Scaling Organizations 101

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Scaling – What is it?

+ When an organization changes in size, structure, or revenue. This can happen when new funding is received, the number or type of services offered changes or grows, services are expanded into new places, or the organization is improving the efficiency of its operations.

Illustration by Jakob Hinrichs

Why Think About Scaling?

+Even if you are not ready for growth, thinking about and planning for scaling prepares you for future opportunities aligned with your mission and values or for challenges you might experience.

Scenario

Scaling in the Context of Community:

Peer Run Crisis Respite

Scaling Areas to Consider

+ Shared Values

+ Staff

+ Structure

+ Speed

+ Scope

+ Financing

Overall questions to ask:

How certain must you be that your services will achieve positive impacts and avoid negative ones before you scale?

Shared Values

Represent the organization's culture and define how you interact in the organization, solve problems, and work together.

+ The culture of many new organizations often reflect the founder's values and personalities, they are more implicit.

+ It's key to make your organization values explicit – take the time to write them down, share them, live them, let them guide how you scale.

+ Losing sight of your values may = loss of focus and drift.

Question:

What happens if your funders/opportunities bump up against your values?

Staffing

For newer organizations that are resource limited, the right team can make all the difference.

+ Hire people who believe in and live the values of the organization.
+ Recognize you may feel pressured to hire to fill an immediate need and try to resist this.
+ What roles can be outsourced or how do you fund administrative positions not included in service-focused contracts?
+ How do you develop staffing to service cost models?

Question:

How do you scale staffing, without losing history, integrity and values?

Structure

If your organization is growing, the decision-makers in your organization should also grow.

+ It's hard for the founder or director to "do all of the things" so developing staff to grow with the organization is important.

+ Onboarding and training is additional work, but proper onboarding pays off in the long run.

+ Structure roles in the organization or contract out roles to support growth ... if the leader doesn't let go of holding some of the structure, your organization won't be able to scale (e.g. HR and finance).

+ Decisions around a "shingle" (lease, buy, or donated) or work out of home.

+ Believe in iteration and failing forward ... "The greatest teacher failure is."

Question:

What comes first, building structure so you're prepared for funding, or receiving funding to build structure?

Speed

When you have something to offer that others want to buy, take a minute to assess how fast you can and should scale. How fast is too fast to grow?

+ Does it align with your values and mission?

+ Are new staff needed and how quickly?

+ Are there new measures/data attached and will changes be needed in systems or processes to collect them?

Question:

What are the tensions for scaling up quickly? What are the benefits and what are the risks?

Scope (the other side of Speed)

When you consider expanding what you're doing … new contracts with partners in your community, new communities, developing new services or products.

+ Where or who do you look to for these opportunities (passive or active)
+ What is needed in other scaling areas to support increased scope?
+ Does increased scope align with your mission and values?
+ Do you have a current map of your growth opportunities?

Question:

How do you align funding and mission and values? What if the funding is outside of your mission

Financing

How do your finances align with your scaling strategy ...

+ What is the first thing you think about when new funding opportunities arise?
+ If offered new funds, will they support building out infrastructure and hiring additional staff and not just service delivery?
+ How do you decide if accepting new funding is a good decision for your organization?

Question:

What does "all money is not good money" mean as it relates to peer-run organizations? How do you determine this?