

THE LITERATURE ON SCALING SOCIAL IMPACT

In practice and in research, the base of knowledge about scaling social impact is interdisciplinary and evolving. A range of scholars, researchers, consultants, funders, social sector observers, and practitioners - social entrepreneurs and nonprofit leaders - are at work generating knowledge related and relevant to scaling social impact, whether through their active examples, analysis and reflection, or scholarly research. Through this summary literature review and annotated bibliography, the Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship has begun to create a working resource for researchers and social sector leaders that frames, identifies, and inventories knowledge and research about scaling social impact. Our assumption is that, when oriented toward practical analysis and action, stronger knowledge about scaling social impact can improve the practice of scaling social impact.

Concepts & Definitions: “Social impact” is the value created for beneficiaries, society, and the world by a social-purpose organization or program, value that cannot be reduced to economic wealth for owners or consumption benefits for customers. “Scaling social impact” is the *process of increasing the impact a social-purpose organization produces to better match the magnitude of the social need or problem it seeks to address*. Scaling social impact can include, but is not limited to, the following categories of action: expanding the quantity and improving the quality of the services provided directly by your organization; enabling other organizations to provide a higher quantity and quality of direct services; changing the political, cultural, or economic environment to reduce the need or problem; attracting more or improving the productivity of resources devoted to addressing the need or problem.

By definition, the interdisciplinary concept of scaling social impact draws upon knowledge from many fields and topics of study, including, for example, business management and strategy, nonprofit management and strategy, entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, social change, social movements, organizational growth, organizational design, public policy, and the diffusion of ideas, innovation and knowledge.

In order to understand the scope of the literature, it is helpful to break down the sources into themes or categories. The sources in the annotated bibliography (Part 4 of this document) are organized under the categories listed below. For each, a brief introduction indicates how that group of sources relates to scaling social impact and provides example references. Note that the set of categories currently used in this bibliography is neither collectively exhaustive (other topics related to scaling social impact may not yet be included) or mutually exclusive (sources relevant to multiple topics are listed under each.)

- **Scaling Impact vs. Scaling Organization:** The literature is divided between the perspective of scaling the *organization* and that of scaling *impact*. While sources on scaling organizations are more common (Young, 1989; Oster, 1996; Letts, Ryan, Grossman, 1999; Grossman & Rangan, 2001; Bradach, 2003; Wei-Skillern, Anderson, 2003 O’Flanagan & Taliento, 2004), a number of sources use a frame of scaling impact (Kramer, 2005; Alvord, Brown, Letts, 2004; Uvin, 1995; Uvin, Jain, Brown, 2000; Dees, Anderson, Wei-Skillern, 2003).
- **Identifying Options & Models for Scaling Social Impact:** Peter Uvin’s “definitions and taxonomy for scaling up” (Uvin, 1995; Uvin, Jain, Brown, 2000) represents early work on classifying a framework of approaches for scaling social impact. Taylor, Dees & Emerson (2002) identify several pathways for “scaling deep” (achieving greater impact in home community or market) and “scaling out” (disseminating principles, creating learning networks, or packaging/selling programs). Dees, Anderson, and Wei-Skillern (2003) provided a matrix of “pathways” for scaling social impact that considers options for what to scale and the mechanism for doing so. Kanter (2005) identifies choices for leaders in terms of both targets and vehicles of social change and impact.
- **Organizational Scale & Growth:** Some studies assess growth in a particular organization, but offer lessons transferable to other organizations (for example: Campbell & Louh, 2005; Banerji, Chavan, Vaish, Varadhachary, 2001). A wide range of case studies on particular organizations appear in sources throughout the annotated bibliography.
- **Field- or Industry-Specific Scale & Growth:** Several sources assess growth in a particular nonprofit industry or field, and many of those explicitly or implicitly offer lessons transferable to the larger sector and other kinds of organizations. Examples include community development finance (Ratliff & Moy, 2004), U.S. social service organizations (Corbin, 1999), international social service organizations

(Alvord, Brown, Letts, 2004); international development organizations (Uvin, 1995; Uvin, Jain, Brown, 2000), and youth-serving organizations (Bridgespan, 2005).

- **Scaling Impact as Social Change:** Other work emphasizes a context larger than organization, but frames the issue in terms of “systemic” or “higher order” social change or social transformation instead of social impact (Drayton; Schwarz, 2005; Alvord, Brown, Letts, 2004; Bornstein, 2004; Kanter, 2005).
- **Scaling Impact through Replication and Multi-Site Organizations:** There is a significant amount of work on replication in general (Bradach, 2003), on the choice between affiliate and branch models (Oster, 1996; Wei-Skillern, Anderson, 2003), on affiliate/federated models (O’Flanagan & Taliento, 2004) and on managing multi-site nonprofit organizations (Young, 1989, 2001; Oster, 1996; Letts, Ryan, Grossman, 1999; Grossman & Rangan, 2001; Litman, 2003).
- **Social Impact through Social Movements:** While most literature on social movements focuses on the sociological and political aspects, Zald’s work connects social movements to organizations and puts social movements in the context of the social sector and social change process (Zald, 2004).
- **Scaling Impact through Partnerships & Alliances:** One example from La Piana Associates, Inc. (2006) offers a framework for nonprofit partnerships and alliances.
- **Scaling Impact through Public Policy:** Several sources assess how social impact can be achieved through private initiative influencing public policy (Zald, 2004, *New Profit Inc.*, 2005; Schwarz, 2005; Kanter, 2005). Of course, there is vast literature on the general topic of the role of government and public policy in addressing public issues and problems.
- **Scaling Impact through Spread of Innovation, Ideas, and Knowledge:** Frameworks for diffusion and adoption of innovation (Rogers, 2003), ideas (Godin, 2001; Gladwell, 2002), and knowledge (Badaracco, 1991; Wenger, 1998) can be applied to strategies for scaling social impact.
- **Capital & Scaling Social Impact:** There are a number of resources on social sector capital markets and financing growth. Bauman (2005) offers an overview of the growth capital market; Miller (2001, 2002) assesses how nonprofit capitalization impacts capacity, change, and growth; and Emerson (2000) outlines capital development needs at nonprofit stages of growth as well as the types of investors, sources, and instruments for nonprofits to access capital.
- **Capacities & Scaling Social Impact:** The subject of capacity-building and its impact on the ability of an organization to scale its social impact effectively and sustainably has been studied, for example, by Hauser (2003) and Light (2004).