

THINKING BIG

A FRAMEWORK FOR STATES ON SCALING UP COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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JOBS FOR THE FUTURE



It is a truism of American social policy that our nation has great success generating innovative programs that improve outcomes for participants—but that we are far less effective at moving from small, “boutique” programs into broadly applied solutions that improve the prospects of large numbers of individuals. This is certainly true in the education and workforce fields. Given this history, it is no surprise that the challenge of “getting to scale” is a growing preoccupation among educators, policymakers, and funders who are impatient with the pace of change and of the limited adoption of effective practices and programs.

We at Jobs for the Future are not the first to tackle the question of scale. We felt the need, though, to undertake our own inquiry and craft our own assessment of how to think about scale and to specify a framework that could be useful to both policymakers and practitioners. JFF has over two decades of experience designing and implementing scaling-up strategies to expand educational and economic opportunity for low-income youth and adults. We have learned from our work, and we wanted to systematize and further develop our thinking.

Starting from our organizational experience, we also mined the extensive research literature on scale and sustainability. Most important, though, we tested our emerging framework by examining efforts designed to spread, across entire state community college systems, evidence-based innovations that improve outcomes for students. We looked in depth at efforts in Arkansas, Oregon, Virginia, and Washington state (see box, “Four Examples of Scaling Up Community College Reform”) and interviewed key policy and practice entrepreneurs, college and system leaders, and experienced evaluators of community college initiatives, in Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, New York, and Texas.

FOUR EXAMPLES OF SCALING UP COMMUNITY COLLEGE REFORM

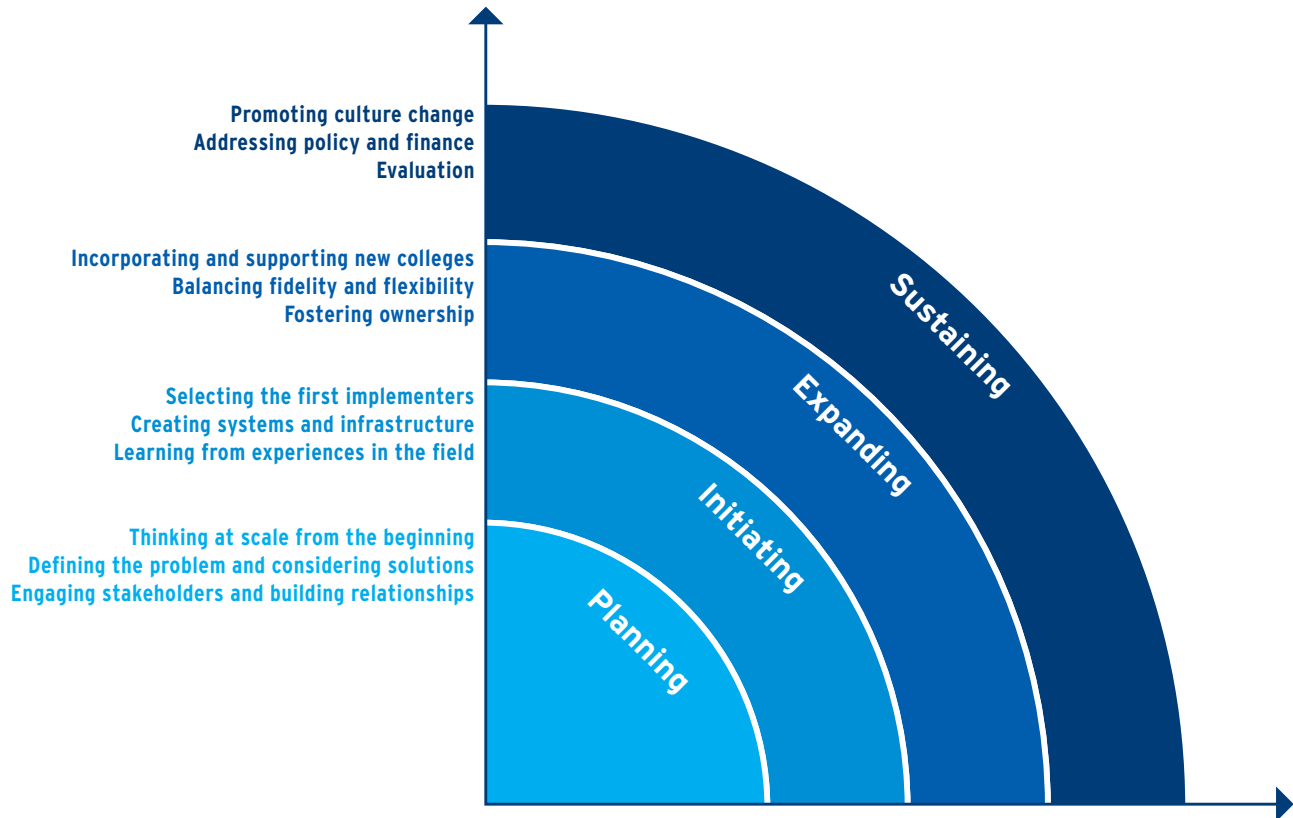
The Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative, administered by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education at 25 sites, including all 22 community colleges in the state, serves custodial “working poor” parents who are eligible for or receiving TANF funds. Over 27,000 students have participated in Career Pathways, with over 24,000 certificates and degrees awarded.

The Oregon Career Pathways Initiative, coordinated by the Oregon Department of Community Colleges & Workforce Development, has been scaled up to Oregon’s 17 community colleges. The goals are to increase the number of Oregonians with certificates, credentials, and degrees, and to ease transitions across the education continuum and into employment. More than 350 career pathway road maps have been developed; over 240 Career Pathway Certificates of Completion are offered statewide. Since 2008, students have earned more than 5,000 short-term certificates.

The Virginia Community College System’s redesign of developmental education has led to change across the entire system of 23 colleges and 40 campuses, enrolling a total of 280,000 students.

The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges’ Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program accelerates the progress of Adult Basic Education students by combining basic skills education with occupational training. The program is in all 34 of the system’s colleges, with 163 programs and over 3,000 students participating annually.

THE ARC OF SCALING



Based on the literature and the states' experiences, we have produced a definition of scaling up and of the conditions for its success and sustainability. We have identified distinct phases of scaling up, from initial planning to institutionalization and sustaining. Our goal is that the framework offered here helps innovators be deliberate and strategic from the outset, increasing the odds of successful expansion, impact, and sustainability.

THE ARC OF SCALING

Scaling up is an ongoing process, with distinct phases. While each statewide scaling-up initiative is unique in content and context, all share an arc that begins with preparation and planning, then moves into initiating and expanding, and then comes to sustaining, with changes in practices and norms.

PREPARATION AND PLANNING

The groundwork for scaling up an innovation takes place before the first student enrolls in a new program. The first step in scaling is identifying an innovation to test and scale that addresses an identified need. Once the innovation has been selected, effective planning for scale requires thinking systemically and systematically even if a program is only being piloted in a few colleges. It takes into account the complexity of the change process, considers strengths,

and anticipates obstacles, resulting in a nuanced understanding of the system and landscape, a clearly defined problem, and a potential solution.

INITIATING

The next step is to identify and engage likely colleges for initial implementation. Central office leaders create guidelines, organize data systems, and build pathways for communication, while the actual work of program development—refining and adapting the model—takes place at the colleges. Those involved with the program at the state and local levels systematically learn from early experiences in the field thru data analysis and stakeholder feedback, then refine the model and prepare it for further expansion.

EXPANDING

The third stage is expanding—bringing more colleges into the network and expanding the program at each college. Lessons learned from initiating help the second or third wave of colleges get started. Building on the system capacity developed during the initiating phase, the central office supports the new colleges, incorporates them into structures set up for collaboration and peer learning, and orients them to the guidelines, systems, and structures in place. The model evolves as more colleges adopt the reform.

SUSTAINING

The act of sustaining is dynamic, requiring both continuity and flexibility. Without the novelty or excitement of start up, sustaining relies on changing the norms of practice and keeping successes visible. The strategies and activities that brought a program to scale—such as professional development, communication, and peer learning—need to be ongoing to sustain it. Professional development, communication, and the network of practice all continue.

LESSONS LEARNED

Even as the system context and innovations vary, the state experiences examined in our research revealed a set of consistent themes and lessons.

The strongest message from state systems and colleges is the need to think and work toward scale from the beginning—from the top down, the bottom up, and through the middle. The vision of scale—in terms of proportion of the target population to be reached, expansion strategy and timeline, and fiscal sustainability—has to drive planning and implementation from the outset.

In the state systems studied by JFF, the entrepreneurial leaders articulated and were guided by a clear, definable vision of scale. They anticipated and prepared for responses from their peers, their subordinates, and their various stakeholders, whether enthusiastic or skeptical. Some started by introducing changes across the entire system; in others, the state strategically selected a diverse set of pilot institutions and then expanded based on evidence and experience. In each, planning began with a discussion of assumptions about scale and how to assemble the human, political, and financial capital needed to implement innovation at the desired scale and scope.

Large-scale innovations invariably require engagement across systems—K-12 and higher education; workforce and

economic development; community-based supports and college-based academics. Large-scale problems do not respect system boundaries; effective solutions often engage multiple agencies and cross structural and cultural barriers. Because of this, planning for scale requires careful attention to communication and buy-in strategies and to the building of strong, motivated partnerships, collaborations, and relationships across institutions and systems. The initiatives studied for this report invested heavily in the professional networks, individual relationships, and institutional partnerships that provide the social capital critical to growth and broad adoption of reform.

As efforts to scale up innovation grow and mature, the challenges shift. As an innovation is scaled, leaders must grapple with the need to balance fidelity to the model as designed with the reality that local conditions frequently demand adaptation if an innovation is to take root. They must turn from the challenge of assembling development capital and of driving innovation to the proposed scale to the equally important challenge of ensuring ongoing resources to sustain new practices at the expanded scale and scope. States and systems must creatively braid together existing funds, but also identify long-term sources of funding and commit to pursuing cost-effective ways of sustaining innovation.

Throughout the scaling-up process, effective use of student data is critical: initially, to make the case for reform and for the particular strategy; later, as a tool for feedback and formative evaluation and for continuous program improvement and midcourse corrections; and ultimately, as evidence of impact to policymakers and participants.

Finally, the experience of states included in our research reminds us of how complex the change process always is. And it reminds us that ongoing focus and engagement are critical during all stages of the arc of scaling.

Available for download at <http://www.jff.org/publications/education/thinking-big-framework-states-scaling-co/1541>

Jobs for the Future works with our partners to design and drive the adoption of education and career pathways leading from college readiness to career advancement for those struggling to succeed in today's economy.



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