pursuing policy change**

*“We don’t have to have more chapters or more people involved, or expand to new regions - we can take the issue and get it into the policy domain, have public policy discussions and scale those up.”*

Spreading successful programs or initiatives by increasing the number of people and the geographic area served is one approach to scaling. Spreading the principles upon which the social change is predicated is another. Yet, for many social innovators, an equally powerful opportunity lies in impacting higher levels of institutions through policy change. Many participants described the shift in their scaling efforts to focus on the policy level because it has “the largest impact on greatest number”. One person described how policy change is necessary for the disruption of failing systems and their transformation to something better. Participants described at least two approaches for scaling up. In the first approach, pointed to in the quotation above, social innovators working at the level of families or communities shifted their work to higher levels in government in order to address root causes in larger-scale institutions that affected an entire population.

An example of this is the work of Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN) in their creation of the world’s first Registered Disabilities Savings Plan, which changed the financial regulations guiding savings and benefits for people with disabilities and enabled them to escape financial dependency on the state. Creating new policy or regulatory frameworks was seen as part of disrupting existing systems and transforming them into something better. This differed from replication strategies, since it often meant leaving behind the initial innovative initiative, and starting a new initiative focused on policy change.

The second approach for scaling up focused on linking together community-level policy interventions into a more coherent movement. Interestingly, just as application within the local context is important when disseminating new ideas and programs, it was also seen as critical when scaling policy change from one community to another: “One of the things that we learned in trying to scale up in terms of policy related work was that context really mattered... We had to learn how to identify local problems and turn these into policy issues - whether at the federal, provincial or municipal level.” Those leaders who were seeking to scale policies faced challenges because municipal contexts and regional (provincial) policies vary greatly across Canada, and approaches had to be adapted to new locations each time. One participant described that her organization’s response to this challenge was to look for the “essence of the idea” to take across the country through sharing stories of policy change, because jurisdictional differences can hamper scaling efforts.

### **1.3.4 Scaling deep by generating big cultural ideas**

*“Our language changed – from feed the hungry to ‘good food for all’”*

*“It is about learning and change. We do not solve problems; we all learn to live differently in a way that the problem can no longer exist.”*

As an adjunct to other scaling strategies, many participants began to deliberately reorient their work, reframing predominant narratives and working to change the culture, beliefs and norms surrounding the social issues they were seeking to address. As one participant noted, “scaling means changing the frame”. Another observed that big ideas are scalable - capable of getting at the cultural beliefs lying at the roots of many social problems. This was characterized by a leader with L’Arche, an organization focused on people with disabilities:

*“We have, with others, been successful in reframing the goal of disability support from charity to contribution, from group to individual, from need to asset, and to significantly reduce the stigma attached to intellectual disability. Much more work to do, but today, as opposed to 10 years ago, the goals of belonging and citizenship for people with intellectual disabilities are widely accepted.”*

Culture change strategies varied tremendously, but several examples included using stories as a method for sharing and co-creating ideas. One practitioner explained that amalgamating stories from the individuals affected by the relevant social issues, and translating them into a resonant framing enabled individual anecdotes to tell a more systemic story about the need for change. Our findings suggest that creating new stories and amplifying those that exist can become an important vehicle for generating cultural ideas and thus, scaling deep to affect the cultural landscape.

### **1.3.5 Scaling deep by investing in transformative learning**

*“What we learned was how to develop a community of learning that in turn develops the growth and development of the networks we created. It is the connectedness that is the strength of our networks and this connectedness can only be created through sharing experiences and best practices.”*

*“What it was we wanted to scale was an experience rather than a particular program or process”*

A common strategy to increase the scale and impact of socially innovative initiatives is to invest in learning processes (e.g. Dweck, 2007, Crutchfield & McLeod Grant, 2008). The cultivation of learning communities can both spread knowledge and foster innovative relationships, which in turn spread and model new content, processes and practices. Investment in such learning by AD participant organizations became a specific strategy used to build shared mindsets across a range of sectors and organizations, to ensure the impact of their initiative was scaled deep into the defining routines, practices and beliefs of partners and collaborators. Participants described how learning processes for scaling can be supported by a range of methods, including: mentorship, deliberate transfer of practices, capturing and sharing organizational or community culture, and shared reflection and evaluation practices. Interestingly, many AD learning group participants who used learning communities as a central means of scaling credited their experience in the AD learning group itself as the inspiration or model.

*“For us, the biggest learning was that too often people try to scale the forms of social change and forget that it's the experience of change that we're after. And that replicating even the most simple process or project will often not scale because it is not continuously checked and re-checked against the experience of those on the ground”.*

Learning communities helped people to embody change. The above quote speaks to the capacity of a learning community to both honour people’s on-the-ground experience, and to engage people to

experience new possibilities. This enabled new knowledge and approaches to be spread widely, and ensured that what was spread was valuable and relevant to the people affected. As multiple experiments occurred in diverse locations, groups networked in learning communities were able to share new insights and evolve their collective practice. It is more effective to foster learning in a network or community when this stance is also internalized within the organizations leading change initiatives. From this perspective, the means of engagement and the ends of social change are intertwined. One practitioner said it all starts with a small group “equally concerned with involvement and getting the idea right.” Another emphasized the role of community-building, “In order for a socially innovative (outside of the box) initiative to grow, it must create a sense of community. There has to be a connection between all of the parts that is a place for sharing, worrying, helping, and supporting in a group.” Some participants in the AD group cemented their commitment to distributed learning approaches because of their exposure to complexity and systems thinking, adult education and coaching methods, and open source models:

*“It was the strategic frameworks and articulation that allowed us to develop a model that encouraged and supported innovation and decision-making in a highly distributed way around EWB. This served to unlock the potential and creativity of thousands, rather than centralizing idea formulation and innovation in the hands of a small few.”*

In most cases distributed and experiential learning approaches were linked to networks and partnerships as strategies for scaling. The following two strategies were found to be cross-cutting, building on the two described above – that of making scale a conscious choice, and analyzing the roots of problems to clarify purpose.

### **1.3.6 Cross-cutting strategies for scale: Building networks and partnerships**

*“We have used these principles in the growth and development of networks across the province and they in turn are doing the same with their partners. Our staff, as well, has embraced this approach. They have witnessed first hand how, through developing a community of learning and practice, we have strengthened our networking approach and developed much faster by bringing together the networks to share best practices and knowledge gained from experience.”*

Strong networks and partnerships that enable access to decision-makers, funds, allies, and others supporters proved to be critical to the successful scaling of many of the participants’ social innovations, regardless of whether the type of scaling they pursued. Networks are well-suited to knowledge-dissemination and shared learning strategies - as both an audience, and as a source of stories to document and share. Different participants described how networks have been central to their strategy:

*“... we did an evaluation of our projects last year with an outside evaluator and that was one of the things that came back very strongly - that the networks felt like they have access to all of us whenever they want, that there’s no hierarchy and, it’s a very open system. So I think that’s something that has been very helpful in making the other organizations develop well and faster...”*

*“The next stage of our growth is entirely dependent on building partnerships/allying with other groups -- organizations, companies, government -- to scale out or scale up our social innovations. These will either be in collective and coordinated action toward a common purpose (e.g. allies in the same space on engineering education, but who are focusing more on environmental innovations), in jointly bringing assets to bear on common challenges (e.g. emerging work with the new young leadership program), and in having allies who have natural mechanisms for scale (e.g. workplace intrapreneurship partnership emerging with a global engineering firm).”*

Partnerships across sectors are particularly valuable for addressing cross-cutting issues from a common sense of purpose. Partnerships allow more targeted approaches, focused collaboration, resource-

pooling, extension of influence, and unusual alliances. One participant noted that partnerships with global entities offer natural scaling mechanisms. Another noted that how an organization models openness, learning, and partnership is key to successful collaborations, and that success in this regard hinges on internal organizational and leadership capacities.

### **1.3.7 Cross-cutting strategies for scale: New resources and funding models**

*“We came to understand that in order to grow, we had to build organizational capacity and we have done so in an effective manner over several years. As a more mature organization we needed to allocate new resources to growth and development”.*

All participants acknowledged that scaling their ideas, process, or programs required either new funding, or entirely new funding models from their original initiatives. Practitioners described the importance of identifying and leveraging new resources, especially through collaboration and private sector partnerships. One participant acknowledged that the confidence gained through the AD learning group emboldened them to ask for help from the private sector. The result was articulated as the following:

*“We’ve had a very, very positive experience over the last three years...of working with people from the private sector that helped us put wheels on what we wanted to do, and in particular, through a board member and through contacts, we were able to pull together a group of about six or seven people who either were, or had worked with McKinsey Consultants. And we spent a year working on the strategy”.*

Another person recognized that there was a need for a larger pool of true impact investors in Canada who would be willing to balance impact with returns; that is, neither government grants nor the McConnell Foundation could or should be expected to support all of the scaling possibilities. But funding not only supported the scaling process, it was also seen as necessary before scaling was possible because of the need to invest in the baseline capacity of organizations. As one person stated: “Innovators need funds that are longer-term and allow us to pre-grow our base capacity to scale social innovations in the future.”

### **1.3.8 Cross-cutting strategies for scale: Commitment to evaluation and research**

As a result of the approaches introduced during the learning sessions, participants grew their commitment to using evaluation and data as feedback to adapt their practice. Many were using developmental evaluation, due to its ability to examine broad and emergent impacts, and the subtle but powerful shifts in attitudes and relationships that may accompany dissemination or scaling efforts, but might be overlooked by traditional summative evaluation methods.

*“And so one of the things we learned was to pay attention to the community changes taking place around us as a result of the work, even though it wasn’t necessarily something that we were counting in terms of strict poverty reduction. But that if organizations were collaborating or working better together or having an improved system for training, for example -- that was important and significant”.*

In addition to providing evidence, evaluation methods have been embraced by many of the AD participants as a way to embed organizational learning processes. For one organization in particular, scaling involved a heavy reliance on research that was rigorous and helped to establish evidence-based choices for policy or program change:

*“Replication isn’t the problem. Doing it with integrity is hard. Growth doesn’t just happen, growth has implications for leadership and for “product”. Experimentation is important, rigorous and disciplined planning is important.”*

*“...we continue to be an applied scientist practitioner model. This focus has enabled us to ensure we are in fact developing a cost efficient effective intervention for children and their families experiencing emotional regulation, self-control and problem solving issues. Cost benefit analysis findings reveal that we can be incredibly cost effective and save society huge costs in the long run.”*

In essence, participants learned to evaluate the process *and* the outcomes of their work, and applied evaluation approaches that could capture impacts at different scales and phases of change.

#### **1.4 The Evolution of Practitioner Understanding about Scaling and Impact**

*“Impact, durability and scale are interconnected. Scale alone is not enough.”*

*“We have learned, however, that growing programs is only one approach, and that it has limitations. Innovative leaders also need relevant and timely research, customized training, and the opportunity to forge alliances with influential individuals, institutions, and organizations. Most of all, they need unflinching support to enable them to explore and make mistakes. These processes are essential to learning, to the discovery of new and lasting solutions to chronic problems, and to the pursuit of the sustainable world to which we are all committed.”*

It was clear based on the reflections of participants that in 2002 when the AD learning group began, “scaling” was initially defined by everyone in the group, including the McConnell staff, as replication, dissemination, or “scaling out” the same successful innovation with the hopes of spreading those same results to more people. But after a short time, some participants realized that replication could go on forever and would never address the root of the systemic problem, which lay within governing institutions, including policies and laws. In these instances, the individuals involved decided to focus on change initiatives at that institutional scale. Therefore, “scaling up” meant no longer focusing on the original innovation. With this new focus, participants recognized that the integrity, principles, and values embedded in the organization’s original mission had to be carried forward as they shifted to intervene at higher scales.

For others, scaling out was eventually deemed insufficient once there was recognition that deeper cultural shifts were needed to address the context holding the problem in place. That is, transformation needed to focus on social norms, beliefs, and relationships (whether those were between children in a school, across sectors, or levels of government). Therefore, scaling impact required changing deeply held cultures, or “scaling deep” (see Figure 1 and Table 1). Several participants sought to achieve this by emphasizing learning communities and creating new forms of experience and awareness, through whole systems and distributed engagement approaches, such as Tamarack and Caledon Institute through Vibrant Communities, and Engineers Without Borders. In these cases, protecting the “DNA” or the core principles also remained important.

Ultimately, the terminology to describe scaling became very fluid as time passed and appears to be used differently by diverse practitioners, despite them being part of the same community of practice. But regardless of the small differences in framing, what becomes clear is an evolution in the way practitioners are thinking about, and attempting to achieve, scale. Most initiatives blended different approaches, emphasizing different types of scale at different phases of the process in order to achieve greater impact on the social issues of deepest concern to them. Two patterns dominated for the practitioners involved in this study: i) they moved from scaling out to scaling up, or ii) they moved from scaling out to scaling deep:

***From scaling out to scaling up:*** In which many practitioners redefined scaling to expand beyond replication or dissemination to include significant scaling up to achieve systemic impact through new policies or institutionalization at higher scales. *“From our perspective, in particular, going to scale meant growing geographically in terms of the community-based initiative we were advocating. But going to scale also meant influencing relevant policies in order to have the largest possible impact on the greatest number of people.”*

***From scaling out to scaling deep:*** Most practitioners have also expanded from scaling out, to thinking about how to deeply affect and impact the “root” of the systemic problem, and how to stimulate transformation in place, in self, in culture. This has been pursued through protecting the positive intent and impact of a program while focusing on transforming long-term relationships, but also by targeting large-scale cultural change and the need to shift underlying patterns of belief that caused problems in the first place.

Regardless of which scaling sequence they undertook, all of the practitioners recognized the importance of capacity-building and learning, both through the AD learning group and through their own organizational and network processes. Arguably, the requirement for learning is one thread that helps to distinguish social innovation for system change from notions of scaling and replication that are often observed in business and social enterprise models. With system change as a goal, whole-system engagement and learning is crucial so that social innovations can spread and take root in very different regulatory, social, cultural contexts. Often, social innovations cannot rely on the disseminating force of markets - which for social enterprises act as a scaling mechanism. This is because social innovations may be addressing a market failure, or at an even deeper level, the logic and assumptions of markets may actually be part of the root causes of many persistent social and ecological problems. These findings suggest that learning processes play a role of great significance in the scaling of social innovations, as both ends and means.

## 1.4 Challenges in Scaling

Inevitably, ambitious systems-change goals can present leadership, organizational and social challenges. Some challenges described by the AD learning group emerged with success, and some were specific to the original conditions, the nature of the social issue being addressed, and the scaling strategies being pursued.<sup>4</sup> Two key obstacles faced by the social innovators involved in the AD learning group were: leadership challenges, and the need to manage growth.

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed exploration of five pathways or configurations for systemic change that were pursued by Applied Dissemination participants, as well as a discussion of the unique challenges associated with each pathway, see Westley et al. 2014.

## Leadership challenges

*“Note to self. Do not underestimate the resistance that will come from within and without. It takes great commitment and time and energy to grow into the new. In our larger and decentralized organization, we are not always unified as we struggle to hold together the old and the new, the “system” and the individual, growth in numbers and growth in character and leadership, the simplicity with running alone and the complexity of partnering with others for greater impact, and the longing for stability and completion with the reality that change is our constant companion.”*

Several participants noted that one of the greatest challenges with scaling social innovation related to their own capacity to act as leaders, as opposed to solely relating to the process of scaling the innovative initiative itself. Practitioners who were leading significant change in their initiatives often spoke of the personal toll it took on them, and of the inner resources needed to continue. The AD learning community provided a safe space to reflect on the leadership challenges associated with scaling, among peers with a common experience. Here, participants were supported both in their vulnerability and in their development of new capacities. As one innovator described:

*“... to me this question of stress and the capacity to manage the ambiguity and to inspire others to stay with you in the ambiguity, is a key capacity. And when we talk about key leadership challenges, it’s certainly maintaining in oneself that capacity over time. Because none of this work, if we’re really talking about impact, durability and scale, is in any way a short fix.”*

Several people acknowledged that throughout the years when the AD learning group met, and in the years that have followed since, they were exhausted and stressed from their work. In fact, one perceived benefit of the AD learning group was that it served as an acknowledgement for the work, and gave the participants permission to take a break, to delegate, and reap rewards from the support that surrounded them if it was needed. This theme is taken up again in Part 2, where the design and impacts of the learning community is discussed in more detail.

## Managing growth

In addition to needing to “recharge” at points during the innovation process, participants also noted organizational management challenges that arose as they scaled up or out.

*“Our idea is at scale, we are in a new space. We see possibility and have no idea how to operate in the space of large-scale cultural and economic change.”*

As the scaling process unfolded, practitioners faced a range of new challenges. For some, this meant confronting the dilemma of investing different amounts of time with different audiences. But at least four of the practitioners recognized that the most significant growth challenge revolved around the need to balance the time and energy required for scaling with the requirements of the organization’s original work or mission: “I think that there really is a lot of tension between managing the core organization and the job of really spreading it”, observed one participant. Often, a socially innovative initiative is managed and implemented by a small portion of a larger organization. But this creates tension, both with other staff in the other sections of the organization, and at times with Board members who see the initiative as an anomaly from the organization’s central mission. As one participant stated: “We ended up with a ‘business’ operating inside of a non-profit. We had conflicts between the ‘old’ and the ‘innovative’. Our operational needs were different than other departments in the organization”. These internal tensions were recognized as being as important, and sometimes more time consuming than any external relationships that were required for scaling success. As one person described: “I underestimated the time, skills, and talents required to get other colleagues within the organization to understand and support what we were trying to do”. Ultimately, every participant agreed that the scaling process and the internal and external organizational changes that enable this process, all take much longer time than

expected. While the AD learning group provided time for participants to reflect and grow their own practice, it also influenced the McConnell Foundation's own practice.

### **How grantees' scaling challenges changed McConnell Foundation practices**

Unique relationships were created between the grantees of the AD learning group and the McConnell Foundation. McConnell Foundation staff learned alongside grantees in real time, present to new insights, shifts in strategy and knowledge generation and transfer. The Foundation developed more comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the personal, organizational and social realities of the grantees' work. The power dynamics between funder and grantee began to equalize, and a level of trust emerged that transformed the McConnell Foundation's role into one of collaborator. This enabled the McConnell Foundation to learn and adapt faster, shifting its practice and becoming an even more engaged funder. For example, most of the grantees underestimated the time horizons, human and financial resources, and leadership challenges involved in scaling efforts. Often grantees did not anticipate the impact of scaling on their own organizations and had not built in backfill plans for the time and effort required of leadership staff involved in scaling an initiative. The McConnell Foundation's willingness to allow flexibility in the use of funds was an enabling condition for successful scaling, particularly as much of the work was uncharted territory. The McConnell Foundation decided to extend its original commitment to the AD granting program and shifted its practice of not renewing grants to the same organizations, which led to maintaining relationships for upwards of 10 years, since the time horizons for scaling were longer than were previously conceived and planned. And as the success and impact of AD learning group became increasingly obvious, it also decided to continue convening the group beyond its initial plan, which required an additional commitment of financial and human resources. It also began convening other clusters of grantees working in common domain areas as school-based sustainability education, and those working as intermediaries or backbone organizations.

### **Summary**

Part I of this report highlighted that strategies for scaling social innovations go far beyond simply disseminating or replicating promising initiatives. When practitioners shift their focus to scaling for systems change – seeking to impact broader institutions, or deeply held cultural beliefs and norms – their purpose may need to be reframed through deeper analysis of root causes. Using complexity and systems thinking perspectives can help to provide the vocabulary and the tools to “see” the broader system holding a particular social problem in place. Different sets of strategies may be used to scale out, up, or deep, but since “what” practitioners' are scaling may be changing to suit different scales and contexts, protecting the values and principles upon which an organization operates can be essential. Over time, multiple approaches to scaling may be necessary if systemic impacts are sought – from spreading an initiative (scaling out) to scaling up work for policy change, or scaling deep to address the relationships, values and cultural patterns holding a social problem in place. As scaling occurs, it is also important to invest in leaders, so their efforts can persist for the duration of time required for scaling an initiative. Otherwise, these issues can form barriers that frustrate or stall otherwise successful ideas and initiatives. Applied learning processes, such as the AD learning group, can serve as an important forum to address these challenges, but thoughtful design and implementation of the learning process is required. The core design elements of the AD learning group are described in more detail the next section.



## Part 2 – Designing Learning Processes To Scale Social Innovation

### 2.1 Design of the Applied Dissemination Learning Group

*“I think we really understood that we had the right partner <in McConnell>, because without that funding commitment and then the AD Group - that just added so much...so much value to us. Without those two things I know we wouldn't be where we are today”.*

The structure of the AD Group (and the McConnell leadership) provided a "container" for the discipline of taking time out for support, learning and reflection. From the outset, every participant agreed that participating in the AD learning group as a McConnell Foundation grantee had a positive impact on their personal growth, their organization, and their initiative. In many cases, the specifics of the impact was emergent or unexpected:

*“There are a lot of really amazing unanticipated outcomes and I think the organization is right where it needs to be, as innovative as ever and having a bigger impact than it ever had before. But it's not in the ways that we had laid out in that grant. But I do think that it is directly an impact of being part of that group, receiving the grant, having access to the learning... the peer learning and the support of the Foundation and those frameworks, and applying them to our work, to what we were doing”.*

In reflecting on the success of the initiative, participants pointed to specific aspects of the process and design as critical, including: a) participant selection, b) the conditions created by the convenors (McConnell Foundation staff) c) the culture and environment that the AD group created and nurtured together, and d) the timely introduction of content and frameworks to support learning about scale and impact.

#### 2.1.1 Participants

*“We didn't have people to follow. There weren't other organizations leading the way...so there was a really important sense of camaraderie between the people in the room and, therefore, we were able to understand one another very well”.*

*“Despite the wide ranging interests we all had, some fundamental shared elements really made for amazing insight and sharing. For example we were all dealing with "breaking new ground" "going where others fear to tread" or "having a vision about how to change things". The term "founder" was often used to describe many of the people in the room and I think that element about people really made things different. These were all people who started or help start some fundamental change in their communities. These are people who were comfortable outside the box and could make it work for them”.*

Participants in the AD learning group came from a variety of backgrounds and worked on different social and environmental challenges, such as attempting to: improve math proficiency in young students, address poverty in communities across Canada, and build networks of support around people with disabilities. Despite the differences, participants were more focused on the one similarity: their shared purpose and experience. The practitioners in the learning group had all initiated promising changes in their communities or fields, and faced similar leadership challenges in pioneering new approaches and desiring to increase their scale and impact. This shared context enabled mutual support towards big visions of change. One participant stated: *“we could frighten ourselves with our dreams, and there was a sense of - it's possible...and creating the container for that was, I think, a very powerful act in and of itself”.* Participants described each other as people with passion, compassion, and dedication.

### 2.1.2 Educational approach and design: Setting the container

Certain conditions were recognized as essential for creating a positive learning environment in which learning could occur. Firstly, an experiential, peer-based and participatory approach was adopted in recognition of the wisdom that the practitioners brought into the learning process. Multiple learning styles were honoured in the group, and activities were deliberately paced and varied.

Secondly, at least four participants acknowledged that the McConnell Foundation staff demonstrated leadership when they also joined the learning journey and seemed to embody or embrace many of the key concepts. The impact was that their openness to learning minimized the power imbalance between them and the other participants that the McConnell Foundation had convened. Moreover, funding was not linked to the learning group's activities – this time together for learning was separate from their grant-related activities, and participants appreciated that this also reduced the power imbalance that can exist between grantor/grantee.

The fact that each meeting was designed as a “retreat” with time spent overnight and away from everyone's workplace and daily routines was recognized as a critical factor that ensure that each one of them was focused and engaged. The reasons for this importance were varied – for some participants, it was because their funder was clearly giving them permission to take time and reflect: “That's what I loved about those applied dissemination meetings...it gave us permission to pause. It gave us permission to say I don't want you to do this right now. I need you to come here and just ... be. And I think that was important”.

Another person noted that once they were away with the AD group, everyone seemed to agree to engage equally, and that it meant no one was quickly leaving the room for a meeting or to take a call:

*“You <McConnell Foundation> were investing in us, so when we were there, we were THERE.... We are all busy, we are all being pulled in twenty directions. But we shut ourselves off to that point of our world when we were attending those meetings. And I would say that the majority of the time that we were there, everybody was actually ‘there’, if you know what I mean, they were there ‘cause they wanted to be there...So nobody was more important than anybody else”.*

Finally, the retreat-style meetings offered a sense of luxury and rejuvenation for participants – who were often drained and exhausted from running their own organizations. “*The wear and tear on the leaders of innovation can be huge when you're taking it to scale. ‘Cause you're running and running and running, and I don't think you're stopping and pausing and thinking”.* The luxury was experienced due to leaving other concerns behind, in the surroundings, and in being invited to take time to reflect, learn and connect with their peers working on other issues.

### 2.1.3 Culture and Learning Environment

*“I had an experience - and I know that other people did as well - of being deeply respected for the personal commitments that we had made to take our initiatives or our organizations to another level. And I like that word a lot... I like the word ‘respect’ a lot, partly because there's a lot of places where you actually feel not fully respected or not fully understood”.*

*“The trust and respect in the room were pervasive”*

One consequence of the design of the AD learning group sessions (mixed learning activities, McConnell Foundation and practitioner engagement, peer-support focus), and the fact that participants shared common leadership challenges and situations, a deeply trusting and respectful learning environment was established over time. Participants recalled the sessions together as a unique, safe space where there were no penalties for failure-- a “safe harbour” to ask questions, experiment, and spark thinking.

One participant shared the importance of respect in supporting learning and inspiration: "...the sense of respect is really palpable and that stuff is just pure gold in terms of creating an environment for learning and for hope to be kindled and rekindled..."

The AD learning group was also a place to seek and provide support amongst peers. One participant remembered watching another cry as they described the frustration they faced in making change happen in their organization. The participant recognized that it was important to see that other strong leaders could still be vulnerable – and that vulnerability was a normal or shared experience for all of them, "and in that vulnerability of course, you're open to learning". Another participant appreciated the mutual celebration when their AD peers accomplished new goals that had been surfaced through their learning process.

Collectively, the shared ups and downs were important for building strong bonds amongst the participants, as demonstrated by the following quote:

*"And being able to walk with that solid cohort through the ups and downs... what became obvious in some ways, with some of the participants, is that they really weren't going to scale. Or there was going to be a leadership transition or, you know, whatever. But that's part of the rich learning as well."*

Participants were taking risks – with their ideas, their financial resources, and with the social capital they may have held in their community – so having a safe place where they could learn from each other was invaluable. The trust, respect, and safety associated with the group was attributed to the design elements of the learning sessions. Therefore, the learning culture and process design were intricately linked. Examples of the designed "culture" elements included:

- Welcoming "the head and the heart" - the personal and intellectual
- assigning pairs to be "critical friends"
- blending opportunities and exercises to challenge and support each other
- clearly establishing the value of learning from failure
- setting a ground rule that there were "no penalties" (again, decoupling the funding from the McConnell Foundation with learning outcomes helped alleviate fears of being penalized if they acknowledged certain struggles or failures)

Overall, the process functioned to support not just individual learning, but the learning of the group, which was called "very different" because of the quality of sustained conversation, and as a result, "very powerful."

#### **2.1.4 Content: Knowledge, tools and methods from Applied Dissemination**

*"... our understanding of our own work and of social change theory, and what other organizations were achieving, it was just being pushed, and I think our minds were being opened all the time."*

*"The frameworks that were presented, particularly around panarchy and organizational growth, helped contextualize and provide a language for understanding the progression of our organization, culture and scale."*

The AD learning community was enriched by the inclusion of various experts, whose knowledge could be applied to real-life organizational challenges. Several participants reflected that the introduction of different frameworks and content was incredibly timely - meeting their need for learning just as certain challenges arose. One appreciated "the extraordinary capacity of the organizers to find just the right resources for us. To bring in just the right person with just the right tools to help us understand our own experiences, which were not standard, and to move us along this path of sowing what we know." Invited

experts brought credible knowledge with framing relevant to practitioners, which influenced a different quality of practice, and supported root analysis of problems. The concepts and analysis helped participants “find vocabularies for their experience”.

Specific knowledge, frameworks and methods recognized by participants as crucial in their learning about innovation, scaling and accelerating impact included:

- The adaptive cycle and the panarchy (resilience) model of H.S. Holling
- Complex systems thinking
- Developmental evaluation and other innovative evaluation methods
- Using collaborative and participatory approaches for every phase of innovation
- Case study analysis
- Peer input processes (circles to share a challenge and receive peer feedback)

The body of knowledge shared with participants emphasized the importance of collaboration, partnership, participatory engagement, and social inclusion when addressing complex social challenges. The content and design of learning sessions highlighted the value of including multiple perspectives, the importance of ongoing learning and reflection, and the role of evaluation methods in both increasing impact and supporting organizational learning. Distributed problem-solving approaches were modeled, and participants were encouraged to think more broadly about their problem domain, their purpose in seeking scale, and how to best intervene in systems to create the change they sought. One participant described the impact that the McConnell Foundation grant officer had on their thinking: “she challenged us to start to think strategically in where we were actually going, what was our vision, what was our strategy, ‘cause we didn’t really have one, we just wanted to know we can replicate and we could be ... you know, we could try to meet every kid or family in Canada, United States or the world who needed it, so we were all over the place.”

### **2.1.5 Validation through interactions with experts**

*“...bringing an academic element into my experience was very important. It was ... not legitimizing, but giving credibility and ... you know, that people at the university level were looking at the work that we are doing, and exploring the challenges that we’re facing and making sense of it - with the panarchy model – it was really, really validating and a very important element, for me, as an individual”.*

One participant observed this value was tied to her own ability to later draw on that knowledge and articulate her ideas with confidence to partner organizations:

*“...the comfort that I developed with the role of being a leader in a new area - a territory that no one dares to tread...My comfort level in those activities, I think, became much stronger when I felt like I had a credible body of knowledge to build my arguments on”.*

Some participants appreciated the academic experts, but also expressed appreciation that the sessions were so applied and practitioner-focused, affirming how “profound learning is possible outside the academy.” People consistently described the powerful impact of learning both from the successes of their peers, and also from their struggles. Someone described the AD learning group as the “gift that keeps on giving” because of the experts, the new information, and the safe space it provided for ongoing exploration. A surprising number of participants mentioned that they still reviewed their notes regularly as resources, and shared them with others in their organization - including the models and frameworks, notes from peer input circles on a particular strategic challenge, and the valuable personal feedback they were given by peers to reach for their highest passion and potential.

## 2.2 Value of the AD Learning Group - Organizational and Personal Impacts

*“I think the AD process has embedded a sense of ambition, critical thinking and a commitment to share what they know in the culture of the organization, even if the specific methods the group has chosen to scale up differ from the methods we were considering in the AD group”.*

*“I think what has happened with this McConnell process and all the support we were awarded there through this whole journey we’ve been on, is I feel we got to the door of another phase of our existence...”*

The combination of the thoughtful design, the constructive and emotionally supportive learning environment, and the expert and peer-driven content of the sessions led to significant personal and organizational impacts, beyond the scaling of the innovative initiatives. The AD community of practice was described as having a “seminal impact” and being of “outstanding importance” to one leader, who reflected: “and I changed a lot of things, and I changed me, as a result.” Participants shared how the safety of the group allowed for them to try things that had not been done before, and gave their organization a new sense of direction and ambition to imagine greater impact. They also saw themselves as resources for one another. One participant described how the AD learning group supported personal integration, deeper focus, and accountability to a larger vision. Overall, the learning group cultivated a sense of belonging and challenge, leading to “amazing, poignant and powerful shared moments” as the group members grew together over many years. Participants also supported each other in very concrete ways, opening fundraising doors and advancing scaling goals. Participants recognized that the AD learning group had been a “deeply important time” for their development as leaders, and that this “pulled the individual, their initiative, and their organization to a higher standard”. In that sense, there was an individual accountability that was created from having to meet the other practitioners once a year and to discuss their progress. The frameworks, tools, and processes impacted both their daily life and their organizational strategic planning, and many participants cited how the AD learning group experience was critical for taking their organizations to the “next stage”. This included growing participants’ confidence to lead systemic change and evolve their models, as well as affirming the scaling efforts they were already pursuing. Such learning then diffused further, when participants sought to develop similar capacities in senior leaders and board members within their organizations, as well as with partnering organizations and networks.

More than one participant acknowledged that the tools and awareness that they learned helped them to face common struggles and recognize that organizational fragility while undergoing change initiatives was inevitable and a natural part of the process. In particular, the collective learning process improved their ability to “see” new choices or different possibilities for their initiatives. “I learned that I could do (Y) or (Z) and I didn’t just have to do (X)”. Sometimes, that choice also involved saying “no” to certain projects or partners, to protect the integrity of their vision, or to learn to “let go”. As one leader put it:

*“If you believe in something so strongly, at some point, there is a time where you need to let go. And so part of my process in learning has been that I don’t have to be everything for everything we do. And I have great people that have grown and have done some amazing learnings in their positions. And now they’re disseminating, and they’re growing and they’re leading these pieces of it. So I think that was an important piece of learning: to let go”.*

Given the rewards and impact of the AD learning group, a number of participants went on to use the principles of experiential and group learning within their own organization or networks, coming to view collaborative learning as an essential part of the innovation process. In a sense, the AD learning group was a microcosm and an example of how to scale: “*Hands down, the most concrete benefits of participating in the AD group for us were the modeling of the process, the approach and the critical elements.*”

For those groups whose mission required the dissemination of systems thinking and new models of collaboration, the convening methods, frameworks, and peer-learning processes demonstrated in the AD community of practice became central to their own engagement and scaling work. As noted above, several organizations report directly modeling the process, approach and critical elements from the AD learning group in their own work - to build learning communities, convene networks, and scale their impact.

### 2.3 Challenges

While participants strongly emphasized the positive impacts of the AD learning group, they also recognized that challenges did arise that should be considered by anyone attempting to create a similar type of community of practice in the future. While meeting regularly seemed to instill in participants a sense of accountability, participants also indicated that being selected to be a part of the group brought an accompanying sense of burden. For one younger leader, this burden of responsibility related to feeling like they needed to be “further along” in their own development; in part, because they could compare themselves to other strong leaders in the group and realized their career was at a different stage. One participant described difficulties in applying the learning:

*“Understanding how it all applied to what we were doing and then again, turning around and being able to articulate that out, was just a huge challenge.”*

Another participant expressed that the responsibility was associated with the fact that they perceived that the McConnell Foundation was “risking a lot in investing in us”.

In some instances, the AD learning group changed over time because an organization had a transition in leadership and a decision was made to include the new leader. For both the core AD learning community and the new leader who joined the group late, the lack of continuity in relationships was difficult. Expansion of the group size was also an issue. Early in the AD learning group, the group was small, and participants referred to the small size as being critical to the development of the strong, trusting bonds that formed. Later, when additional people were included, one participant reflected that there was a “watered-down” sense of a shared learning experience. Yet, from the perspective of the McConnell Foundation staff involved, keeping the group size small was challenging when new AD grants were made and the new grantees would hear about the successful AD learning group and wonder why they were not invited to join. Restricting participants risked a) upsetting grantees who believed they were excluded or that the McConnell Foundation were “playing favourites”, and b) creating tension between those organizations that were involved and those that were not involved, which could impact partnerships or working relationships. This delicate balance needs to be considered as an important element in any group learning process design. One participant reflected how using new forms of social media could enable the content to be more widely shared, while still retaining a smaller learning community.

It is interesting to note that a former participant who has applied the AD convening model is facing similar challenges balancing growth and intimacy in their own situation:

*We are at an interesting point, however, in our scale up process. We have gotten so big (approximately 50 people attend our retreats) that maintaining the intimacy of a community of practice has become challenging to maintain. We have begun to break the groups up regionally and bring together smaller groups to ensure good discussion still happens. There is most definitely a limit in size for the kind of group learning and support we find most valuable.*

McConnell Foundation is currently experimenting with two scaling strategies for its learning activities. It created an external program called Innoweave, which has the capacity to help thousands of organizations learn about, assess, and implement new tools and approaches to generate greater impact and advance their mission more quickly through on-line modules, in-person workshops and subsidized coaching. It also has re-launched its convening of scaling grantees, accommodating growing numbers by stepping out of the convenor role after 18 months with plans to initiate new communities of practices with newly approved grantees.

## **2.4 Summary**

Reflections on the design of the peer-based, experiential learning process established for the AD learning group recognized the equal importance of the culture and environment, and the content. The culture and environment, which was modeled by the McConnell Foundation staff from the beginning, nurtured trusting relationships where the exploration of ideas and then ongoing experimentation and learning was encouraged. Likewise, having content that drew on leading research on complexity, resilience, and organizational theory helped to both frame new ideas and purposes, and to give confidence to participants as they went forward into uncharted territory. Although a couple of participants acknowledged that being surrounded by leaders in social and environmental organizations increased pressure for them to perform and apply what they were learning, all agreed in the value of the community of practice – to themselves as leaders, to their organization, and to their initiative. Perhaps most importantly, the practitioners involved in the AD learning group grew comfortable with knowing when to protect principles, people and projects, and when to let go, and be open to the emergent, dynamic change that would inevitably follow, without fearing a loss of control.

## Conclusion:

We conclude with several observations. First, the practice of scaling in Canada has evolved from earlier, simpler conceptions to a much more nuanced understanding. We have identified three types of scaling associated with five associated strategies, as well as five cross-cutting strategies that supported change leaders to expand the impact of their social solutions. These practitioners not only sought to disseminate their innovations over wider geographic areas or to greater numbers, but aimed also at systemic impacts - changes to rules, resource flows, cultural beliefs and relationships in a social system at multiple spatial or institutional scales. The experience of Canadian practitioners can provide an orienting map for the complex and often isolating journey of social innovation, suggesting that multiple approaches to scaling may be needed to achieve systemic impacts.

Second, a critical part of the scaling process involved learning, through peer-based forums, from experts who conducted research on social innovation and organizational change, from direct experience, and through ongoing evaluation. But it was an important finding: the learning that the McConnell Foundation stimulated in the AD community of practice became an embedded practice and essential part of scaling innovation itself. Many participants also still draw on frameworks introduced, and rely on reference material they collected from the sessions when thinking through difficult decisions or when training new staff.

Third, by convening the AD learning group, the McConnell Foundation supported interconnectedness among practitioners, and shifted its own practice. While these connections eventually developed into long-term, trusting relationships that supported learning, they have also created the conditions for emergence, whereby new ideas and new approaches for trying to make change happen in various social and environmental issue areas could be fostered. Many participants remain committed to the relationships developed during the AD learning group, and continue to serve as a resource and support system for each other. Furthermore, the participants we interviewed hoped that they could be brought together to support the next generation of socially innovative thinkers, recognizing that they have experiences that they could share with others.

Fourth, designing and implementing a peer-based, experiential learning forum that drew upon experts at specific times to provide new concepts and frameworks was recognized by all who participated as extremely valuable. However, any foundation or organization considering leading the same type of process should be aware that this was a resource-intensive exercise. It is difficult to achieve the level of trust, openness, and support that was critical to the transformation of the individual participants, their organization, and their initiative, without spending the time, energy, and financial resources to bring people together in thoughtful and thought-provoking ways. While this resource-intensiveness raises questions about the “scalability” of the impact of such learning processes, the experiences of a number of participants who have gone on to embed peer-based learning in their own organizations and networks demonstrates that the model can be scaled. Social technologies and advances in online learning platforms are making scaling of peer networks and dissemination of knowledge much more available, and while these do not replace the multiple benefits of face-to-face learning, they can complement and support learning cohorts in ever-expanding ways. For example, much of the early learning material used in Applied Dissemination has been systematized and advanced upon through the research from the Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience, hosted on the SiG Knowledge Hub ([www.sigknowledgehub.com](http://www.sigknowledgehub.com)). The McConnell Foundation’s Innoweave initiative offers an online platform to support organizational learning through courses, coaching and small capacity grants ([www.innoweave.ca](http://www.innoweave.ca)), including modules on scaling, developmental evaluation, and strategic clarity.

Finally, although the journey of social innovation is never complete, for there are always complex and seemingly intractable problems to consider, this report ends on a note of celebration for successes and for new beginnings. It is clear that applied learning did help to accelerate the impacts of several socially



innovative initiatives across Canada. Now, these same practitioners, along with new generations of change agents, are considering “what next” and continuing to push the boundaries of social change practice. We look forward to discovering what the next generation of social innovation experiments in Canada will bring.

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## Appendix A

AD Participants involved in the study came from the following organizations:

### Focus Groups:

**Leena Augimeri**, Director, Centre for Children Committing Offences at the Child Development Institute and founder of SNAP (Stop Now and Plan) <http://www.childdevelop.ca/programs/snap> a violence-prevention program that helps at-risk children manage angry feelings and prevent impulsive reactions. Using a cognitive-behavioural approach, SNAP works with children and youth with conduct and related behavioural problems, many of whom are at risk of interacting with the law. Its evidence-based approach makes it one of the most highly regarded programs of its kind in the world.

**Nathan Ball**, past Executive Director, L'Arche Canada Foundation  
The l'Arche <http://www.larche.ca/> movement was started in France in 1964 by the well-known Canadian theologian and scholar Jean Vanier. It is now international, with 145 communities on five continents, 29 of them in Canada. In these communities, young volunteer assistants live in homes with people with intellectual disabilities for periods ranging from several months to two years or more.

**Eleanor Beattie and Audrey Bean**, Co-founders and Board members, L'Abri en Ville <http://www.labrienville.ca/> provides a stable and fulfilling environment for persons with a mental illness through safe, affordable housing and inclusion in a supportive community. The l'Abri model has attracted interested people in other regions who wished to create their own projects. L'Abri provides a combination of information and accompaniment as these groups form.

**Paul Born**, Founder and President, Tamarack -- An Institute for Community Engagement <http://tamarackcommunity.ca/> develops and supports learning communities that help people to collaborate, co-generate knowledge and achieve collective impact on complex community issues. Its deep hope is to end poverty in Canada.

**Vickie Cammack**, Founder and past Executive Director, PLAN Institute <http://institute.plan.ca/> provides training, consultation, and research to groups and organizations in the citizen and public sectors, related to "belonging", caring citizenship and creating a good life for people with disabilities. Vickie Founder and President and CEO of Tyze Personal Networks, a for-benefit corporation that creates online personal networks and collaboration tools for people facing life challenges and their caregivers, friends, and family.

**Mary Gordon, Founder and President, Roots of Empathy** <http://www.rootsofempathy.org/>  
A classroom program, it has shown dramatic effects in reducing levels of aggression and violence among schoolchildren while raising social emotional competence and increasing empathy. Each classroom receives a monthly visit from a parent with a child under the age of one year, along with a trained instructor. The class observes the child's development and uses the experiences of baby and parent as a stimulus to exploring their own feelings, resulting in greater understanding of the feelings of others.

**Jennifer Johnson**, Executive Director, CHSSN (Community Health & Social Services Network) <http://www.chssn.org/En/default.asp#&panel1-1> works to strengthen networks at the local, regional and provincial level in Quebec in order to address health determinants, influence public policy and develop services in collaboration with public partners. It now has more than 60 member organizations and is involved with over 40 projects and partnerships in the areas of primary health care, community development and population health.

**Jane Rabinowicz**, past Executive Director, Santropol Roulant <http://santropolroulant.org/> a Montreal-based organization bringing people together across generations and cultures through an innovative meals-on-wheels service. Jane is currently the Program Director at USC Canada, working on food security with small-holder farming communities within the global South.

**Sherri Torjman**, Vice-President, Caledon Institute of Social Policy <http://www.caledoninst.org/> which produces rigorous, high-quality research and analysis; seeks to inform and influence public opinion and to foster public discussion on poverty and social policy; and develops and promotes concrete, practicable proposals for the reform of social programs at all levels of government and of social benefits provided by employers and the voluntary sector.

Focus groups also included the following J.W. McConnell Family Foundation representatives:

**Stephen Huddart**, President and CEO, The J. W. McConnell Family Foundation

**Dana Vocisano**, Senior Program Officer, The J. W. McConnell Family Foundation

#### **Additional Survey Respondents:**

**Dave Kranenburg**, past Executive Director, Meal Exchange a national, student-funded, youth-driven, organization working to achieve a more secure and sustainable food system on campuses and with communities across the country. Dave is currently the Director of Programs at the Centre for Social Innovation.

**John Mighton**, Founder, JUMP Math <https://jumpmath.org/cms/> which spreads the JUMP Math method, an approach tailored to students struggling with math, especially those from low-income families. JUMP believes that all children can be led to think mathematically, and that with even a modest amount of attention every child will flourish.

**George Roter**, Co-founder and CEO, Engineers Without Borders <http://www.ewb.ca/> a movement of over 50,000 professional engineers, students, overseas volunteer staff, and supporters across Canada that works to harness the skills and creativity of the Canadian engineering sector to find practical solutions to extreme poverty in Africa.