LEARN Scaling Plan Guide

A scaling plan helps you pull together and build on relevant insights and findings from the Apply stage to prepare for the Transition stage. It is helpful for presenting your product and plan to external audiences such as funders and investors. Your scaling plan will:

- Express your **vision for the future** and **provide a roadmap** to achieve your project's goals for reach and impact.
- **Integrate essential information** about the people and organizations you aim to serve, how your solution offers a superior alternative, your strategies for building awareness and scaling, and the organizational capacities and resources needed to achieve your vision.
- Set out a **realistic growth scenario** (or multiple scenarios) grounded in data and analysis.
- Provide a **tool for making decisions** about how to increase adoption and impact, generate and allocate funding, forecast and budget, build an infrastructure for scale, and manage staffing.
- **Communicate your vision and plans** to potential funders and partners.
- **Come together iteratively** as you work through interdependent assumptions, such as funding/revenue projections and staffing.

LEARN to Scale Toolkit

This resource is part of the LEARN to Scale Toolkit. The toolkit is designed to support researchers and developers in using the Invent-Apply-Transition framework to create, test, and scale evidence-based educational products. Access the full toolkit at learntoscale.org.

The template in this guide provides an outline for the components of a scaling plan, guiding questions to inform your scaling pathway, and decisions to make along the way.

- **How to use:** While this outline may appear linear, the process of developing the plan is iterative as you work through interdependent activities in the Apply and Transition stages and adjust assumptions, such as funding projections and potential staffing models. Feel free to rearrange sections and adjust the template to meet your needs.
- **When to use:** Start your scaling plan as you enter the Transition stage. Don't expect to have all the answers from the start. As noted above, you will likely need to iteratively update it as you continue the scaling process.
- **LEARN Go-to-Market (GTM) Playbook**: Throughout this guide, you will see references to another complementary resource designed to help you transition and scale your educational product. The GTM Playbook is designed to help activate your scaling plan through a step-by-step process.

Scaling Plan Summary

Use this space to succinctly summarize your responses based on the guiding questions and resources provided in the next section.

Introduction: Ground the plan in a concise summary of your project's vision and goals.	
Proposed solution: Describe the unique value proposition your solution offers.	
Target audiences and use cases: Identify whose needs your solution addresses and how it will fit in their workflows.	
Market and competitive landscape: Articulate the "unique selling points" for your solution and what challenges you may need to overcome when converting users from other providers or the status quo.	
Scaling goals: Describe what success looks like in 3–5 years in terms of reach and impact.	
Marketing and sales / Business development strategy: Describe your plan for reaching decision-makers and users and what capacity you will need.	
Funding sources: Provide realistic scenario(s) for generating revenue to sustain and grow your product.	
Resources / Capabilities: Define the team / organization needed to achieve your scaling goals.	
Internal systems and tools for scale: Define the internal systems and tools needed to achieve your scaling goals.	

Scaling Plan Guiding Questions and Resources

Introduction: Ground the plan in a concise summary of your project's vision and goals.

Guiding questions:

- What problem or opportunity does your project aim to address?
- Does your solution address an unmet need or offer an alternative solution to how the problem or need is being addressed?
- What outcomes and long-term impact do you aim to have?
- Who will benefit from your solution?

Resources:

- Identify a Need
- Define Indicators of Success

Proposed solution: Describe the unique value proposition your solution offers.[1]

Guiding questions:

- What is your proposed solution to **address the problem/opportunity**?
- **Need:** What problem(s) are your target users facing?
- **Differentiator:** What about your product makes you stand out from the competition?
- Why is your product the **best choice**? How does your differentiator **solve the challenge**?
- How will your proposed solution be **packaged, sold, distributed, and implemented**? Will it consist of services, a product, or a combination?
- Will it be adopted and implemented at a **district or school** or by **individuals**?

Resources:

- Imagine a Solution
- Satisfy the End User
- Envision Scaled Implementation

Target audiences and use cases: Identify whose needs your solution addresses.

Guiding questions:

- Who are the target **decision-makers/buyers**?
- Who are the target **users**? Who will be responsible for **implementing** the solution?
- What features/criteria are the highest priority for each group of users and decision-makers? Identify **key performance indicators** that decision-makers and users might consider to determine whether the solution is working as desired.

[1] A strong value proposition clearly communicates how your product solves a problem or fulfills a need for users and decision-makers, what sets it apart from competing options, and why it is the best choice for the target audience. A value proposition is more than just a product description; it is the specific solution that your business provides and the promise of value that a customer can expect you to deliver.

- What **are users' workflows** related to the problem of practice or opportunity? Which individuals interact with your product and at what times/circumstances? Identify "**pain points**" where your product can help to make their job easier and points of **potential friction** where individuals need to change their behavior, do their work a different way, reconfigure a system, add a new step, or so on.
- **Ideal Customer Profile (ICP):** Identify the attributes of the organization, school or institution that your product is best suited for.
- **Ideal Customer Avatar (ICA):** Identify the attributes of the target individuals (decision-makers and end users) who will benefit from your product.

Resources:

- Appendix A: What Is a Workflow?
- Define Indicators of Success
- Imagine a Solution
- Satisfy the End User
- Gather Market Requirements
- GTM Playbook: Have a Market-First Mindset with ICP and ICA

Market and competitive landscape: Articulate the "unique selling points" for your solution and what challenges you may need to overcome when converting users from other providers or the status quo.

Guiding questions:

- What types of districts, schools, individuals, or others do you seek to convert as users and, if relevant, paying customers (e.g., Title I schools, urban districts, literacy coaches)? You may have a primary market segment that is the most likely to benefit from your solution or a productive place to focus your market efforts, followed by secondary markets. Define your target market in ways that are **actionable** in terms of marketing and outreach.
- How do users in the target market currently meet this need? Who are the top 3–5 providers in this space?
- How does your solution compare to other options available to users in terms of **performance, reliability, convenience, and cost (PRCC)** and user perceptions? Consider additional benchmarks such as product offering (technology, services, offline materials, etc.), pricing, share of market, marketing claims, attributes of competitors' target users and/or clients, and what users or customers say they like and do not like about other products.
- How does your team/organization compare in terms of other criteria that are important to users, such as being a **trusted provider**, stability, mission alignment, focus on evidence-based practices, and ability to reach potential users and build adoption?
- Are there other important factors defining the landscape, such as policy considerations, recent mergers or acquisitions leading to a product going away

or to consolidation, or major trends (e.g., end of pandemic-related funding streams, increased focus on Science of Reading)?

- Are there **barriers to adoption** such as state-level authorization, multiyear contracts with a competitor, or technology prerequisites (e.g., adherence to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines)? What steps can you take to overcome these barriers, such as offering no-cost pilots in parallel with multiyear contracts or getting on state lists of approved products?
- How will you want your product to be perceived in the minds of your current and prospective users or customers? What will be your product and brand's unique place or position in the market? What makes your product distinct and desirable, relative to competitors, for a specific target audience?

Resources:

- Analyze the Market
- Identify the Competition
- GTM Playbook: Differentiate with Value-Based Positioning

Scaling goals: Describe what success looks like in 3–5 years in terms of reach and impact.

Guiding questions:

- What are your **scaling ambitions** in terms of adoption? What does success look like in 3–5 years in terms of adoption and impact? Targets can be set as volume of use (e.g., content downloads), individual users, schools, or district adoptions.
- Do you have a **transition pathway** in mind? Will you build an organization to scale the innovation or license your intellectual property (IP) to a company?

Resources:

- Appendix B: What Would It Look Like to Move Up the S-Curve?
- Set Scaling Goals
- Identify a Pathway

Marketing and sales / Business development strategy: Describe your plan for reaching decision-makers and users and what capacity you will need.

Guiding questions:

- How will you **reach key interest holder groups** (decision-makers and target users) to build awareness and interest? Detail use of communication and marketing channels such as:
  - Owned: website, webinars, email, blog, direct mail, etc.
  - Paid: industry events/conferences, paid webinars with a media outlet (e.g., *EdSurge* or *Inside Higher Ed*)
  - Earned: intermediaries, partnership groups or associations, interviews and articles published by other entities
- How will you **identify business development** opportunities? For example, do you have a plan to monitor and respond to RFPs? How will you know when state

agencies are reviewing products in your category for approved lists? Do you have a team member focused on championing your offering and developing leads?

Resources:

- Gather Market Requirements
- GTM Playbook: Define Multichannel Marketing Strategy

Funding sources: Provide realistic scenario(s) for generating revenue to sustain and grow your product.

Guiding questions:

- Will you seek a **mix of funding** from operations, grants, and other sources such as in-kind institutional support? Do you plan to seek investor funding?
- Will you generate **revenue from operations**, such as professional development services, contracts, and content licensing? Will your revenue model be one-time or recurring? Note that services tend to be a one-time cost, while software or annual content provides greater predictability in revenue forecasting.
- If relevant, what is the **operating revenue potential** for your solution?
    - Examine historical data (if available) to determine average revenue per user (RPU) or revenue per district or school.
    - Develop adoption and revenue **forecasts** taking into account the size of the potential market, what "share" of this market seems attainable given what you know about the competitive landscape and other market forces, how many potential customers you can reach with marketing and business development activities, assumptions on conversion rate based on historical data or industry benchmarks, and revenue per customer.

Resources:

- Appendix C: Revenue Projection
- Prepare to Scale
- Identify a Pathway

Resources / Capabilities: Define the team / organization needed to achieve your scaling goals.

Guiding questions:

- What **organizational capacity** do you need to achieve your scaling goals?
    - Consider staffing needed to achieve marketing and sales/business development goals (including grant writers, if applicable) and to support customers.
    - Consider staffing needed to continue product development and operations, as content and technology quickly become stale without updating.
- What capabilities should you **build internally versus acquire through partnerships and outsourcing** (e.g., hiring consultants)?
    - Consider your team's core strengths, assets, and gaps. What critical capabilities are you missing?

    - Consider which tasks are short-term or one-off and where sustained integration is most important.
- Consider your **team's personal goals**. Are there one or more champions who wish to devote their time to a new venture? What trade-offs are individuals willing to make in terms of job security, workload, time spent on research, and other considerations?

Resources:

- Appendix C: Revenue Projection
- Identify a Pathway
- Build Your Team

Internal systems and tools for scale: Define the internal systems and tools needed to achieve your scaling goals.

Guiding questions:

- What internal systems and tools do you need to achieve your scaling goals?
    - If your product is web-based, consider what updates you will need to make to your technical infrastructure as usage grows and/or new requirements enter the market related to security, privacy, accessibility, and so on.
    - Consider what systems and tools you will need to support go-to-market operations (marketing, sales, customer experience and support) as well as general business operations such as finance, legal, travel, security, and service delivery.
- What capabilities should you build internally versus acquire through partnerships and outsourcing (e.g., hiring consultants)?
    - Consider your team's core strengths, assets, and gaps. What critical capabilities are you missing?
    - Consider which tasks are short-term or one-off and where sustained integration is most important.

Resources:

- Envision Scaled Implementation
- Internal Systems and Tools for Scale
- Build Your Team

Appendix A: What Is a Workflow?

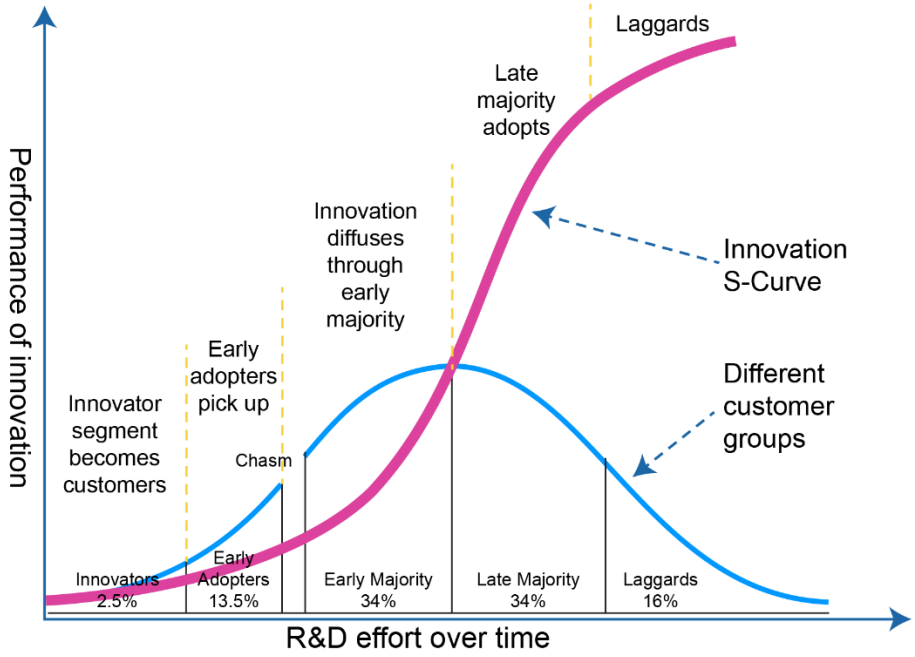
A workflow is a sequence of steps or processes a user completes. The vignette below provides an example workflow for an educational technology tool.

Vignette: Geometry app for grade 6 math.

1. **Lesson planning:** The teacher, Jasmine, begins by planning her geometry lesson. She decides to introduce the concept of angles using a math app. Jasmine explores the app to familiarize herself with its features and determine how it aligns with her instructional goals.
2. **Interactive demonstration:** During the lesson, Jasmine uses the app to demonstrate different concepts to her students. She displays the app on a projector screen or interactive whiteboard and guides students through interactive activities.
3. **Hands-on exploration:** After the demonstration, Jasmine provides time for students to explore the app on their own devices, such as tablets or laptops. She assigns specific tasks or challenges for students to complete using the app.
4. **Collaborative learning:** Jasmine encourages collaborative learning by having students work in pairs or small groups to solve problems and discuss their findings using the app.
5. **Formative assessment:** Throughout the lesson, Jasmine uses the app to assess students' understanding in real time. She observes students' interactions with the app, monitors their progress, and provides immediate feedback as needed. Jasmine can also use the app's built-in assessment tools, such as quizzes or interactive exercises, to gauge student comprehension and identify areas for further instruction.
6. **Homework and reinforcement:** As homework, Jasmine assigns additional practice problems or challenges using the app. Students can access the app from home to review concepts, complete assignments, and reinforce their understanding of angles independently.
7. **Data analysis and reflection:** After the lesson, Jasmine analyzes data from the app, such as student responses and performance metrics, to assess learning outcomes and inform her instructional practice. She reflects on students' engagement and achievement levels, identifies areas of strength and improvement, and adjusts her teaching approach as needed for future lessons.

Appendix B: What Would It Look Like to Move Up the S-Curve?

The S-curve model is used widely to describe the adoption of innovations over time, showing how adoption starts slowly, accelerates, and then tapers off as saturation is approached. The market population is typically divided into categories (Innovators, Early Adopters, Early Majority, Late Majority, and Laggards) based on willingness and speed to adopt new technologies (see figure below). These categories can represent individuals (teachers, administrators) or organizations (schools, districts). It is possible that a product is reaching *individual* innovators within *organizational* laggards (or vice versa). Moving beyond the innovators at either level means adoption is gaining momentum.



Source: "Diffusion of Innovations," by E. M. Rogers, A. Singhal, & M. M. Quinlan, 2014, in D. W. Stacks & M. B. Salwen (Eds.), *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research* (2nd ed.), pp. 432–448, Routledge (https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203887011).

Some key points:

- Most educational products reach the **innovators**, who are typically a small group making up about 2.5% of the target population, are willing to take risks, have the highest social status, have financial liquidity, are social, and have closest contact to scientific sources and interaction with other innovators. Their acceptance of an innovation is a key step in triggering the adoption process. Reaching 2.5% of U.S. public schools would mean

achieving adoption in 2,500 schools. Reaching 2.5% of, for example, grade 6 math teachers would mean reaching roughly 1,200–1,500 teachers.[2]

- Imagine what it would take to reach **early adopters**, who typically represent about 13.5% of the population. Individual early adopters are more integrated into the local community than innovators. They have a higher degree of opinion leadership in the community, typically influencing the average member's attitudes toward a new product through their early adoption choices. In the example above, a product designed for grade 6 math has made significant headway into the early adopter group once it reaches around 7,000 teachers.
- The transition from **innovators** to **early adopters** is significant because it often represents a shift from a product being viewed as experimental to becoming potentially mainstream. Early adopters are crucial for the validation and dissemination of new ideas, as they are typically seen by their peers as "the person to check with" before adopting a new product, thereby accelerating the spread through society. This progression often suggests that a product has begun to prove its utility and value, overcoming some initial barriers to adoption, and is on a path toward wider acceptance.
- The shift from **early adopters** to **early majority** is significant because it often means that the product has been accepted by a significant segment of the market population, indicating its usefulness and stability and heralding its integration into widespread use. This phase is critical for the sustained success and impact of new products or ideas.

[2] This estimate is illustrative only. It is based on an estimate that there are around 650,000 middle school teachers and the assumption that a quarter of these teachers teach math (162,500) and a third teach grade 6 (54,166).

Vignette (continued from Appendix A): Around 1,200 teachers have registered to use the math app. About 75% of these teachers use the free version, which has limited functionality for lessons, homework, and access to student data. Another 20% are at schools that pay a license fee of $20 per student per year for full access. The remaining 5% are at schools that pay for student licenses *and* a higher level of professional development, for which the developer charges $1,000 per teacher.

The developer aims to grow the user base to 7,000 teachers, which would move her from the **innovator** group to the **early adopter** group of grade 6 math teachers. She has identified several strategies to achieve this growth:

- The developer purchases a booth at the next National Council of Teachers of Mathematics conference, where 6,000 math teachers are anticipated to attend.
- She expects about 90 teachers who already use the free version of the app to attend the conference. Her goal is to convert 25% to paying users, 5% of whom will also opt into the higher level of professional development.
- She also hopes to register a third of conference attendees to use the free version of her app.
- The developer offers an incentive to teachers currently using the free version of the app: They can upgrade to the licensed version for free for a class of 30 students if they refer five new users.
- She reviews her registration data to see where teachers are using her app and which students they teach. She plans to focus on recruiting teachers in other middle schools in the same districts where teachers are already using her app, and she plans to reach out to teachers in similar districts to those already using her app.
- The developer schedules interviews with teachers already using her app (including the free, licensed, and professional development versions) to better understand what needs the app is addressing for them. She believes these interviews can inform her recruitment of teachers with similar needs at other schools and districts.

To reach this larger community, the developer knows it is important to keep the free option available to teachers. At the same time, she is nearing the end of her current grant period (and funds) and needs to increase the operating revenue generated by the app in order to cover staff costs. (Continued in Appendix C.)

Appendix C: Revenue Projection

Financial forecasting is unfamiliar territory for many researchers, but it is fairly straightforward. The hardest part is making educated guesses about how the future might look. The steps below may help you get started (note this is a conservative approach).

1. Start by projecting the cost of supporting your current team, making reasonable assumptions about annual salary increases (as you would for a grant proposal).
2. If you have historical revenue data, analyze these data to determine an average or median revenue per customer. (The median may be more appropriate if the average is skewed by 1–2 outliers.)
3. If you do not have historical data, consider how much districts pay for comparable products, such as supplemental materials or edtech licenses. If a competitor does not provide this information on its website, you can find it through public record requests (under the Freedom of Information Act) or district board documents and meetings.
4. Using this estimate of revenue per customer, calculate how many customers (schools or individual licenses) would be needed to generate enough revenue to cover your costs. Does this seem feasible with your current staff?
5. If not, consider projecting a lower number of customers and then calculate how much you would need to generate in grant or philanthropic funding to make up the difference.
6. Alternatively, consider what additional capacity you would need to increase the number of customers, and what that might cost. If you hire a person to handle marketing or outreach, what would that cost and how many leads would that person help bring in? If you hire a sales or business development person to handle lead management and conversion, how many new customers might that person convert from marketing-sourced leads (e.g., from an email campaign or booth at an event) and/or leads they generate on their own (e.g., through targeted outreach or referrals)?
7. As you increase the number of users, be sure to increase any variable costs (e.g., server capacity, licenses for internal systems and tools, customer support staff).

Some of the steps above involve making educated guesses. You may want to create a couple of different scenarios (e.g., base case, conservative case, optimistic case) to model what these scenarios would mean for staffing and revenue.

Vignette (continued from Appendix B): The app developer wants to figure out how much funding she needs to bring in through grants and operating revenues to cover her staffing costs. She also wishes to increase her user base to 7,000 over the next 4 years and is unsure what staff capacity she needs to bring on and what that will cost. The developer creates a simple financial forecast to help inform decisions about staff and marketing activities. She takes these steps:

- She determines the goal number of paying users she wants to obtain in each year. This means accounting for the proportion of users who use the app for free versus the proportion who pay for licenses and/or professional development.
- She then multiplies the desired number of paying users by the cost per user for each service (license, license + professional development) to obtain total revenue.

The developer could meet her goals by increasing the number of users over 4 years from 1,200 in Year 1 to 7,000 in Year 4, assuming 75% of her users will download the free app, 20% will pay for licenses, and 5% will pay for the additional professional development. The operating cost breakdown is presented in the table above.

However, the developer could also pursue a different strategy that entails converting more of her free users to paying customers. For example, if she can convert 34% of her users to a license and 6% to additional professional development, she will only need 4,200 users to meet the same revenue goals outlined in the table above. This scenario might be useful if Jasmine needs to pursue a more aggressive strategy to recoup more costs in a shorter time frame, perhaps because her existing grant funding is running low.

The table below provides an example of a completed revenue projection based on the vignette.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Revenue	$240,000	$600,000	$1,000,000	$1,400,000
Number of customers	120	300	500	700
Number of active users	1,200 teachers	3,000 teachers	5,000 teachers	7,000 teachers
Average revenue from customer	$200	$200	$200	$200
Cost of operations to generate that revenue				
Labor cost for services (trainings and coaching)	$300,000	$300,000	$300,000	$300,000
Labor cost for product development	$300,000	$300,000	$300,000	$300,000
Labor cost for customer support (to retain existing customers)	$50,000	$50,000	$100,000	$150,000
Labor costs for sales and marketing personnel	--	$110,000	$110,000	$220,000
Labor costs for management of all operations	$140,000	$140,000	$155,000	$185,000
Other marketing expenses (conferences)	$5,000	$10,000	$10,000	$10,000
Cost for print materials	$5,000	$15,000	$25,000	$35,000
Total operating costs	$800,000	$925,000	$1,000,000	$1,200,000
Operating margins	($560,000)	($325,000)	--	$200,000
Funds to cover the loss (raise capital, donors, grant funding)?			--	--