



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How to fulfill the potential of Business Development Services using SCALE

SEPTEMBER 2021

FOREWARD

In 2013, I arrived as the new director of Argidius with the expectation that we should focus on small and growing businesses and acceleration. Accelerators were the thing, and development can be as much the victim of fashion as any other human endeavor! “But,” I said to my board, “First, we do not know whether accelerators do accelerate business growth, and if they do, how? And, second, there are a range of other interventions that might be equally or even more effective? Should not we find out?” To their credit, they said yes, so we set off on a journey to fund a range of interventions to a cross section of different types of business at different stages of growth to see if we could find out from our own impact data what appeared to work most effectively. At the same time, we would sponsor the research of others and the wider collation of what the sector was learning to see whether what we were discovering correlated with the findings of others.

Through all of this work, elaborated on in this report, a pattern of common characteristics emerged that became SCALE. Rather than a prescriptive framework, SCALE is a lens through which to look at a business development program. For a practitioner, this can demonstrably suggest ways to improve their impact. For a funder, it can help one see what good can look like and how to help grantees achieve better, more impactful results. Often these improvements can be quite small yet have compelling effects.

At Argidius, we have incorporated SCALE into the questions we ask at due diligence and how we frame the discussion with partners, potential and actual, about what to focus on as we work together to achieve the best possible results. This includes adapting not only programmatic funding but the core funding we provide to organizations to help support their people, structure, and processes. Meanwhile, we recognize that there is always more to learn – and so, SCALE is the beginning not the end of a journey as we explore together ways to help entrepreneurs build more successful businesses.

It is, however, very much focused on some of the core “nuts and bolts” of a successful intervention. Whilst we recognize that there may be many other important considerations that business support programs wish to include – gender, wider inclusivity, climate, wider sustainability issues, etc. – we don’t want to lose sight of getting the basic building blocks right because without them, no other objective will be obtainable. I remember a program that had so many indicators of “success” that the business coach spent more time collating these than actually counselling the businesses with, sadly, predictable results.

I, thus, commend SCALE to you and look forward to working with our partners – practitioners and funders – to continue to develop and refine what we know so that we can help small and growing businesses appropriately scale and create the formal, productive employment that we see as one of the key pathways out of poverty into a resilient and sustainable future.

Best wishes,

Nicholas Colloff

Executive Director
Argidius Foundation



Why SCALE?

- Small and growing businesses (SGBs) profoundly impact economies and livelihoods, particularly in emerging markets
- A growing body of evidence demonstrates that business development services (BDS) create jobs and increase the productivity of SGBs
- However, the impact of BDS programs varies considerably
- In 2013, Argidius set out to identify what works best in BDS to enable SGBs to grow and create employment. In doing so, they drew not only from their own portfolio but also from extensive academic literature and the experience of outside programs
- Five fundamental considerations emerged that distinguished high-performing BDS programs (those that cost-effectively delivered SGB growth). These five considerations have been codified as **SCALE**
- **SCALE** offers BDS providers and funders guidance on how to implement practices that improve the effectiveness of BDS programs and, as a result, boost revenue and job creation for SGBs
- Emerging evidence continues to reinforce the positive impact of **SCALE** considerations on BDS programs
- This report aims to share these considerations and good practices with BDS providers, funders, and other key actors across the BDS ecosystem to improve the effectiveness of support offered to SGBs





There is evidence of how to help small and growing businesses drive growth in emerging markets

Small and growing businesses play a critical role in the development of emerging markets, and while programs to support them have proven effective, they have also exhibited considerable variation in impact

Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) are key to economic transformation. They create an estimated 60% of new jobs in emerging markets and have the potential to grow their contribution to GDP from 30% to 50%.^{1,2} Within the MSME category are small and growing businesses (SGBs)*, which can create new jobs, drive innovation, and deliver goods and services that address consumer needs, but face difficulty accessing business resources, knowledge, and finance.³⁻⁵ In order for SGBs to grow and reach their potential, these challenges need to be addressed.

Incubators, accelerators, technical assistance providers, and other entities offering business development services (BDS) play a critical role to help SGBs identify their constraints and develop solutions. BDS have proven to support SGB grow, improve productivity, create jobs, and ultimately drive economic transformation.⁶⁻⁸

While there is strong evidence that BDS works, there is significant variation in impact across programs.⁹⁻¹² In fact, even programs delivered by the same BDS provider using the same approach and similar curriculum can yield vastly different business performance outcomes. There is emerging evidence of good practices shared by high-performing programs as well as of less effective practices common to low-performing programs.¹³⁻¹⁷ However, clear direction on what works is still missing.

*SGBs are not a monolith – they can be broadly segmented into four profiles (High-Growth Ventures, Niche Ventures, Dynamic Enterprises, and Formalizing Enterprises) based on several key characteristics: market growth and scale potential, product/service innovation profile, and entrepreneur behavioral attitudes. SGBs in each segment have different needs and constraints – these can be addressed by effective BDS programs. More detailed information on each of these segments can be found in the CFF The Missing Middles report.



Scale is a set of evidence-based considerations that distinguishes the cost-effective and impactful BDS programs from the less effective ones

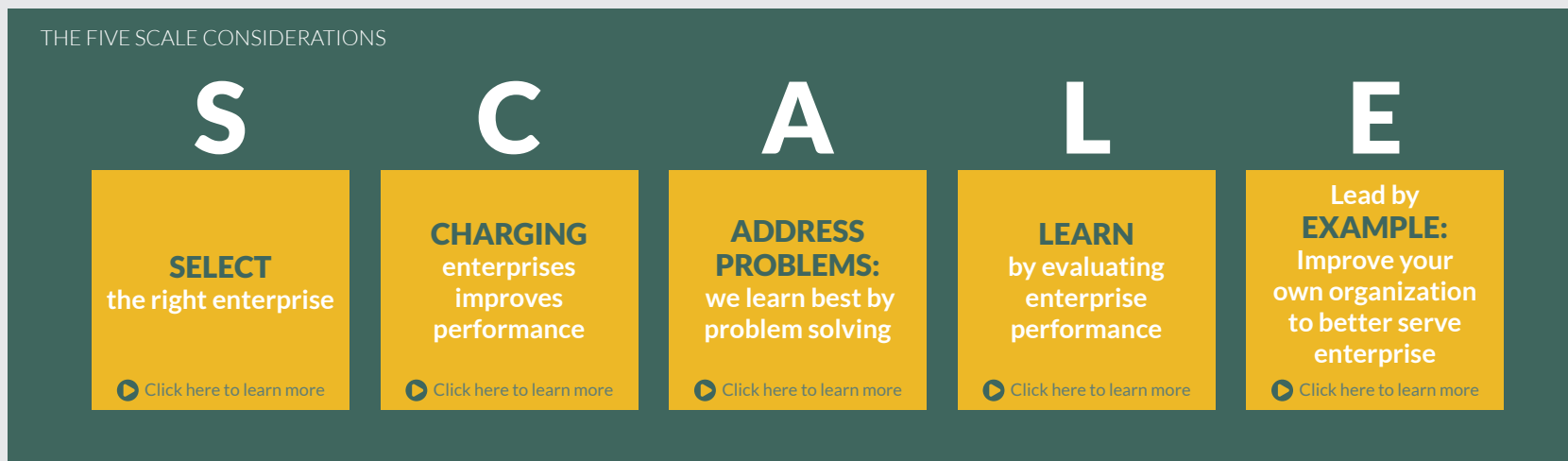
There is a growing body of evidence on what works and can increase the effectiveness of BDS programs

In 2013, Argidius launched a strategy to improve the effectiveness and reach of BDS. They funded a variety of BDS providers to deliver services to tens of thousands of SGBs of varying sizes, ages, and profiles. Each engagement asked if, how and why SGBs were supported to grow. Standardized quantitative and qualitative data collection was embedded into each of the three-year grants, independent evaluations for more than 30 projects have been completed, and impact measurement and management at supported organizations was heavily invested in.

Alongside this, robust research was funded and followed; findings from the broader academic space were examined and synthesized; and Argidius leveraged their network to learn from the experience of others.

By analyzing patterns in the evidence, five key considerations emerged that distinguished cost-effective and impactful BDS programs from less effective programs – these are codified as SCALE.

SCALE is meant to be a set of helpful considerations rather than a prescriptive framework. It intends to align BDS providers and funders on a common language and shared goals so programs can be effectively designed and adjusted around what works to achieve SGB growth. Although each consideration can be implemented as a standalone component, when implemented together they have the potential to reinforce one another.



Emerging evidence continues to reinforce the impact of scale considerations on the performance of BDS programs

Actions taken by BDS providers to integrate SCALE considerations have led to noticeable increases in impact, reinforcing their efficacy

Integrating SCALE considerations, even as small or straightforward adjustments can lead to tangible improvements in revenue and job creation. For example, following a joint evaluation with Argidius, Bpeace made two modifications to its programs in alignment with SCALE considerations – they introduced a fee for clients and adjusted the timing and intensity of delivery. As a result of these relatively small changes, they saw a significant improvement in performance between its cohorts. The new cohort generated USD 3.4 M incremental revenue and 62 full-time jobs in just one year, while a previous cohort that had received support under the original model generated USD 180,000 in incremental revenue and 32 jobs after two years.

There is an emerging body of evidence that continues to strengthen the rationale behind SCALE. For instance, a recent trial found that insourcing or outsourcing certain functions was particularly effective at growing enterprises, and more so than consulting or training.¹⁸ Behind this result are the findings that: i) effectively **Addressing** problems leads to growth; ii) problems relating to certain functions, in this case finance and marketing, can be more effectively **Addressed** by bringing in new skills already available in the marketplace instead of developing new skills; iii) using mechanisms to enable firms to be **Charged** for the services overtime leads to sustained results; iv) **Selection** criteria and diagnostics ensured the support was targeted at suitable firms; and (v) in this case a robust evaluation methodology was deployed to **Learn** what works.

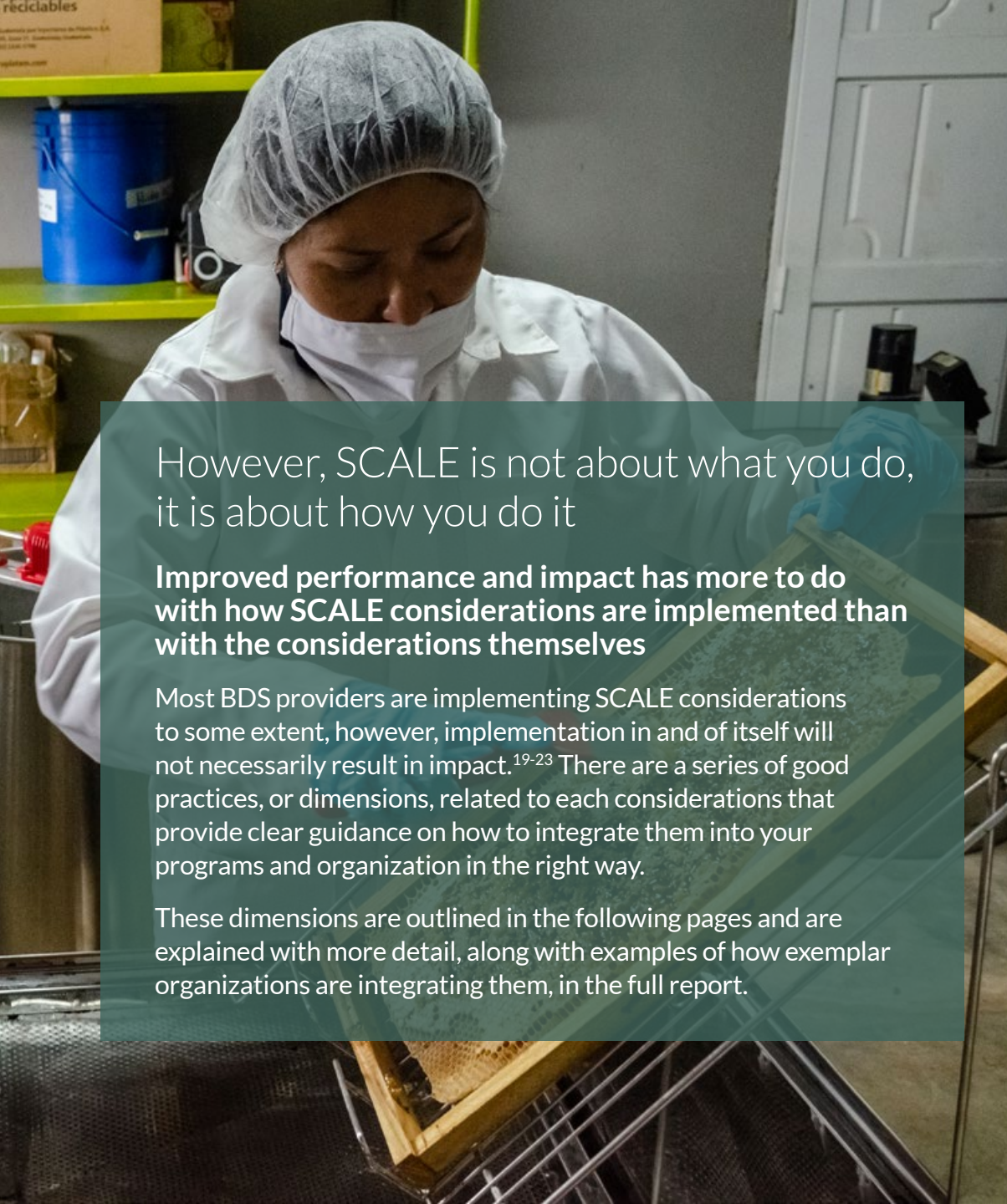
The impact of SCALE can be seen across other publicly available datasets and evaluations, as well as in a growing number of robust academic studies. So, if you support enterprises, or fund those that do, you should think about how SCALE might be applied to your work.



“To maximize impact, we want to help BDS providers achieve the highest possible standards. SCALE is a way to accomplish this.”

Nicholas Colloff
Executive Director of Argidius
Foundation





However, SCALE is not about what you do, it is about how you do it

Improved performance and impact has more to do with how SCALE considerations are implemented than with the considerations themselves

Most BDS providers are implementing SCALE considerations to some extent, however, implementation in and of itself will not necessarily result in impact.¹⁹⁻²³ There are a series of good practices, or dimensions, related to each considerations that provide clear guidance on how to integrate them into your programs and organization in the right way.

These dimensions are outlined in the following pages and are explained with more detail, along with examples of how exemplar organizations are integrating them, in the full report.

About the full report

What is in it

The report contains four sections

- **Section 1:** introduces SCALE and summarizes the evidence of effective BDS
- **Section 2:** provides detailed evidence for each consideration and information on how to implement them, highlighting good practices of how organizations adopt them. It also includes guidance for funders on how to support BDS providers to implement SCALE
- **Section 3:** offers detailed information on six BDS providers that have delivered exceptional results regarding revenue growth, jobs created, and finance mobilized. Most are part of Argidius portfolio and serve various enterprise types at different growth stages and across geographies
- **Section 4:** provides tools and resources for BDS providers and funders to integrate SCALE considerations into their work

How to use it

Rather than a document to be read cover to cover, the full report is meant to be a reference document for BDS providers and funders to consult. Sections 2-4 contain an interactive index to help readers quickly find the information they require.

When to use it

The report can be used at a critical juncture, such as entering a new market, or simply to identify best practices related to a particular program component to improve an existing program. It can also be used to understand how other organizations have successfully implemented SCALE considerations.



S

SELECT the right enterprise

S SELECT the right enterprise

WHY SELECTION IS IMPORTANT *(learn more on pages 17-18)*

Selecting the right enterprises can improve performance.²⁴⁻²⁷ It allows BDS providers to identify entrepreneurs who are motivated to grow²⁸⁻²⁹ and form cohorts with the right mix of entrepreneurs enabling peer-to-peer learning.³⁰ Additionally, BDS providers can gain a better understanding of enterprises' needs and tailor their program to meet them.³¹

HOW TO IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE SELECTION *(learn more on pages 19-27)*

- Establish clear selection criteria upon which to profile enterprises and entrepreneurs
- Leverage referrals from past and current participants and others in the ecosystem
- Set clear and realistic expectations for enterprises
- Segment the portfolio and tailor the approach
- Make selection a multistage process to periodically assess partnerships and allocate resources to enterprises that are most engaged and can derive the most value from the program
- Integrate feedback loops to inform selection criteria going forward

HOW EXEMPLAR ORGANIZATIONS HAVE IMPLEMENTED SCALE



Pages 75-80

- Adapted selection criteria to segment enterprises in order to match them with the most relevant program
- Improved selection process by leveraging network connections, including multi-stage selection, and investing in a dedicated team



Pages 86-90

- Refined selection criteria to ensure target segment were reached
- Leveraged network of local representatives to identify potential clients



Pages 98-104

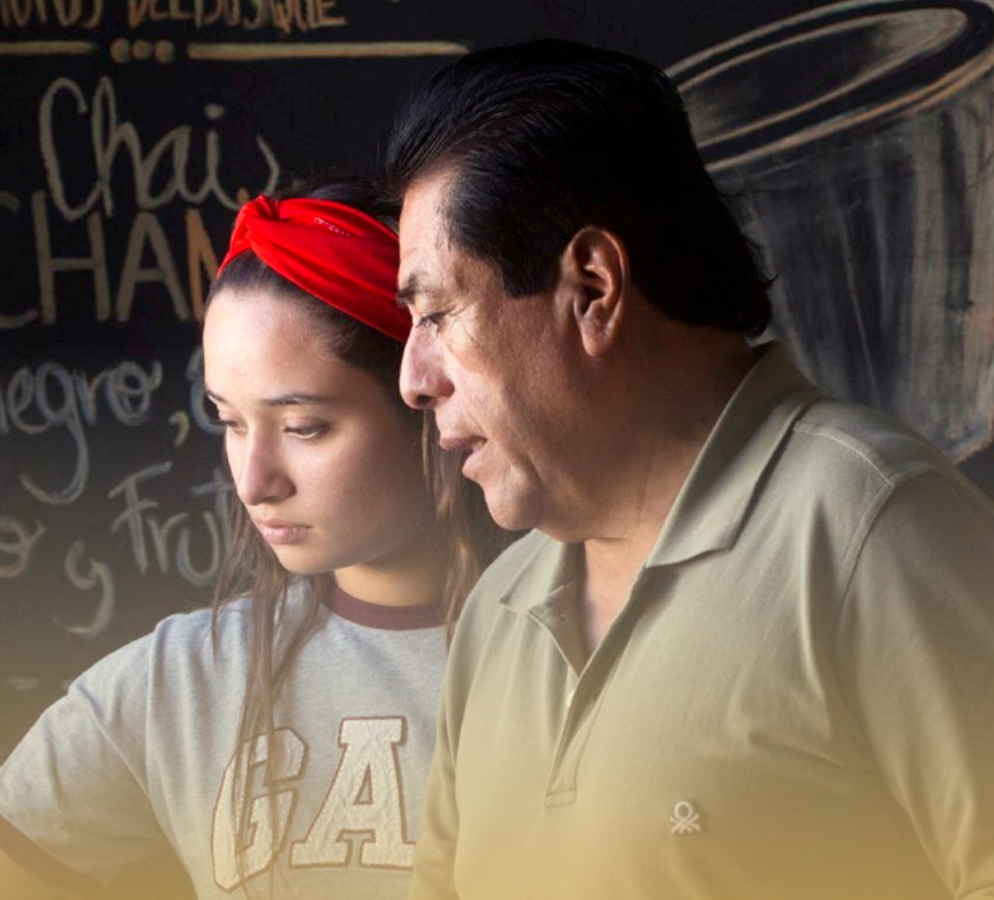
- Formed selection committees to select entrepreneurs based on fit with the program's target segment
- Incorporated peer selection into a multi-stage selection approach



Pages 105-110

- Defined target segment by identifying gaps in the regional market
- Evaluated entrepreneurs based not only on their business ideas but also their values
- Incorporated multiple perspectives to select the right enterprises





C

CHARGING enterprises improves performance

CHARGING
enterprises
improves
performance

WHY CHARGING IS IMPORTANT *(learn more on pages 30-31)*

Charging is possible as enterprises are willing to contribute at least a nominal fee.^{32,33} It helps BDS providers select the right candidates and increases engagement throughout the program^{34,35} Moreover, charging improves job creation and increases return on investment.³⁶

HOW TO IMPLEMENT CHARGING *(learn more on pages 32-33)*

- Communicate the value of charging
- Build relationships based on value
- Define and test the appropriate level of contribution
- Diversify your income streams to strengthen your financial sustainability*

HOW EXEMPLAR ORGANIZATIONS HAVE IMPLEMENTED SCALE



Pages 81-85

- Consulted current and previous clients to understand how much they would be willing to pay, and worked closely with staff to introduce a charging model
- Improved applicant quality and entrepreneur engagement through charging



Pages 91-97

- Used communication and charging to encourage self-selection
- Introduced charging incrementally, beginning with a nominal fee and gradually raising it to identify the right amount
- Considered implementing alternative charging models, and not just upfront fees





A
ADDRESS
 problems:
 we learn best
 by problem
 solving

A

**ADDRESS problems:
 we learn best by problem solving**

WHY ADDRESSING PROBLEMS IS IMPORTANT *(learn more on pages 39-40)*

Helping entrepreneurs solve their problems, instead of teaching them what they ought to know, fosters growth and productivity.³⁷⁻⁴¹ Learning in group settings can deliver impact at lower costs.⁴² Additionally, regular interactions among peers to discuss business challenges and share solutions can lead to improved business outcomes.^{43,44}

HOW TO EFFECTIVELY ADDRESS PROBLEMS *(learn more on pages 41-48)*

- Assess enterprise problems accurately
- Build relationships based on trust
- Facilitate learning among peers who face and have overcome similar challenges
- Make business education relevant, engaging, and easy to apply
- Build in time for learning to be applied

HOW EXEMPLAR ORGANIZATIONS HAVE IMPLEMENTED SCALE



Pages 81-85

- Promoted interactions with enterprises' full team to improve impact and depth of learning
- Shortened its program duration from 18 to 12 months to improve engagement
- Balanced customized support with scalability by introducing low-touch, remote services



Pages 86-90

- Conducted multiple rounds of discussions with entrepreneurs to understand their needs and match them with the right support
- Offered follow-on support to encourage enterprise change



Pages 91-97

- Designed programs around segments with similar needs
- Focused on delivering skills and allocated time for implementation to encourage behavior change
- Addressed common needs through group support, and then focused on individual needs through a more tailored approach



Pages 98-104

- Identified underlying needs using human-centered design methodologies
- Leveraged cohorts to encourage peer learning
- Reduced time spent lecturing and instead placed emphasis on discussion, feedback, and implementation





L

LEARN by evaluating enterprise performance

L

LEARN by evaluating enterprise performance

WHY LEARNING IS IMPORTANT *(learn more on page 51)*

Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning (MEL) helps BDS providers and funders understand if SGBs are being supported to grow, and how this might be achieved more effectively. MEL is critical to improve programs and increase impact.⁴⁵⁻⁴⁹ When BDS providers support enterprises to collect and use their data, these can improve businesses performance.⁵⁰⁻⁵³

HOW TO IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE SELECTION *(learn more on pages 52-59)*

- Collect relevant data points, ensure entrepreneurs obtain value from reporting, and be relational (three key indicators are revenue, employment, and investment)
- Support enterprises' collection and use of data to manage their performance and improve their businesses
- Experiment with different approaches and improve delivery

HOW EXEMPLAR ORGANIZATIONS HAVE IMPLEMENTED SCALE



Pages 75-80

- Connected its MEL team with its selection team, and aligned its KPIs with those of other ecosystem actors to benchmark results and promote continued learning
- Improved response rates by understanding entrepreneurs' priorities, and making internal adjustments, among other approaches



Pages 81-85

- Invested in building trust and engaging alumni to enhance data collection
- Ensured data collection was additive to entrepreneurs by sharing information with them on how they were performing against their peers



Pages 91-97

- Collected both business performance and entrepreneur satisfaction data over time
- Leveraged a continuous learning process to make incremental changes to its programs
- Worked with outside organizations to validate program impacts



Pages 105-110

- Modeled its MEL process on existing frameworks and evolved it over time
- Used data to inform continuous learning for both the entrepreneur and the team
- Tested to define the right balance between the amount of data required and the frequency of its collection



E

lead by **EXAMPLE**
improve your own
organization to
better serve
enterprises

E lead by **EXAMPLE** improve your own organization to better serve enterprises

WHY LEADING BY EXAMPLE IS IMPORTANT *(learn more on page 62)*

BDS providers who address their internal challenges perform better.⁵⁴ Moreover, by investing in organizational development they can achieve long-term growth and financial sustainability.^{55,56} Funders who support the BDS provider to address internal challenges can leverage further resources and impact.⁵⁷⁻⁵⁹

HOW TO IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE SELECTION *(learn more on pages 63-69)*

- Have a clear and focused strategy
- Integrate a governance structure in your organization that includes successful entrepreneurs
- Build a well-organized, empowered, and capable team to enable your organization to deliver and grow
- Diversify your income streams to strengthen your financial sustainability

HOW EXEMPLAR ORGANIZATIONS HAVE IMPLEMENTED SCALE

altern

Pages 75-80

- Formed a Board of Directors with members who had strong individual expertise, ecosystem connections, and an entrepreneurial background
- Diversified its funding stream and developed a clear strategy

VillageCapital

Pages 98-104

- Maintained a close alignment between its mission, vision, and strategy
- Promoted a highly collaborative approach to fundraising and developed relationships with a range of donors
- Amplified its impact by embedding a learning mindset into its strategy

villgro possible.

Pages 105-110

- Developed a strong team structure by clearly mapping necessary roles to positions
- Recruited staff with passion and willingness to learn to minimize attrition
- Developed its board by seeking members who could serve as ecosystem contacts and strategic thought partners



Tools and additional resources to help funders and BDS providers integrate SCALE considerations

SCALE One-pager

The infographic is divided into four main sections: **SC**, **AL**, and **E**. Each section contains a list of key points and a brief description of the goal. The 'S' section focuses on selecting the right enterprise, 'C' on charging enterprises to improve performance, 'A' on addressing problems, and 'L' on learning by evaluating performance. The 'E' section is an example of how to lead by example.

Target audience:

- Funders, BDS providers, and other actors in the entrepreneurial ecosystem

Objective:

- Provide an overview of the SCALE considerations

Target audience:

- Funders and BDS providers

[Click here to go to the tool](#)

SCALE Diagnostic Tool

The page is titled '1. INTRODUCTION' and 'SCALE Diagnostic Tool'. It includes a 'What is SCALE?' section, a 'Purpose of this tool is:' section, and a 'How to navigate this tool:' section. It features a large graphic with the letters S, C, A, L, and E, each with a corresponding description: Select the right enterprise, Charging enterprises to improve performance, Address problems and learn best by problem-solving, Learn by evaluating enterprise performance, and Lead by Example: Improve your own organization to better serve enterprises.

Objective:

- Help funders better assess BDS providers in terms of what has been known to be impactful
- Help BDS providers assess how their programs and organizational practices are aligned with what works and identify opportunities to improve

Target audience:

- Funders and BDS providers

[Click here to go to the tool](#)

SCALE Questions for Reflection

The infographic is titled 'REFLECTION TOOL' and features four main sections: **S** (SELECT the right enterprise), **C** (CHARGING enterprises improves performance), **A** (ADDRESS PROBLEMS: we learn best by solving problems), and **L** (LEARN by evaluating enterprise performance). It includes a 'WHAT IS THE SCALE REFLECTION TOOL?' section, a 'WHEN TO USE THIS TOOL' section, a 'HOW TO USE THIS TOOL' section, and a 'WHO TO USE IT WITH' section.

Objective:

- Promote reflection and discussion around good practices and areas for improvement

Target audience:

- Funders and BDS providers

[Click here to go to the tool](#)

Additional Resources

Consideration	Resource	Organization	Description
Select the right enterprise	Scout for participants	Impact Hub	A toolkit of guiding documents to help Impact Hub incubators form the r... developing an application, engaging partners, formulating selection cri... holding events.
	Interview guide (Spanish only)	TechServe	An interview template with close-ended and open-ended questions to an... phase.
	Value Proposition Canvas	Strategizer	Used to define customer profiles, define the value an enterprise creates...
Charging enterprises improves performance	A quick guide to value-based pricing	Harvard Business Review	Four-step approach to value-based pricing
	DC Sales	Whittem and Roy Partnership	A sales framework BDS providers can use to help entrepreneurs make th...
	Social Enterprises Closing the Deal	Stanford Social Innovation Review	Three myths about selling to customers with few resources
Address problems	Accelerating Trust Action Plan	Bpeace	An interactive tool that provides guiding questions to begin developin... including clients and employees.
	Networking Works	Argidius	Evaluates the impact of peer-to-peer networks on SGB growth through... and provides insights to help BDS providers strengthen or complement p...
	The Lean Startup	Eric Ries	Provides a scientific approach to creating and managing startups and ge...
	Business Model Canvas	Strategizer	Offers a simple way to communicate and visualize an existing business m...
	Village Capital VIRAL Pathway	Village Capital	A diagnostic tool that can be used at the beginning of and throughout a p... and investment readiness, based on a matrix of criteria that look at the b... model, and more.
	Program Capacity Building Support: Diagnostics	Impact Hub	A brief guide provided to Impact Hub incubators to develop a diagnosic...

Objective:

- Provider funders and BDS providers additional evidence and information on good BDS practices

[Click here to go to the tool](#)



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Argidius Foundation aims to help entrepreneurs to build profitable businesses and contribute to the sustainable development of their communities. We do so by improving the effectiveness and reach of small and medium enterprise capacity development services

Questions and comments about this report can be directed to mail@argidius.com

