

# **Scaling Social Innovation Through Cross-sector Social Partnerships**

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# **Scaling Social Innovation Through Cross-sector Social Partnerships: Driving Optimal Performance**

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# Foreword

When we began writing this book, we had no idea what was about to happen to the world. The onset of Covid-19 and the resulting health and economic concerns have created a time of uncertainty the likes of which have not been known during our lifetimes. However, this global pandemic has also shined a light on the importance of the kinds of partnerships we are writing about to sustain our communities during the toughest of times. National Institute of Health Director Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D., and Johnson & Johnson Vice Chairman of the Executive Committee and Chief Scientific Officer Paul Stoffels, M.D., declared that response to the Covid-19 pandemic will require “a swift, coordinated effort across many sectors of society.” We have seen competing city hospitals coordinate to ensure patient care, state and local governments partnering with non-profit organizations and private business to provide Covid-19 testing and ensure the continuance of K-12 and higher education, and pharmaceutical companies working together with universities to develop a vaccine as quickly as possible. Among the most unique partnerships is between St. Christopher’s Hospital for Children in Philadelphia and Gate Gourmet, an airline food service provider. When the Covid-19 pandemic began, St. Christopher’s worried about how its families, already vulnerable from the illnesses suffered by their youngest members, would obtain meals during stay-at-home orders. Gate Gourmet was suffering from the massive downturn in air travel. Together, the two began working to distribute boxed meals to the hospital’s patient families. This initial partnership has grown as St. Christopher’s has introduced Gate Gourmet to additional distribution sites around the city. But the story doesn’t end there. Deemed “Project Isaiah,” the partnership garnered the attention of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. With players lending their support financially and acting as on-site volunteers, Project Isaiah was able to exist under the Hall of Fame’s existing 501(c)(3) status. Since launching in April 2020, Project Isaiah has provided more than 350,000 boxed meals in 11 US cities. In Philadelphia alone, Gate Gourmet has provided more than 25,000 meals each week. In addition, Gate Gourmet has been able to preserve more than 500 jobs that may otherwise have been lost to the pandemic.

Ron Dreskin, Principal-in-Charge of Eisner Amper’s Health Care consulting Group, says that “Covid-19 has made it abundantly clear that none of us lives in a vacuum, and it will take unique partnerships to help us get through this.” In Florida, a pilot program involving a team of South Florida farmers will distribute more than 380,000 pounds of fresh produce directly to 87,000 inmates across 35 correctional facilities in the state. This partnership helps buffer the blow to Florida agriculture

caused by a decrease in produce demand as restaurants close to reduce Covid-19 cases. It also ensures that inmates will have access to produce despite disruptions in local and national supply chains. The New York State Department of Labor and State Office of Information Technology Services partnered with Google Cloud, Deloitte, and Verizon to upgrade the reliability of the state's unemployment application systems. The goal of this partnership is to make it easier for New Yorkers to apply for unemployment benefits by increasing capacity of the system to accept and process applications, a partnership created by a 16,000% increase in phone applications and a 1,600% increase in online traffic during peak weeks as stay-at-home orders led to unprecedented layoffs.

Across the United States (and indeed, the globe), we continue to witness innovative partnerships designed to ease some burden caused by Covid-19. While the context may be unique to our present day, the suggestions offered in this book still apply. During this time of heightened unrest and concern, we hope the drivers of optimal collaboration performance discussed here will provide a sense of pragmatism and security for those facing new partnerships, unprecedented challenges to a current partnership, and even current higher education students with a desire to change the world through cross-sector social partnerships (CSSPs). The need for these insights is heightened against the backdrop of Covid-19, as new work from Pereira Temouri, Patnaik, and Mellahi (2020) suggest that there is "new urgency on understanding the complexities of public-private partnerships" ([https://aom.org/about-aom/aom-news/blog-detail\\_news/insights-videos/2020/06/20/partnering-to-speed-covid-19-medications](https://aom.org/about-aom/aom-news/blog-detail_news/insights-videos/2020/06/20/partnering-to-speed-covid-19-medications)) given our current health crisis. However, the importance of understanding CSSPs is no less important after this pandemic ends. Lest we forget, there are a myriad of complex social problems remaining that would benefit from a CSSP framework – let's begin!

*Sources:* <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/nih-director-defeating-covid-19-requires-unprecedented-action-collaboration>  
<https://www.eisneramper.com/healthcare-partnerships-covid-19-hc-blog-0520/>  
<http://southeastagnet.com/2020/04/10/new-partnerships-emerge-covid-19-relief/>  
<https://www.labor.ny.gov/pressreleases/2020/april-09-2020.shtm>

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In the twenty-first century, our global society will be faced with problems of unprecedented complexity and gravity. Critical obstacles stand in the way of successfully addressing issues such as climate change, income and wealth inequality, global pandemics, water scarcity, and declining educational outcomes. Globalization and rapid increases in technological capabilities are increasing the urgency and the scope of these problems as productivity gains from automation will decimate the traditional workforce. As a result, our capacity to adapt to these changes is vital and we will require strong leadership to meet the challenges. Solving these types of dynamic and complex problems that involve interdependent societal variables requires transformative approaches including multi-sector approaches.

### Wicked Problems

Known by various labels, Horst Rittel (Rittel & Webber, 1973) coined the term “wicked problems” to describe these large life issues that affect all of us. Furthermore, they have outlined 10 characteristics of such wicked problems:

1. Wicked problems do not have a definition that is formulaic. Poverty does not look the same across different communities, states, and certainly not across countries.
2. It may actually be impossible to claim we have “solved” a wicked problem, because they are often so tied into other wicked problems that we cannot adequately address one without addressing the other.
3. Because of #2 above, we should be looking for ways to move the needle toward improving a situation, not always toward solving it. There is often no idealized end state.
4. While understanding how the problem has been historically addressed, there is no template that can be used to address wicked problems. Challengers are quite literally making things up as they go along.
5. There is always more than one correct explanation for how a wicked problem came to be, with each explanation’s accuracy tied to the view of its designer.

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## 2 *Scaling Social Innovation Through CSSPs*

6. Every wicked problem is symptomatic of another problem. See #2 above again – everything is tied together.
7. There is no definitive scientific test that can determine whether a wicked problem has been solved because societies created wicked problems, and science exists to understand naturally occurring phenomena.
8. Every attempt to “solve” a wicked problem is essentially a “one-shot operation” because every attempt is highly involved and expensive. There is little room for trial and error.
9. Wicked problems are all unique.
10. Those attempting to address wicked problems are liable for the ramifications of their actions on the problem, be they positive or negative.

To address the growing wicked problems of the modern global economy, novel and innovative forms of collaboration between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors have spawned across diverse industries to address some of the world’s most pressing societal concerns (Stieger, Matzier, Chatterjee, & Ladstätter-Fussenegger, 2012). The expansion of information through the geo-political landscape of the twenty-first century has highlighted a growing need for alternative approaches to organizational problem solving to adequately address the increasing complexity of societal issues facing the global community (Hiatt & Park, 2013; Korschun, Bhattacharya, & Swain, 2014; Sisodia, Wolfe, & Sheth, 2007). Whether the concerns are local (community improvement, homelessness, etc.), regional (water rights, drought, etc.), or global (poverty, greenhouse gas emissions, etc.), the complexity of these problems has prioritized the need for multi-sector collaborations (Gray, 1985). Individual leaders in specific sectors are recognizing the need for such collaborations as well, as 78% of chief executive officers (CEOs) agreed that cross-sector partnerships would be the way to define and deliver sustainable development goals in the next five years, according to the UN’s Global Compact-Accenture CEO Study on Sustainability (<https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insights/strategy/ungcceeostudy>). Business students are also on board, with a noticeable increase in MBAs seeking internships (even unpaid) that address social entrepreneurship and community investing (<https://www.ft.com/content/laa3d929e-f183-11e3-9161-00144feabdc0#axzz37QgYkSdM>).

We are also witnessing the growth of multi-sector collaboration on an international scale (e.g., Wal-Mart’s partnership with United States Agency for International Development to fund global supply chain logistics to eradicate childhood hunger and poverty) and at the local level (e.g., Sandy Springs, GA turning over city services to a public-private partnership), and similar collaboration efforts are expected to grow in frequency (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2015). Cross-sector social partnerships (CSSPs) have demonstrated effectiveness in addressing intractable social problems since they allow firms to approach problems from different perspectives (Waddell, 2005) and create a unique space for organizational learning (Dutta & Crossan, 2005). CSSPs provide an opportunity for organizations to share knowledge and innovate in new ways that have yet to be fully investigated. In this book, we will be exploring the latest in research and practice surrounding CSSPs to better understand what drives partnership performance and the successful scaling of social innovations. Throughout the book, you will be

presented with vignettes that describe how some CSSPs have been successful at scaling social innovation, such as the multi-sector collaboration that has been at the heart of Nigeria's Covid-19 response:

### **Vignette #1: Covid-19 in Nigeria**

Nigeria's response to Covid-19 has been built upon existing multi-sector efforts to address the humanitarian crisis brought on by ongoing conflict in the north-eastern part of the country. The decades-long conflict has displaced a large part of the population and damaged the health and sanitation infrastructure, with dire ramifications for disease control. Exacerbating the problem is the high prevalence of comorbidities within the population of the region, such as malaria, cholera, malnutrition, etc.

Due to impending threat and damaged health infrastructure, in May 2020, Nigeria engaged in a coordinated approach to managing the Covid-19 response across sectors. This approach brought together national government authorities, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), United Nations agencies, academic institutions, donors, businesses, and the affected population. The coordinated effort involved a decongestion strategy for reducing the density of refugee camps, thus reducing the potential exposure and spread of the disease. This effort called for the acquisition of over 1,200 hectares of land in order to implement sufficient social distancing. Matched with this decongestion was the introduction of screening, personal protective equipment, and water sanitation by the partners.

This approach to responding to the challenge of Covid-19 allowed development, humanitarian, business, and NGO actors to contribute to a coordinated response within the Ministry of Health to minimize the spread of the disease while concurrently providing essential health services, reproductive care, and training of health care workers. Additionally, partnering with the World Health Organization provided the ability for Nigeria to obtain the life-saving supplies and medicines needed during this crisis despite the closure of all international airports in the region.

#### *Questions for Review:*

1. Why was cross-sector collaboration necessary for Nigeria to effectively address the threat of Covid-19? Why did the country choose to engage partners almost immediately?
2. Could the approach of "decongestion" along with providing essential health services and training of health care workers have happened without cross-sector collaboration?

Based on information from:

<http://158.232.12.119/health-cluster/news-and-events/news/Nigeria-multi-sector-covid-19/en/>

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By joining together the best ideas of nonprofit, business, and governmental leaders, cross-sector partnerships have the potential to dramatically impact these twenty-first century challenges. We have much to learn about structuring these collaborations for maximum effect and the task requires practical guidance for developing and growing these partnerships. Our goal in this book is to provide a roadmap for successful cross-sector collaboration so that busy leaders have handy tools and knowledge as they attempt to find the right partners to build collaborations that can scale positive impact for societal challenges. We lean on some of the most compelling research and lessons from professionals who are at the forefront of responding to these challenges to develop this roadmap for cross-sector collaboration.

### **Layout of the Book**

The structure of this book is designed to take the reader through the main ideas and brief history of the field of social innovation. We describe social innovation as a process to address seemingly intractable social issues that involves diverse stakeholders and requires cooperation in order to scale its benefits. A core idea motivating our book is that cross-sector collaboration is vital, if not necessary, for scaling social innovation. Throughout the book, we attempt to provide a pragmatic look at what makes CSSPs successful in achieving social innovation on scale. At the end of the book we have included an appendix that outlines the case vignettes, which have been included to provide tangible examples of the primary themes discussed in throughout the chapters.

In Chapters 1 and 2, we discuss the key developments in social innovation and the streams of research that have helped to define the field. We discuss its initial foundations in market failure theory and describe how it has been successfully applied at local, regional, national, and global levels. We also address and discuss the most commonly accepted scholarly model for understanding how organizations can scale social innovation.

In Chapters 3 and 4, we discuss the phenomenon of CSSPs that have emerged as a mechanism for organizing to achieve social innovation. As neither the market nor governments are sufficiently equipped and organized to tackle complex social issues alone, CSSPs are a vital component to discovering and, more importantly, scaling social innovations. This chapter describes CSSPs in detail to the stage for our exploration of the characteristics that promote successful collaboration toward social aims.

In Chapters 4–9, we outline the CSSP characteristics that have emerged from the research as key to driving successful social change. We find that five aspects of CSSPs are critical for achieving success at scaling social innovation: motivation, cooperative capability, leadership, political networks, and culture. These five represent a distillation of the findings from research and practice of what makes a successful CSSP. We include tangible examples that illustrate each of these characteristics for use in a social innovation classroom and to help to guide practitioners operating in CSSPs.

This book is intended for a wide-ranging audience. It is designed for nonprofit leaders who wish to leverage their existing programmatic expertise and community connections to scale the reach of their mission beyond what a single organization is capable of. The book is designed for governmental leaders who see the big picture of creating systemic change and are searching for optimal allocation of governmental resources to affect that change. It is targeted at business leaders who are motivated to take the lessons of the dynamic, efficient, and measurement-based organization environments that they have mastered to make a difference in the wider world. It is also a call to philanthropists who seek out opportunities to fund collaborations focused on systemic change rather than single organizations or programs. Perhaps most importantly, this book is also designed for teachers and students of public policy, social innovation, and social entrepreneurship who are on the vanguard of social change in the twenty-first century. The directions within this book, its case study exemplars, and its focus on driving performance of cross-sector social collaborations are vital lessons for the next generation of change makers.

Knowledge of how to achieve social innovation should be common property and should include co-created discoveries. As a result, this book is intended for wide sharing in order to encourage further contributions to the field. Scaling social innovation is an arduous task and success is improved by sharing lessons, examples, and experiences. This book aims to synthesize the important work already accomplished on CSSPs to illuminate the capabilities that help to improve their chances of success.

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## Chapter 2

# Scaling Social Innovation

### Social Innovation

The most difficult challenges in today's world, such as poverty, education, climate change, health care, income inequality, etc., are complex and laden with dynamic social interactivity. These are problems that involve solutions on a grand scale which require national and international attention to successfully address. Too often, however, these issues are approached with individual programmatic solutions that are insufficient to tackle these issues at the scale at which they exist. Our goal should rather be to enhance the scope and complexity of our perspective and engage multiple stakeholders to craft solutions that are comprehensive enough, and possess sufficient resources and ideas, to adequately address these grand challenges. Conventional discussions of innovation tend to focus on its products – a new technology, new service outcome, new delivery model, etc. However, innovation is as much about process as it is about the result. Rather than moments of discovery, luck, or brilliance, establishing a culture of innovation is what drives continual and lasting change. This is particularly true for social innovation where advancements and new ideas must simultaneously meet social needs as well as create new relationships in order to be successful.

Social innovations involve creating new methods of meeting social needs with the goal of strengthening civil society. The primary approach of social innovation is to introduce new approaches to seemingly intractable social concerns and transform the social institutions that bear responsibility for creating initial problems. Social innovations occur in an inherently complex ecosystem that includes a variety of actors, affected stakeholders, companies, governments, markets, research institutions, and nongovernmental organizations. The intention of social innovation is to “create new opportunities and pathways for vulnerable social groups that help reduce incidences of vulnerability, social exclusion, marginalization, precarious living, and/or inequality and inequity” (Shier & Handy, 2020, p. 333).

Social innovation occurs at the local level within ideas such as community-centered planning, charter schools, supported employment, etc. It occurs regionally, such as in habitat conservation planning, urban policies, micro-finance initiatives, and many other initiatives. It happens on a national level as fair trade

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policies, emissions policies, tourism development, and other ideas are intended to drive social change. Social innovation is also a global prerogative as international labor and environmental standards are developed. Global social innovation priorities have been established by the United Nations, which has adopted 17 sustainable development goals that include eliminating poverty and hunger, promoting health, education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, clean energy, work opportunities, sustainable cities, improved infrastructure, responsible consumption, effective partnerships, peace and justice, as well as reducing inequality and improving life on land and life below water (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals>).

### **Scaling Social Innovation**

In a recent meta-review of the literature on scaling social impact, Han and Shah (2020) discuss five distinct groups of theoretical models that have been introduced by scholars to describe the factors that contribute to scaling: supply–demand, three strategy, spiral, multi-factor, and pathway. In supply–demand models (e.g., Mulgan, Ali, Halkett, & Sanders, 2007; Taylor, Dees, & Emerson, 2002), organizations use strategies to connect supply with demand in an environment where public agencies are willing to purchase contracts, charitable funders are willing to provide support, and the public is willing to pay for the innovation. The three-strategy models (e.g., Dees, Anderson, & Wei-Skillern, 2004; Lyon & Fernandez, 2012), the latter of which we will discuss in further detail later in the chapter, focus on strategies used by organizations in scaling impact without considering institutional factors. Spiral models (e.g., Gabriel, 2014; Murray, Caulier-Grice, & Mulgan, 2010) offer conceptualizations of the developmental stages of scaling innovation, focusing on the organization itself rather than the drivers of scaling impact. Multi-factor models (e.g., Bloom & Chatterji, 2009; Cannatelli, 2017), the former of which we will discuss in greater detail later in the chapter, identify internal organizational capabilities and external factors that coalesce to create opportunities for scaling. Finally, pathway models (e.g., Ratliff et al., 2004; Waitzer & Paul, 2011) describe the evolution of social innovations from genesis to systemic change, focusing on the decisions and resources required at different stages of scaling.

It has been said that defining an innovation for scale is an important first step for transferring it to new markets and new locations (Dees et al., 2004). An iterative process of continually redefining the innovation is key to spreading its impact. In their three-strategy model, Dees et al. (2004) discuss primary means of scaling innovation:

1. *Dissemination*: through the providing of information and technical assistance to others looking to introduce the innovation to their communities. This is the least resource intensive approach to diffusing innovation where the disseminating organization maintains little control over its implementation in new areas.
2. *Affiliation*: formal relationships where partners are committed to the same goals, share resources, and create operational guidelines. This approach offers