



# Scaling Transformative Change

OFFICE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH AND LEADERSHIP

Leadership

Adoption and  
Adaptation

Evidence

Storytelling

Networks

Dissemination

Technology

**Spread and  
Endurance**

## Transformative Change Initiative Overview

The Transformative Change Initiative (TCI) is dedicated to assisting community colleges to scale-up innovations that improve student outcomes and program, organization, and system performance.

***Guiding Principle for Spread and Endurance:** Scaling of transformative change will occur when innovations are chosen for scaling that show the potential to spread and endure.*

Innovations that result in improved performance are a very good thing. No one complains about doing things better. However, innovation that reaches only a small number of people, representing what some call “boutique reform” (see, for example, Detrich, 2010, n.p.), can be disappointing. To grow impact, information about how change happens needs to be shared beyond those involved in the original groundbreaking work so that the innovation can spread to others. For community colleges involved in the current wave of reform, it is important to share far and wide what is known about innovation and change.

Strategic approaches to scaling innovations stretch not only originating organizations but also adopting organizations to move beyond everyone’s comfort zone. With adequate backing and support, innovations can be scaled and sustained, and they can produce widespread benefits that have larger social impact. Looking at change in this way, it is clear how organizations represent a test bed for innovations that are poised to produce breakthrough results on behalf of students, their communities, and society at large.

When educators, partners, and students first come together to implement change, they may be uncertain and even fearful about whether the change is a good idea. Their worries may focus on whether the time and effort to change is right, whether better student outcomes will result, and whether reform will last. Perceptions of innovations as being disruptive and costly can dampen enthusiasm for change and deter efforts to engage in reform, so it is important for leaders to inspire adopters by sharing their vision of the potential impact that change will produce. Sharing stories of what innovations can do is necessary to inspire innovation and reform.

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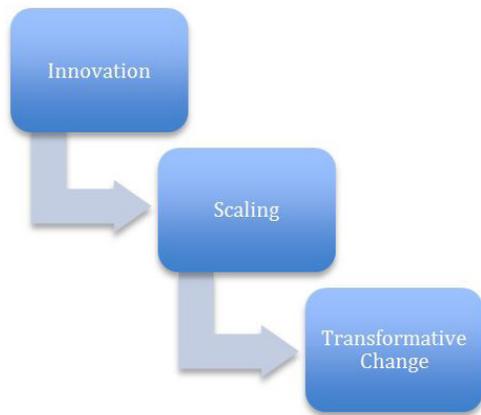
**The work of scaling is not done by implementing the reform, but rather it is about producing transformative results.**

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Century, Rudnick, and Freeman (2010) claim the two critical dimensions of scaling are spread and endurance. By understanding spread and endurance, leaders can focus their strategic thinking on how the innovation will be disseminated and how it can be supported to endure over time. These two dimensions make good sense for scaling just about any reform, and they make especially good sense for community college reforms.

Spread refers to the adoption and adaptation of innovation within and across community colleges. This dimension focuses on scaling to broaden the impact of innovation, within the organization that originated it and to other organizations that are not part of the original adoption process and that become engaged over time. In community colleges where stakeholders (i.e., K-12 education, universities, workforce agencies, employers, community-based organizations, other partners, students) are rooted in their local communities, it is important to set targets that inform and guide the spread of an innovation on all levels: student, program, organization, system, state, and nation.

Endurance is about how long an innovation will last, and what processes are needed to ensure longevity. Few changes of substance come about quickly, so a commitment to change over time



is needed. Realistic timelines are needed to both implement and institutionalize change, with institutionalization referring to fully integrating the innovation into an organization's structures, processes, resource capacity, and culture. It is about making innovation routine and commonplace, i.e., part of the organizational DNA. Century (2013) agrees with this perspective, claiming both adoption and adaptation are key to endurance because most innovations acclimate to the local context over time, not immediately. Adaptation and acclimation are required for long-term endurance.

Century (2009) also supports the necessity of innovation that is linked to program and process improvement, advising that, in order for innovations to be sustained, they must adapt to continuous change. Because community college education is an ever-changing enterprise, data need to inform reformers on what is being learned about the change process. Evidence on

performance needs to support the scaling of innovations for continuous improvement. The process of scaling should be fueled by carefully crafted evaluation conducted over time.

Century (2009) suggests individuals who engage in scaling, who she refers to as “scalers”, should keep in mind:

1. “Don’t invest in making changes last; invest in continuous lasting change” (p. 23). Endurance requires change over time.
2. “Invest in reports and strategies designed to adapt” (p. 23). Whereas fidelity of implementation is important, adaptation does not reduce effectiveness; rather, it improves it.
3. “Every investment should be an investment in learning” (p. 23). The context of education is always changing and lasting reforms are influenced by people who learn and adapt from the always changing environment/context.
4. “Increase tolerance for risk” (p. 23). Resistance to change is normal and is to be expected. The challenge is finding the space in which the new practice moves the needle toward improvement but does not raise the red flags of risk aversion. Find the level of discomfort associated with change that is tolerable to most.

Last, scaling is about growing impact. Scalers should be ever mindful of what Enright (2013) claims is the goal of scaling. Taking lessons from her role in leading philanthropic organizations whose core business is about scaling innovation, Enright makes a compelling case that the ultimate goal of scaling is to grow impact. Importantly, the work of scaling is not done by implementing the reform, but rather it is about producing transformative results. From the perspective of the Transformative Change Initiative (TCI), reform is not done until unprecedented results are achieved. In the community college context, achieving greater impact is about creating better and more equitable outcomes for all learners. Through these efforts, and the intended and unintended benefits that flow from transformative change, a greater social good is achieved.

### References

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