

Innovating and Scaling with Governments

A practical guide

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About ideas42



We're a non-profit looking for deep insights into human behavior—into why people do what they do—and using that knowledge in ways that help improve lives, build better systems, and drive social change. Working globally, we reinvent the practices of institutions, and create better products and policies that can be scaled for maximum impact.

We also teach others, ultimately striving to generate lasting social impact and create a future where the universal application of behavioral science powers a world with optimal health, equitable wealth, and environments and systems that are sustainable and just for all.

For more than a decade, we've been at the forefront of applying behavioral science in the real world. And as we've developed our expertise, we've helped to define an entire field. Our efforts have so far extended to 55 countries as we've partnered with governments, foundations, NGOs, private enterprises, and a wide array of public institutions—in short, anyone who wants to make a positive difference in peoples' lives.

Visit ideas42.org and follow [@ideas42](https://twitter.com/ideas42) on X (formerly Twitter) to learn more about our work. Contact us at info@ideas42.org with questions.

Introduction

How can we ensure anti-poverty programs are doing the most good for those who need them? One important step is to invest in scaling successful innovations within these programs. With government-led poverty alleviation programs reaching millions of people worldwide, these programs can model how cost-effective solutions can make significant strides to end poverty. However, innovating and scaling interventions within these programs often bring challenges, particularly when bureaucratic processes are not designed to promote it.

ideas42 has spent the last decade working with 10 governments across sub-Saharan Africa to design and embed behavioral interventions into their cash transfer programs. We designed these interventions so cash transfer programs could better help recipients set and reach their financial goals, such as saving and income generation, as well as human development goals, such as education, nutrition, and child development (see Box 1). Through consistent collaboration and deep commitment to the cause, our light-touch behavioral interventions have reached over half a million cash transfer recipients to date. In this toolkit, we draw from our experience in scaling these interventions with governments to provide actionable tips on how to successfully partner with governments to create and scale innovative solutions to some of the world's most pressing problems.



Box 1: ideas42's experience innovating with behavioral science for cash transfer programs

Cash transfers have proven to be an effective instrument in the anti-poverty toolkit of governments across the world. The power of cash transfers lies in their ability to allow recipients to use the money according to their individual needs. ideas42's decade of experience working on cash transfer programs with governments across sub-Saharan Africa in partnership with the World Bank highlights that many program recipients have long-term aspirations they wish to use their cash to achieve. However, they often face behavioral challenges in doing so, which can limit the potential of such programs to support recipients in reaching their goals for themselves and their families.

After identifying the behavioral barriers that cash transfer recipients face when reaching their financial or human development goals, we designed behavioral interventions that directly addressed these barriers and tested their impact through randomized evaluations. Consequently, we've been able to compile a suite of context-specific behavioral interventions that support cash recipients to take actions in line with their desired long-term goals. These interventions—small tweaks in program design—are typically low-cost and can be easily integrated into existing program activities or touchpoints.

From large randomized evaluations run in seven sub-Saharan African countries, behavioral interventions such as **goal setting**, **plan making**, and **follow-through exercises** have emerged as the most impactful designs. In Madagascar, for example, these interventions helped cash recipient mothers spend cash to feed more nutritious food to their children as well as inculcate positive parenting practices. In Tanzania, participants who received the behavioral interventions were 65% more likely to have saved, and 22% more likely to have made a productive investment. In each of the seven countries where we ran randomized controlled trials (RCTs), **we found the behavioral interventions to be more effective at achieving impact** in comparison to handing the recipients additional cash equivalent to the cost of the behavioral intervention. For more detailed results, see [here](#).

Context

Because we have seen encouraging evidence that behavioral interventions improve cash transfer programs, the ideas42 team has been working with government partners to scale these interventions within their cash transfer programs. Through this process, we've learned that scaling is a deliberate process that requires numerous conditions, including buy-in from key decision-makers and ownership of implementing staff, opportunities for seamless integration into the program, and availability and commitment of financial and personnel resources. In countries where these conditions are present simultaneously, scaling the interventions to many cash recipients has become a reality, supporting them in creating a better future for themselves and their families.

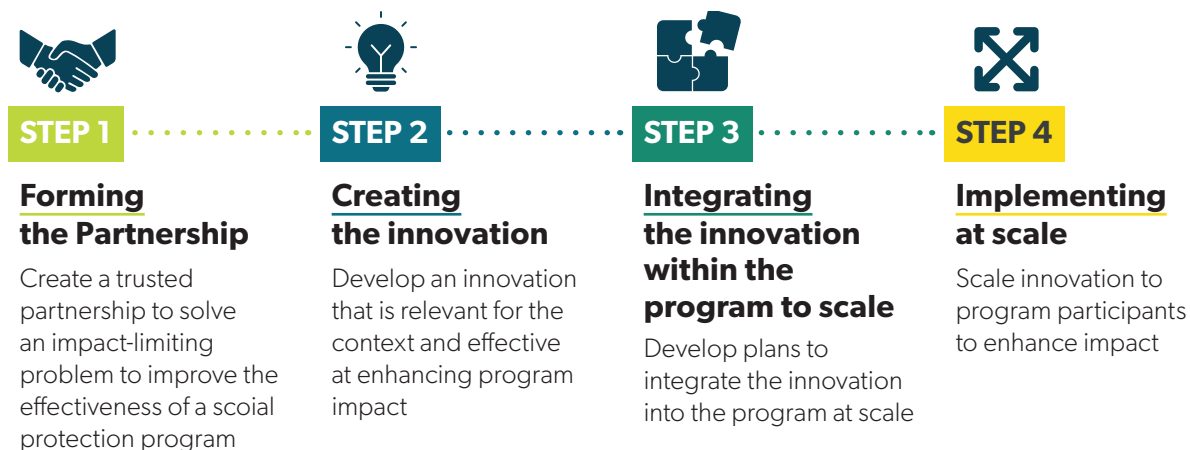
In the sections below, we outline a sample journey map to innovating and scaling with governments, and provide a checklist of actionable tips based on insights from our work.

Insights for scaling innovations

Developing and scaling innovations within government-led programs demands extensive collaboration. It is essential for governments to have a central ownership role in defining partnership goals, co-creating the innovative interventions, and ultimately integrating them in their programs on a larger scale. This is particularly true when technical experts and multiple stakeholders are involved in the innovation process. Without government interest and ownership, the partnership runs the risk of developing interventions that may not be feasible to implement or may not benefit the participants in the program.

Below is a sample journey map to innovating and scaling with governments. This journey map draws from ideas42's work in collaboration with government partners and the World Bank's Social Protection and Jobs practice in designing behavioral interventions for cash transfer programs. In the section following the journey map, we outline key insights from our own scaling experience in an actionable checklist format so that readers can expedite their own scaling and impact journey.

Figure 1: Journey map to innovating and scaling



Forming the Government Partnership

Broad-level activities

- ▶ Identify and introduce key stakeholders from all teams
- ▶ Agree on the goals of the partnership and the problem the partnership will aim to solve

Roles and responsibilities



Government

- ▶ Guide the partnership in identifying context-specific goals
- ▶ Build buy-in of key officials to champion the work



Innovator

- ▶ Generate interest and excitement among stakeholders in using innovation to reach goals
- ▶ Teach stakeholders how to use innovative approaches to reach key goals

Build excitement and agreement to collaborate on an innovative project.

The first step to a successful partnership is building excitement among stakeholders to incorporate an innovative approach or intervention. Innovators may build excitement among government officials and other stakeholders through presentations, workshops, and discussions that show the value of the innovation in other contexts, and highlight how it can maximize the impact of the team's current programming, especially if the innovation can be executed with minimal additional resources. In this stage, all stakeholders should work together to map out the scope of the project and effort required from all stakeholders to ensure everyone involved understands and agrees to their roles and responsibilities.

Build buy-in from all partners early.

In addition to displaying the value-add of the innovative approach, buy-in should be built by facilitating an open environment to have productive and ongoing conversations about the goals of the engagement. This may include in-depth discussions about the current program goals and implementation and where the government team is facing pain points or challenges, and joint brainstorming about ways that innovation can be applied to address such challenges.

While building buy-in in initial stages is key to ensuring stakeholders are on board and the team is working toward a suitable goal, ensuring that the team has continuous opportunities to build their skills in applying the innovative approach is also important in ensuring continued buy-in and, ultimately, in ensuring that they can successfully scale the intervention independently in the future.

□ Identify “champions” to advocate for the work.

Identifying champions up front or asking the government team to nominate key champions to drive the process forward is crucial for scaling. We recommend identifying champions with various roles: from someone who is closer to ground-level implementation and can advise and support on implementation level activities, to an important decision-maker who can advocate for the work during key decision-making points such as budget agreements. The role of these champions may initially include being the key liaison between the government and innovation teams, and compiling input and feedback from the government team as necessary. When identifying champions, make it clear how much effort and time this engagement will require. Identifying, consistently engaging with, and ultimately relying on champions to own the interventions can build strong advocates within the government who are excited to push interventions forward.

□ Develop project plans jointly.

Agreement on work plans, timelines, and roles and responsibilities from the early stages of the partnership is crucial for a fruitful engagement that is able to meet key milestones as planned. Working together to agree on items such as expectations for roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder (including nominating champions/key point people), as well as agreeing on and clearly stating financial commitments and responsibilities as well as time and effort required from all parties, can ensure the project meets the needs of all stakeholders. In addition, working together to define project timelines—including ensuring that key, context-specific dates where partner bandwidth may be constrained are accounted for—is necessary to ensure a timeline that works for all stakeholders. This can also help ensure that all stakeholders have sufficient time to contribute, and can ensure their voice is being included in the work. We also suggest building in a few extra weeks of slack time for events that are difficult to anticipate, such as natural disasters or political unrest. However, such events may still happen unexpectedly, and close and continuous communication and collaboration is needed to discuss and adapt when they do occur.

Designing the Innovative Solution

Broad-level activities

- ▶ Design and iterate on a contextually relevant innovative intervention with input from all stakeholders
- ▶ Assess interventions through proof-of-concept or testing to ensure it is relevant for the context

Roles and responsibilities



Government

- ▶ Participate in co-creation activities
- ▶ Provide contextual expertise to iterate on innovative interventions
- ▶ Lead proof-of-concept or testing



Innovator

- ▶ Develop and lead the design process to co-create and iterate on the intervention
- ▶ Provide tools and frameworks for proof-of-concept or testing

Teach stakeholders how to apply the innovative process.

In addition to building buy-in, teaching stakeholders how to use and apply the methods used in creating the intervention can ensure they are full contributors to the process, and enhance their ability to innovate and scale in the future. Workshops and resources can build theoretical knowledge about the method and process to innovate. This should be complemented with involving stakeholders in research and design activities to build skills of how to apply their knowledge in practice.

Co-design solutions with government partners.

Making government stakeholders significant contributors in the innovation process is crucial for the solution developed to be customized for the context of the program and seamlessly integrated into it. Ensuring the government is co-designing the innovative intervention can also lead to increased ownership over the intervention, leading to excitement and confidence to lead implementation at scale.

Discuss resource constraints early and design solutions that would fit within those constraints.

Because of the financial and human resources necessary during both the development and scaling stages, it is crucial to design interventions with scaling top of mind. This is particularly true for anti-poverty programs, which are often resource constrained. Neglecting resource constraints during design may limit the number of people who benefit from the intervention, such as only those involved in the pilot.

In addition to discussing and considering resource constraints throughout the design process, one effective approach is to schedule regular meetings with key decision-makers on the program side to keep abreast of any program related decisions (activities, timelines, and budget). These meetings should include continuous conversations and brainstorming about how and when designs can be integrated and scaled, and what personnel and financial resources are required.

□ Consider integrating with existing programs.

It is crucial to consider scale from the beginning of the engagement. Designing with consideration for scale prompts designers to consider delivery channels that are scalable and ensure designs can be seamlessly delivered within those channels. In order to do so, designers should familiarize themselves with program documents and processes and strategically seek opportunities to design interventions as part of the existing processes. This could range from adding interventions in key program documents, such as implementation guides or manuals, or mapping all steps/activities within the program context to assess where interventions could be seamlessly integrated if and when they are ready to scale.

Poverty-alleviation programs, like many government-run programs, tend to be administratively complex and run in resource-constrained settings, both from the demand side (participants living in the context of poverty) and the supply side (program staff juggling many responsibilities and project-related activities). When interventions are integrated into existing processes, it reduces the burden on participants to attend additional activities and on program staff to run them.

Once an innovative design is created and assessed through testing or proof-of-concept, the Government must decide if they would like to scale the intervention throughout the program. If and when a decision has been made to scale it, integrating it into existing processes and activities increases its sustainability over the long run. [Step 3](#) sheds light on the actual scaling process based on the foundations laid by [Step 1](#) and [Step 2](#).

Integrating the Intervention at Scale

Broad-level activities

- ▶ Identify and secure resources needed for implementation
- ▶ Develop a sustainable implementation plan
- ▶ Begin implementation

Roles and responsibilities



Government

- ▶ Secure resources
- ▶ Ensure feasibility of plan for scale
- ▶ Own and implement the intervention at scale



Innovator

- ▶ Provide support and guidance as requested by government

Take a subtractive (instead of an additive) approach when integrating the intervention.

Designers should be mindful that resource and bandwidth constraints can make it difficult to continue adding extra components to programs. To reduce the burden on program implementers and participants and to save scarce program resources, designers should take a subtractive approach by identifying any unnecessary or redundant components that the intervention could replace. Where “subtracting” is not possible, the team should design the intervention such that it can be directly embedded in existing program activities and touchpoints to ensure that extra burden is not placed on implementers and participants.

Develop a concrete plan for implementation logistics.

Successfully implementing designs to reach a larger set of program participants depends on ensuring the delivery of the intervention in day-to-day program activities. It's crucial to jointly develop a roadmap for scale that includes items such as how trainers will be trained, who will procure materials, how materials will be transported to program implementation sites, if and how follow-up will occur, and other steps relevant to the logistics of implementation. When developing this plan, it can help scaling go smoothly to jointly brainstorm potential risks or challenges that may arise at each step, and to consider mitigation strategies in advance.

Support government teams to run and implement interventions independently.

The success of the scaling process lies in government teams owning the intervention. Designers can aid this process by working with the government to ensure they have a package of all of the key resources and materials needed to scale. Such a package could include detailed implementation manuals for running the interventions and training guides to ensure that interventions maintain fidelity to their original design and implementation best practices. In addition, such a package could also include a cost estimate per participant for implementing each design, the time it takes to implement the design, and rating the designs on key indicators.

Provide Ongoing Support in the Scaling Process

Broad-level activities

- ▶ Implement at scale
- ▶ Identify and troubleshoot any challenges that arise in implementation

Roles and responsibilities



Government

- ▶ Implement the intervention at scale
- ▶ Identify and raise challenges and propose troubleshooting strategies, when possible



Innovator

- ▶ Provide continuous support as requested to identify and troubleshoot challenges

Facilitate ongoing communication and regular check-ins to discuss challenges.

Interventions that worked on a small-scale may lead to unforeseen challenges when scaled to hundreds of thousands of participants. For example, challenges like difficulty procuring materials in remote areas due to printing issues or inability to ship materials on a large scale may arise, among others. As noted above, teams should aim to map out the delivery process to consider mitigation measures in advance. Holding a regular forum to discuss the challenges that come up and how they can be mitigated can ensure challenges are overcome and partners feel supported as they take full ownership of the intervention.

Conclusion

Scaling successful innovations can be an efficient, cost-effective way of maximizing the impact of government-run poverty alleviation programs.

Although the scaling process may seem complex and time-consuming, there are deliberate actions innovators can take to ensure their designs achieve maximum impact and contribute to sustainable development. As described earlier, the scaling process is an intentional and gradual process, involving several crucial steps including securing buy-in from key decision-makers and implementation staff, co-designing the solution with government teams to enhance ownership and secure commitment of resources, and teaching partners the skills required to use the methodology for designing and implementing the interventions along the way. Adopting a scaling lens from the project's inception ensures that stakeholders develop interventions that can be seamlessly integrated into existing program activities and processes when the time for scaling arrives.

This guide offers actionable insights on how innovators, government partners, and other key stakeholders can collaborate effectively to design innovative interventions and implement them at scale, allowing governments to support even more of their constituents in escaping poverty.

