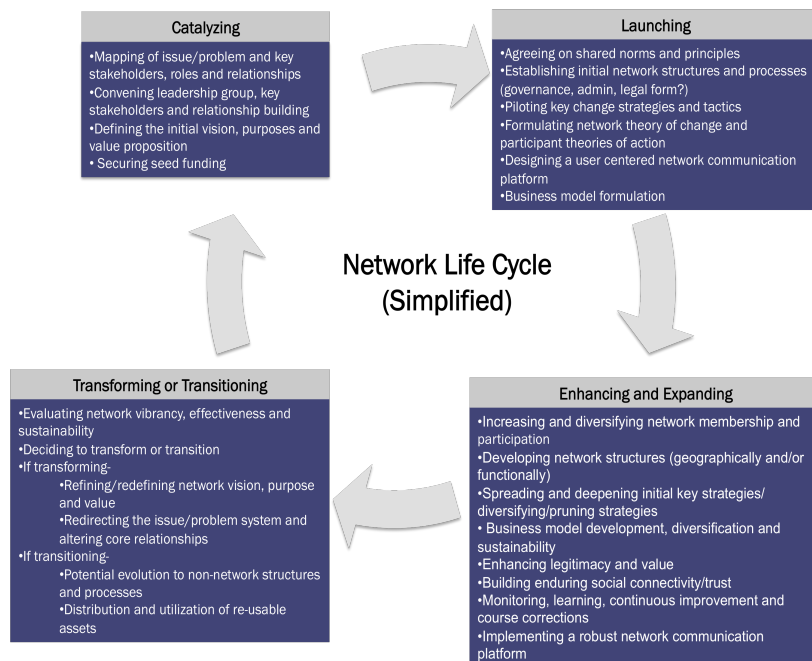


Action networks that bring together various actors in common cause to address pressing social challenges can be remarkably powerful mechanisms for catalytic social change and scaled impact. Effective action networks provide their members with opportunities for diffuse sharing of information and knowledge, mutual learning and identification of good practice, shared strategies and collective action, synergistic mobilization and deployment of resources, and more - all of which translate into more systemic, sustainable, and scaled social change.

As the advantages available to action networks become more recognized, more and more efforts are being undertaken to build these networks. Innovations for Scaling Impact (iScale), in collaboration with a variety of partnering experts, organizations, and action networks, has an unmatched record of supporting many of these efforts to develop and improve action networks throughout the world, engaging a wide variety of stakeholders – from NGOs to governments to businesses – and all addressing a wide variety of issues – ranging from sustainable development to good governance to socially-responsible business practices to the protection of communities worldwide from mass violence and atrocities.

In addition to providing support to specific efforts to develop particular action networks, iScale has throughout the years also hosted various meetings of leaders, funders, and expert observers of action networks to identify and capture lessons for good practice.

Guided by our model of the life-cycle of action networks (see figure and explanation below) we support networks to realize their full potential in terms of vibrancy and effectiveness, through a range of action-network partnership activities, including:



iScale's Network Life Cycle

Networks are dynamic and often pass through a series of phases as they evolve (see diagram below). Based on our work with networks, we have identified a four-phase network life cycle.

Catalyzing: Initial mapping of the issues/problems and key stakeholders. Leadership group developed and convened to define network vision, purpose and value. Initial network theory of change developed.

Launching: Network theory of change revised. Initial member theories of action developed. Initial network structures, norms and processes developed and implemented.

Expanding and Enhancing: Focus on expanding and enhancing network structures developed during the initial launch phase. Network monitoring and evaluation framework and communication platform developed and implemented. Network membership, participation, strategy and tactics diversified.

Transforming: Formal network assessment conducted. Network vision, purpose and value refined/revised. Network decides if it transforms itself (revisiting the activities in the initial catalyzing phase or transitions) or transitions (potentially evolving into a non-networked structure). Current network structure also reviewed and the network determines whether the current form is aligned with the networks function and what, if any, structural/governance changes are necessary.

- Incubating the Emergent Development of Action Networks
- Formulating, Reviewing and Improving Network-wide Theories of Change and Strategies
- Developing and Improving Action Network Governance and Decision-Making Practices
- Designing and Developing Action Network Communications Platforms
- Designing and Implementing Action Network Monitoring and Learning Systems
- Evaluating the Influence of and Value Added by Action Networks

Because every action network effort is different, iScale tailors any support it provides to such efforts to combine one or more of the above activities depending on the specific needs of the network.

Fostering the Emergent Development of Action Networks

iScale's support in developing a Global Network for the Prevention of Mass Violence and Protection of Civilians is one example of its work to foster the emergent development of action networks. The goals of the first phase of this project, implemented with Humanity United, were: (1) to improve stakeholders' knowledge about the actors working to build peace, prevent mass violence and protect civilian populations, (2) to strengthen relationships among critical stakeholders in the field, and (3) to improve the strategies of the field's stakeholders, individually and collectively, to enable faster and more far-reaching impact.

In order to spur the emergence of this action network, iScale initially undertook applied research to identify who the key actors are within the field and what work they identified as being focused on, and then identifying which gaps exist and the potential opportunities for improving the relationships among these actors to encourage their formulation of a network-wide theory of change if not a complete strategy.

The project continues today, under the leadership of a steering committee comprised of leading voices from the field, with a purpose to continue to create a more robust network of efforts in order to increase their collective global impact.

Formulating, Reviewing and Improving Network-wide Theories of Change and Strategies

iScale works with networks either during their initiation phase or during a period of critical transition to help refine and revise their theories of change and develop clear steps for implementing refinements and changes.

In one such project, iScale worked with the Global Knowledge Partnership during a crucial transition period to re-orient their theory of change to new external demands and member aspirations.

Governance and Organization

Over the years, iScale has worked with a number of different networks to help them to develop organizational and governance structures suited to the unique needs of networks. This includes questions around appropriate legal forms, decision making processes, membership structure and the importance of agreeing upon network norms and principles.

Network Communications

Communication within a network is a critical component for ensuring the health and vibrancy of a network. While some communication patterns will emerge organically, developing a formal platform and norms for communication helps to ensure systematic and enduring communication between all members. iScale has, as part of an ongoing project with the Global Aids Alliance, worked to design and develop a communications platform for the Campaign to End Pediatric. The CEPA network communications is designed to serve as a data repository of various surveys, baseline data, report cards, various reports, key performance indicators, and other emerging needs based on the Campaign's KPI's and Theories of Action. It will also be able to support social communication features like commenting, co-authoring, links, and multi-media. In addition, the Hub is intended to be a light and nimble system attending to a variety of technological capabilities, multi-lingual needs, and changing requirements as the campaign matures.

Network Monitoring and Evaluation

Measuring impact is a critical activity for effectively reaching objectives both for internal management and for describing achievements. Yet global social change organizations and networks still face particularly formidable challenges in developing and implementing integrated systems for monitoring and evaluation. iScale has worked with many networks to help them develop such systems.

iScale's Impact Community of Practice (ICoP), one such example, brings together representatives from leading social change organizations and networks with experts in program and organization assessment to share their expertise, explore the challenges global social change efforts face in measuring their impact, and develop innovative solutions for these difficulties.