



Nora Dettor's Learning & Reflection Session on scaling up

Reflections from Nora Dettor, Director of Capability, Spring Impact

Interview by Rimjhim Surana, HCD Consultant, HCDEXchange



Nora is the Director of Capacity Building at [Spring Impact](#). Spring Impact is a nonprofit consultancy organization that specializes in helping organizations scale up solutions. Nora leads the organizations' work to demystify scaling and build the sector's knowledge and ability to scale successfully through practical tools and training.



How does Spring Impact use HCD in its work?

Nora's reflections

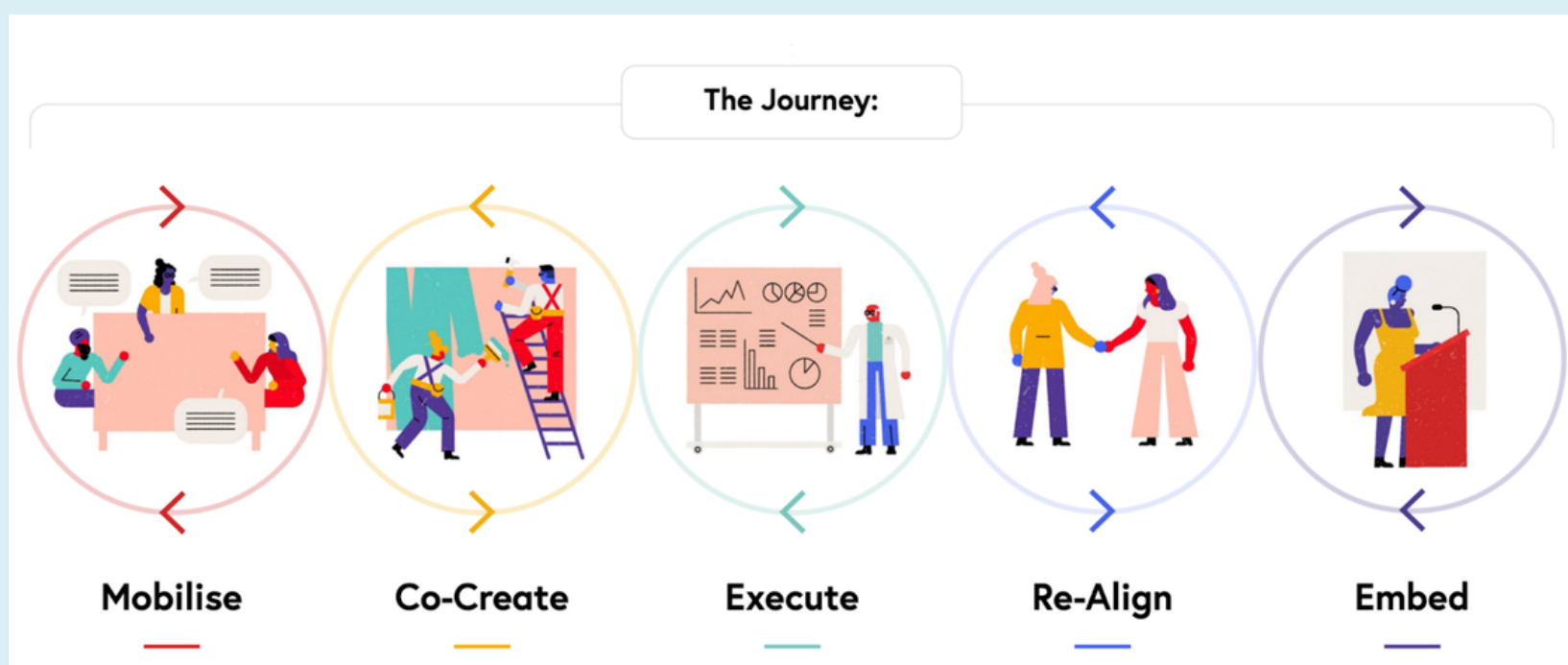
HCD is not something that we use across the board. However one example of when we have used HCD to help make our own work accessible and to deliver the journey to scale with governments. It's something that people working in different countries, social initiatives and government partnerships find really difficult to navigate. So there we took a HCD approach to help create a process and a tool that can be used to navigate this process of partnering and to create a shared understanding with their government partners so that everyone is on the same journey.



Could you share more about the tool and examples of how you have used it?

Nora's reflections

The Journey to Scale With Government Tool was created with input from many different organizations. There were over 100 different contributing organizations and partners - some who are working in the social sector with a desire to partner with the government and have the government eventually take over their solutions and deliver them at scale. We also had government partners who have been involved in those kinds of initiatives as well as funders who are often the enablers of being able to do that process.





Key insights from working with government partners:

Insights on what organizations and governments need to partner effectively

Nora's reflections

To scale well you need to share an understanding and become a collective.

It was very challenging for us to create understanding with the government. They needed something to help them convene, a shared process and understanding of 'where we are now', 'where are we going' and 'what are going to be the important things for us to consider as collective' when scaling up. They also need a shared language around all these different things to be able to communicate throughout the journey.

Insights on challenges faced and potential strategies

Nora's reflections

Anchor your solution and create ownership of it

Consider the government systems that are needed for implementation later on. Do not create your solutions in isolation. Organizations go to the government saying 'here, look at this great solution that we have, you should take this and use this'. However, this never really ends up happening because it's not really designed with the government systems in mind. There is also little ownership or buy-in of the solution from the government. Even if someone within the government thinks that it's a great idea, then one or two years later an election comes along, and there's a change in personnel. So being able to actually go through the long-term process becomes really difficult because the turnover of people within the government and even in the social sector is really high.

So basically, in order to be successful, an insight was that you need to really anchor the solution across the organization, and across different departments of government, and work with the people that are there in a more deliberate way to make sure that they feel that sense of ownership. A way of creating that sense of ownership is to involve government partners in the design process itself because then they are actually part of making the solution better. They know more about how things work within government and how the solution needs to look in order for it to actually be delivered by the government. This also results in having that kind of ownership and emotional investment in the solution and wanting to ensure its success. So even if they are leaving, they will work to make sure that there's someone else that can continue the work beyond their own time or after they've gone.

“ **A way of creating that sense of ownership is to involve government partners in the design process itself because then they are actually part of making the solution better. They know more about how things work within government and how the solution needs to look in order for it to actually be delivered by the government.** ”

Insights on mindsets and shifts required

Nora's reflections

Organizations need to change their mindsets to successfully scale up in partnership with the government.

Many organization's have this mindset that 'here is a great solution, you as a government should just take it over' without considering government perspectives that would make the delivery of the solution not possible. There is a frustration around how extremely slow, complicated and bureaucratic it can be working with government. But changing the mindset from 'why are you so bureaucratic?' to 'what do we need to make sure that we understand in order for this to work within the bureaucracy systems that the government has', and embracing and understanding that alongside having a long term commitment that it actually takes to get through. That ultimately comes to the core being that organizations need to have the mindset of 'how can we work in partnership with you', and not 'for you to do what we want' but 'how can we help support you (the government) to address this problem at scale?'

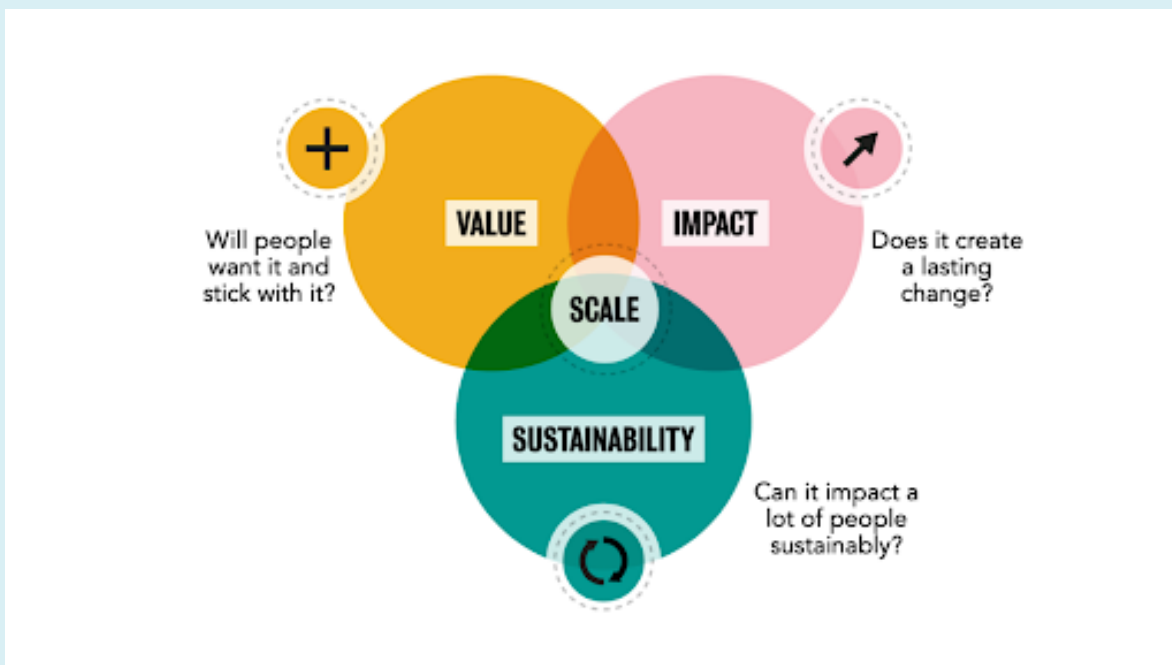


Specifically for programs that use the HCD process, how do you negotiate scale with the need for contextualization based on the desires of the users? That seems to conflict with each other sometimes - the need for contextualization versus replication

Nora's reflections

I think that is a real challenge. It is a negotiation that needs to be considered from the very start. At Spring Impact, we think that in order to have solutions that have a chance at addressing problems at scale, they definitely need to be: impactful, valuable to the people who are using them and they also need to be sustainable. This might mean different things for different problems and different kinds of solutions. But financial sustainability needs to be baked into the solution itself or into the business model that sits around the solution.

These are important in order for it to actually have a chance at being able to be impactful at scale, and not just have have impact for a few 100 people. Traditionally the social sector has been really good at the impact part. However, I think the sustainability bit is still missing and that's what we at Spring Impact work to really lobby for organizations to be considering baking into their solutions at the very early stages of it.



I think HCD brings in the value part really well because oftentimes you have so many projects that seem great but no one ends up engaging with them because they are just not valued enough by the people or they're not designed with the people's needs in mind. They don't become a good experience or a good service for people. HCD has really helped to turn that on its head to be able to bring in the value as well as the impact.



Could describe the HCD approaches used by Spring Impact in scaling pathways when partnering with government?

Nora's reflections

Something that is really helpful as part of the HCD process is the approach of testing and validating, and the learning driven approach which encourages learning how things actually work in practice at as early a stage as possible. When you don't do that you risk designing all these grand ideas that are great in theory, but then it turns out that in practice, there are actually big barriers to them working well. That is really important for scale. Human-centered design, when it's done well, does bring that kind of learning and testing approach into the process at an earlier stage.

For instance, when we were talking about selecting the kind of partners that you would want to partner with in order to implement your solution, you have a hypothesis around who they need to be (in terms of skills, staff, who they target, what they work on etc.). You can develop the profile for who you want to work with, and then validate and test that profile. You need to validate that they actually want to be working with you. Some organizations may be happy to take on a solution if it has your brand and those kinds of things, whereas others wouldn't want to do that but maybe they would be interested in being able to roll it out as a part of their own brand. So testing helps with things like understanding who your partners are and how you can design your solution in a way that doesn't just fit your needs but also fits their needs and market test this to make sure that they are actually signing up with you.

"HCD, when it's done well, does bring that kind of learning and testing approach into the process at an earlier stage."



You had also previously mentioned the aspect of scale that speaks to the value of the solution to the people that use it. How does that fit into scaling considerations and negotiations with government or other partners?



Nora's reflections

I think not losing track of why you're doing something in the first place is really important to keep in mind. Also, if it's not impactful for the people that you're trying to serve and if it's not valued by them in a way that they want to engage with the solution, then none of the rest of it matters. So value for the people is a fundamental thing there. Personally, I think HCD does a really good job of really centering around people's experience of the problems. The way that we got organizations and our partners that are looking to scale up to keep the 'value to the people' in mind is to come back to this concept around what's the core of the solution? What is it that is really driving value to the people that you're trying to help? How is this also valued by service beneficiaries or providers? How is it valued by other partners that are critical to that delivery and scale up. So if you want to scale up in partnership with the government, the solution needs to be valued by those government partners. Say for instance, you are giving advice about contraception, and the main way in which adolescent girls would come to you would be through referrals from another clinic, then having that referral partner value what your program is trying to do is critical because otherwise the solution won't work. This also needs to be tested in real time, in practice, and not spend three years designing the perfect solution, only to go out there and realize that people don't want to engage with it.



Strong government partnerships don't matter if the people that you're trying to impact aren't engaging.



Case Study Highlight

With a Marie Stopes project in Zambia where they partnered with Ideo.org to develop solutions for adolescents sexual health, they ended up developing these Diva centres. Insights for that project came from adolescents to develop these centers. The centers were super valued by the constituents that they were trying to serve, and the constituents also really leaned into and engaged with the solution. After the project they were really excited about the Diva Centers, they were starting to think about how it could get to other people? or how could it be scaled up? so that it can have a greater impact than this. Considering that at that late a stage becomes more difficult, because then you might already have challenges around cost per positive outcome. Because if you're going to have a chance at reaching a million people, then if the intervention costs \$20 versus \$100 per person, that's going to be a very big difference in terms of where you're gonna get to.

The nature of problems define the approach to scale solutions

Nora's reflections

When we think about financial sustainability for scale, it's not just about thinking about cost effectiveness, or how we deliver the solution as cheaply as possible?, it's thinking about what is the nature of the problem that we're trying to solve?, and what does that require in terms of the solutions that we're developing. So for example, if you have a problem that can be completely eradicated. A great example from the social sector is the smallpox eradication program, where you have the disease, you have the solution which is vaccines, and by managing to effectively scale up these vaccines smallpox doesn't exist anymore, and that problem is gone. With this problem there is no point trying to bring down the cost of solutions because what really matters is getting there as quickly as you can since the chances of the problem being completely resolved are high.

So sustainable impact in this case is different and that plays a role in how you think about the solutions that you're developing and the routes to scale that you need to take. Whereas for something like adolescent sexual and reproductive health or services like access to abortion or contraception etc, will probably always be needed in some form. You can reduce the size of the problem by scaling up solutions, or you can work within the system to try to change norms in society which might make the problem smaller or less severe, or you can work on ways of reducing the problem, but there's probably always going to be a need to deliver those kinds of services.

[Listen to a podcast case study about the Diva Centers](#)



When planning for scale, you need to think of the right stakeholder to scale your solution

Nora's reflections

Oftentimes, having the government deliver sexual reproductive health services as a part of their health services provision is a more or less sustainable way of being able to deliver it. And then, if that's your aim, then that also means that the services will need to be delivered year after year to people, and then you know that you will want to have services that are affordable enough to be able to be delivered like that. They may need to be not too complex for the doer, in this case the government so that they can deliver them easily. That way of thinking would then inform how you approach the problem, develop the solutions, and also how you work with the other actors within the sector to solve the problem.

If you know that you want to work with the government you need to take a partnership approach and develop that partnership from the start. In the situation that you think that there is a long way between where you are now and where the government actually is at the moment, then maybe you need to be working with other kinds of actors to change legislation and public policy in order to make way for solutions like yours to be able to be implemented effectively and in the future. You could also work with other actors within the system in order to create the conditions that you think will be needed in the future for solutions to be successfully delivered at scale.



Could you talk more about the route to scale for the Divine Diva project that MSI did in Zambia?

Nora's reflections

MSI had partnered with Ideo.org to finally develop these Diva centers, and then they knew that they wanted to scale up, and they wanted to partner with the government in order to be able to do that. That's where Spring Impact came in to figure out how to help them do that. They identified the Ministry of Health in the Ndola region where they basically developed or recreated their solution which was a physical Diva center within a public clinic in partnership with the local government there. Some of the staff in the center were still from MSI. They had a sexual health clinician from MSI who was giving advice and they had certain people who were supporting that specific side of things. The intent was that they would eventually train up the local staff to do that more. We work with organizations and partners to clarify the things that need to happen in order for this solution to be scaled up successfully. This forms the core and that can then be replicated by someone else. Some of them can maybe happen in a flexible way, and some of them can happen in more like they need to happen exactly like this as subscribed or prescribed, then, then you can think about, okay, so who then could be implementing this, who can be doing this, and what's the profile of the type of partner that we would be looking for.

So for MSI they knew that they wanted the government to be delivering the solution in the longer term. But in the shorter term, they chose to partner with a government department that already had experience delivering sexual health services to adolescent girls. They were already working on that and they had some capabilities within that local clinic in order to deliver their work. They were in some ways already engaging that audience to some extent. Basically they were doing it (engaging the government), but not in an effective manner, which meant that there was an appetite to try to improve the way that they were engaging the government. They could then think about positioning the Diva centers as a solution that the government department would have an incentive to want to take up.



The kinds of things that we will generally help organizations figure out is to think about if you are scaling to a new location, is the implementer of your solution going to be the government or another nonprofit or maybe you're doing it within a school etc. Then also you want to figure out what parts of your solution drives the impact that you want to have, and what is really the core aspect of your solution because if you want to scale up, you need to only focus on the most essential part for the drivers of impact.



If you try to scale up something that's too big, it becomes more costly and it becomes more complicated and fewer potential implementers are going to be able to actually deliver it in an impactful way.



Important tips for scaling

Nora's reflections

Depending on how big your core is, and how complex your core is, you'll have a smaller or bigger pool of potential implementers that could be delivering it for you at scale. When you're piloting it, then you need to figure out who to give it to first and how to make it work. So you define what it is that needs to be replicated, you identify potential implementing partners that could be doing that, and then we also help develop what we call the support package that you will offer to those implementing partners. Oftentimes, the support to the implementing partner may look like coaching the people that are there to help them learn the process that you are using as a part of your core service, or giving them training materials that they will then in turn use with their customers.

There is a trade-off because you want someone else to be able to deliver the service in an impactful way but they might require some support in order to get there, and the more support you give, the less scalable the solution becomes because then it will require time from the organization that originally came up with the solution. You can't give 1000 organizations support. So we try to figure out what's the support that will be enough for them to do it well, but not something that is going to cost you too much to be able to do and try to find that balance. For example, having support initially and not having ongoing support is one way of going about it. With the vaccines - if you have a vaccine there are no ongoing costs, you don't have to worry about it getting expensive. In terms of that ongoing support it gets expensive and unsustainable, whereas delivering a service over and over and over again to millions of people.

What to Consider

1. What are the parts of the solution that drive impact?
2. What needs to happen in order for the solution to work?
3. What are the drivers of value? What are the things that need to be there in order for the constituents that you're serving to actually engage with the solution?
4. What are the things that need to be there in terms of sustainability and the business model?



The A360 program in Ethiopia is a contraception uptake program whereby the build skills to young girls become more financially independent. Using an adaptive implementation approach they are starting to scale up. So they've partnered with the government to take that solution and implement it in different regions of Ethiopia. They are contextualizing it to the extent where they're also changing the name of the solution based on what resonates with the different community contexts. You've spoken about there being a framework or a core which is replicated, but I wanted to understand if there are parts of solutions that are contextualized at scale?

Nora's reflections

I think we definitely use that approach but it also depends on the solution and the problem that you're trying to solve. Something that Spring Impact will help organizations figure out is how flexible or controlled should the scaling of the solution be? Oftentimes, it is quite rare that you have a really tightly controlled solution where you are saying 'this is exactly how it's going to work, you can only use these and these things'. That level of control usually doesn't work. It solution definitely needs to be more contextualized in order for it to work. What we help organizations find is how much of the solution needs to be contextualized in order for it to be effective. For example, if you have an information or advice-giving service about contraception then the clinicians that give the advice have the freedom to give it in a way that they think is best for the audience that they know and work with all the time. They know the culture. They know all these things that the organization that came up with the solution won't know as well as they do. However the organization might still require them to cover certain topics, because this will help drive the impact of outcomes for the solution.



Nora's reflections

So finding the level of what needs to be covered basically is important. How you choose to cover it is up to the organization - we have a spectrum of different kinds of replication pathways that range from being very flexible to very tightly controlled. We are usually on the flexible end for the dissemination kind of models where you are the originator of a solution, you are just sharing information but you have little control over how someone will take it and use it. That's going to be hard to control. But the positive thing is that you can disseminate it to many people without it costing you anything, and you don't have any ongoing costs, because you're not doing anything beyond you having disseminated it.

That kind of model can be really scalable. The point is when you have a really simple and sticky idea, then dissemination can be really effective to reach scale. If you have a complex solution or idea, then there are other sorts of things that are a bit more tightly controlled. For example, if you're trying to improve contraception service advice, then maybe a model that you would consider would be that you have an accreditation model, which involves you training clinicians, so that you know that those clinicians have received the information that the latest high quality advice that they should be providing. When they pass their training, they get certified to give that advice themselves.

As an implementer, that would require quite a bit of investment because you're investing a lot of time in training these clinicians, and you are doing it on an ongoing basis. They are then accredited, and maybe there's some sort of regular checks that you would do with them. They may need to take an accreditation test or something every five years because that's when there'll be more new information that they need to know to stay updated. This might need cost, time and effort but it won't need as much as the other end of the spectrum, which is that you as an originator implementing organization would have a strategic partnership with another implementer wherein you are working together really closely all the time in order to have the kind of impact that you want to have for your solution.

There's a range from being very flexible with very little control and cost to providing different levels of ongoing support which could mean being tightly controlled so that you know implementation is happening in a way that's impactful. But obviously that's going to cost you so you probably can't be working with 1000s of strategic partners at the same time.

Case Study Highlight

An example that we like to use that's well known as AA - Alcoholics Anonymous. That is a very well scaled up social intervention. Anyone anywhere can start an Alcoholics Anonymous group if they have some resources. It's like this 12 Step program that they take participants through, and then the programme itself is run through volunteer groups of people who themselves have been through substance abuse issues. That was just disseminated. In this model there is no way of controlling it - I know that that model has had a lot of positive impact but I'm sure there's also examples of groups where it actually hasn't been impactful at all. You don't really know how people are going to use it or how well it's going to do.



Shifting gears here a little bit - You had mentioned that HCD approaches are used by Spring Impact in scale pathways particularly when you partner with government and/or other stakeholders. Could you talk to me about the journey to scale and partnering with the government for the product that you spoke about earlier? Are there HCD tools and processes that you might have used in the work that you do to make those partnerships happen?



Nora's reflections

Something that is really helpful as part of the HCD process is the approach of testing and validating, and the learning-driven approach which encourages learning how things actually work in practice at as early a stage as possible. When you don't do that you risk designing all these grand ideas that are great in theory, but then it turns out that in practice, there are actually big barriers to them working well. That is really important for scale. Human-centered design, when it's done well, does bring that kind of learning and testing approach into the process at an earlier stage.

For instance, when we were talking about selecting the kind of partners that you would want to partner with in order to implement your solution, you have a hypothesis around who they need to be (in terms of skills, staff, who they target, what they work on etc). You can develop the profile for who you want to work with, and then validating and testing that profile, I think is really important. Also to validate that they would actually want to be working with you. Some organizations may be happy to take on a solution if it has your brand and those kinds of things, whereas others wouldn't want to do that but maybe they would be interested in being able to roll it out as a part of their own brand.



Testing helps with things like understanding who your partners are and how you can design your solution in a way that doesn't just fit your needs but also fits their needs and market test this to make sure that they are actually signing up with you.



What does Monitoring and Evaluation look like when you're looking at scale versus when you're just piloting a program?, and is that very different from a solution that was designed using a human-centered design process?

Nora's reflections

We're talking about many different things when it comes to scaling. So when you're developing your solution, you need to be measuring like, is it having the social impact that you want to have? What are your metrics for that? How is it positively impacting people's lives and those kinds of things, as well as metrics around the depth of impact, and reach. As you're developing a solution, there are a lot more things that you need to be tracking in order for you to understand that the solution is working and how it's working. You don't necessarily need to be tracking everything on an ongoing basis, because once some things are kind of validated, then you can leave that design process, and move into implementation. There are certain things that you want to be tracking as part of an implementation process on an ongoing basis to make sure that the solution keeps working.



The importance of tracking costs and the impact of that on strengthening your solution at scale

Nora's reflections

I think something that nonprofits are notoriously bad at tracking and understanding is the cost of delivery and the cost per outcome or person. So organizations might be able to say we need \$300,000 to deliver this program over the course of two years to reach 2000 people but you don't really get the cost per delivery. What organizations need to be doing more of, is to get an understanding of the drivers of cost per positive outcome or per person that they're impacting. Because that's what you need to know, in order to be able to say, could we deliver this to a million people? Could we deliver this to 5 million people? Those are the metrics that really matter for scale, and also, that's how you can get outside of just thinking of things in terms of philanthropic funding.

If you're trying to raise \$300,000, you can probably raise that but is that actually getting you closer to being able to address this problem at scale, if you're only able to reach a few 1000 people at a time? We have a cost calculator that we ask people to use. So first, how much is the cost to get someone to sign up? What's the cost to get them to actually take part? How many people who take part have a positive impact? Maybe that's, you know, 80% of them have that positive impact? And then how many of those are continuing to have that positive impact over time?

If you can break down the cost at every stage, then you can figure out what part of that needs to be improved in order to make it more cost effective. So for example you can get 90% of people to sign up instead of 20%. That's a huge difference. There's a huge potential for you to become much more effective when it comes to how you spend your resources. If you get that it improves the impact of your service to 95% effective instead of 90%. By understanding the granular costs, you can understand how much money it costs you to get to the point where you have had a positive outcome for one person. What parts of you spending that money could potentially be improved? I think that's something that organizations have little idea about.

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