



Navigating the Path to Scale

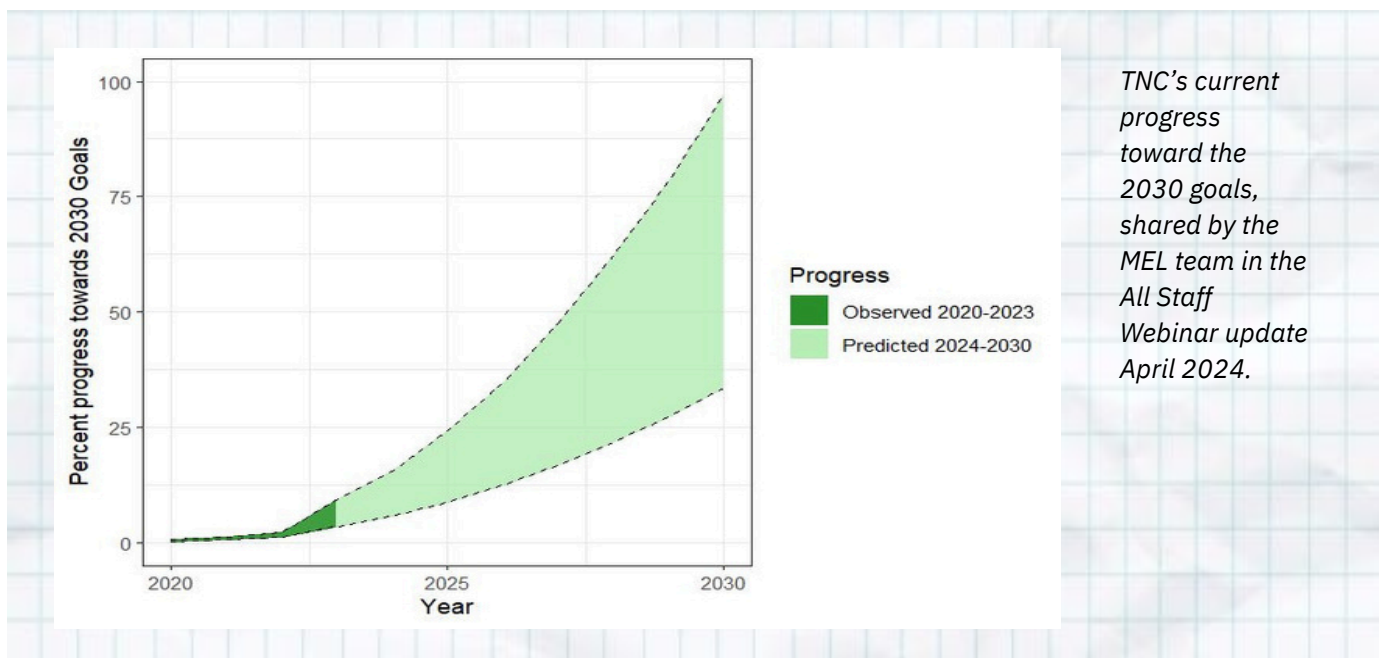
Introducing Key Scaling Concepts and Processes

This is the first of many in a series about how we design strategies and execute for scale. The series is intended to lay the basic foundation and build a shared understanding of what we mean by scale and how we can apply it to our conservation work for greater impact. The first part, this piece, covers basic terminology and key concepts that will enable us to dig deeper in the future.

Bending the Curve to Meet the Scope of the Problems We’re Solving

We all want to make meaningful progress toward the ambitious 2030 roadmap, and more importantly, we want to make a dent in the accelerating biodiversity and climate crises threatening this planet. While not every strategy can or should scale, we need to scale solutions that can match the scale of the multifaceted and complex “wicked problems” we’re tackling. This is where designing a **delivery model for scale** comes in.

Often, we refer to this as “bending the curve,” which we all know we desperately need to do (see our % progress toward the 2030 goals on the next page). But bending the curve is all about increasing efficiency. We have to make exponential progress toward impact without simultaneously exponentially increasing our resources and time. Scale refers to how we do just that.



DEFINING SCALE

Scale is a hockey-stick curve that symbolizes outsized impact with efficiency. A definition from our colleagues at Spring Impact: “Scale is about increasing impact exponentially, relative to the size of the problem, while adding resources incrementally.”

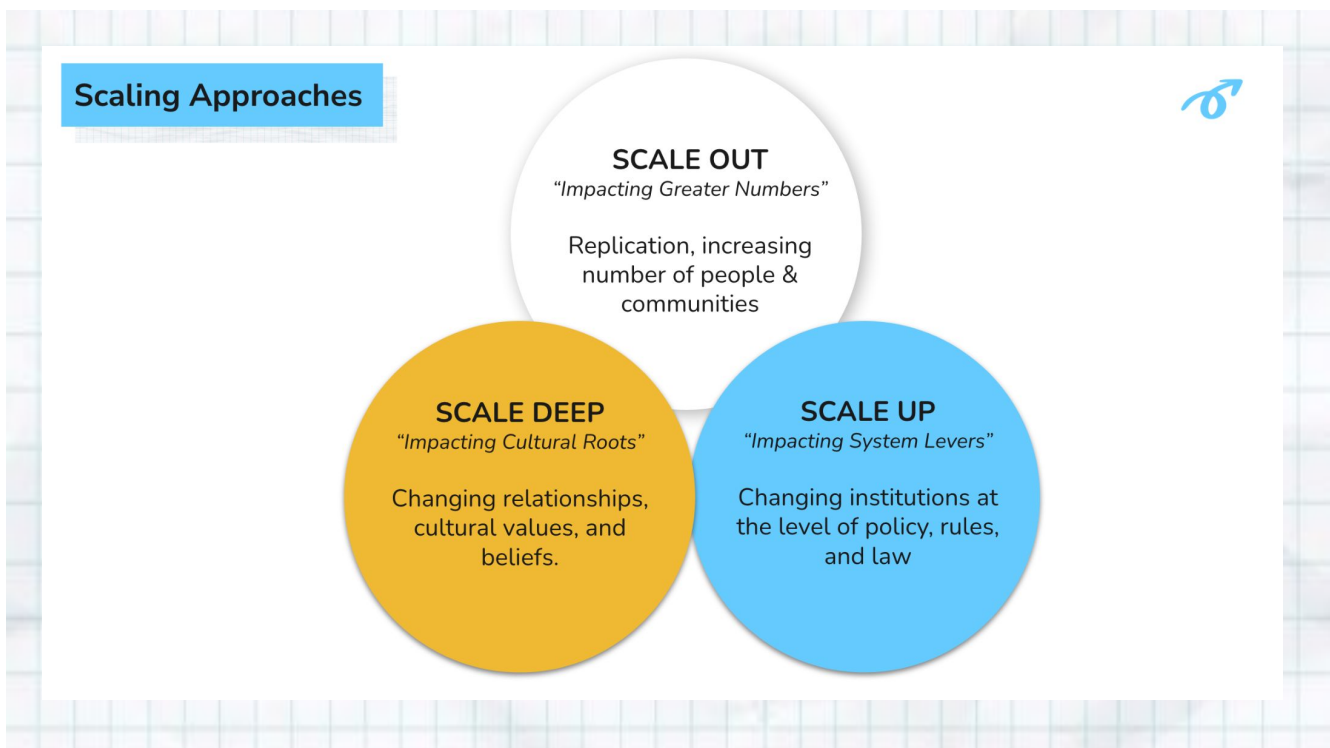
Scale is not:

- **Growth**, which is when you want to increase your impact by 3x your usual ratio and probably need to increase your inputs by roughly the same ratio. Scale is more about figuring out how to efficiently increase the impact without just multiplying the inputs.
- **Innovation**, which refers to new methods, ideas, or products. Scale refers to increasing the reach and impact of an innovation.

3 Ways to Scale

Most people assume that scale is replication. Replication is absolutely a type of scale and one of the most common, but it’s not the full picture. Scaling can be done by impacting greater numbers, but it can also be accomplished by impacting laws and policies or by shifting culture or relationships. All these different approaches are mutually reinforcing to one another through a holistic system. You can work on one of these and still be working on scale, but more often you are working on at least two of them or all three of them.

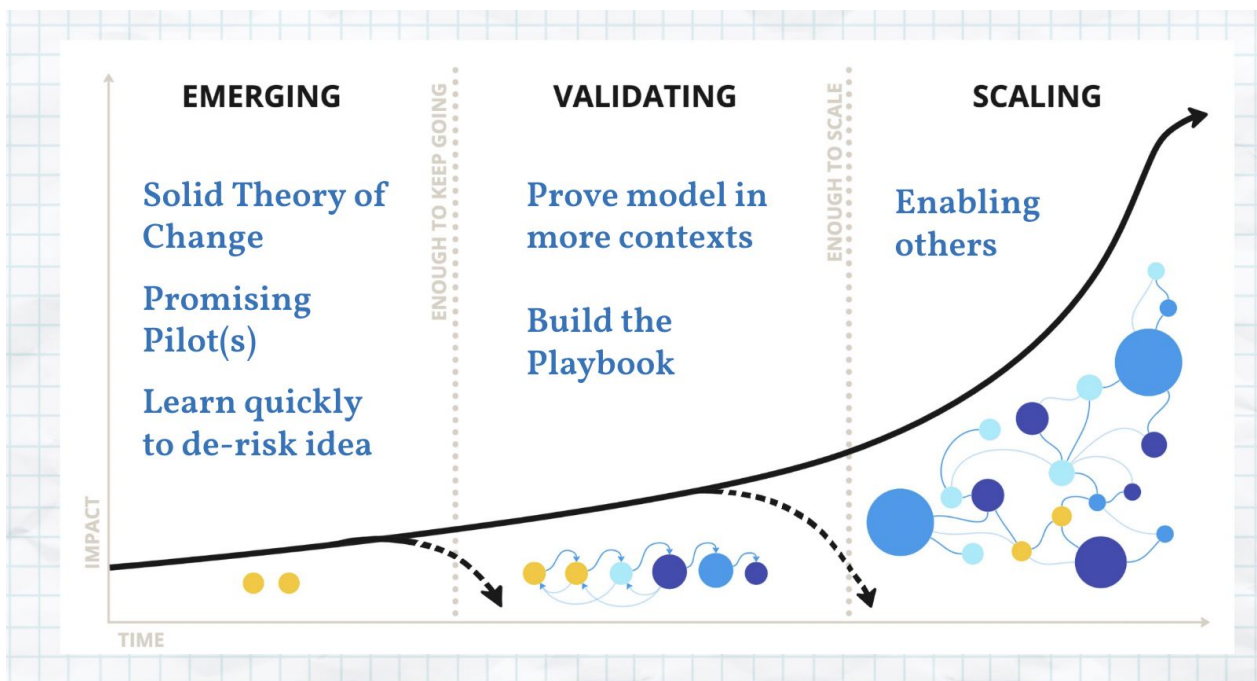
The [scaling literature](#) most commonly breaks scaling down into three general approaches:



Let's review some examples to see what these 3 scaling pathways can look like in practice.

- **Scaling Out** could be exemplified by a conservation team that developed an impactful rainforest reforestation approach in certain areas of Brazil and is now looking to replicate their model across multiple regions of Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia to have a greater impact on the Amazon Rainforest.
- The same team that developed a rainforest reforestation approach might **Scale Up** by working to help successfully pass legislation that now legally requires landowners to actively maintain a certain portion of their property under native vegetation.
- Almost any conservation team can understand the importance of **Scaling Deep**. Our work is only possible with authentic collaboration and engagement from communities and stakeholders at every step of the way.

These examples point out that none of these scaling strategies are independent but mutually reinforcing and interdependent.



Identifying Where a Team Is On the Path to Scale

A team cannot set out to scale its ideas without laying the necessary groundwork and validating a proof of concept. Teams first need to identify where they are on the path to scale.

The path to scale can generally be divided into three phases:

1. **Emerging:** Your team has identified elements of a “wicked problem” that you are uniquely equipped to address, and you have an idea that might work! It’s time to run a pilot (or two). Teams in this stage have a promising pilot and are working toward a solid theory of change. Another key part of this stage, and every stage after, is designing tight feedback loops, such as experiments and processes by which you can learn, adapt, and de-risk quickly.

2. **Validating:** Your team has gathered promising evidence during the Emerging Stage. It's time to replicate the pilot in several additional contexts and use those additional pilots to build a playbook that other teams could apply to their work. At this stage, you might have identified a clear demand and believe you know what solution it is you are taking to scale, but it's important not to rush directly into building the solution at scale without authentically collaborating with and gaining input from external key parties, such as communities and local/regional partners.
3. **Scaling:** You've gathered rigorous evidence and the concept can deliver impact in multiple contexts. It's time to shift implementation to external partners and work to enable others to follow your playbook. At this stage, we begin to shift our own attention away from direct delivery while enabling others to take on that task at hand. While 80% of the time will be focused on enabling others, at least 20% will continue to focus on direct delivery to improve upon the approach.



MENTAL MODEL: SCALE = STRATEGY x EXECUTION

Scaling your impact requires a great strategy AND execution; shortcomings in either area can prevent or inhibit a team's ability to scale. Teams often get stuck focusing on strategy and trying to figure everything out on paper without recognizing that effective execution—whether directly or by influencing and supporting others—is the key to scaling impact. A helpful mental model is to think of **Strategy as a Multiplier of Execution**, therefore:

- Without great execution, even the best strategy makes no impact.
- However, if you have a weak strategy, you risk doing more harm than good.
- **For scale, you need both great strategy and great execution to “bend the curve”.**

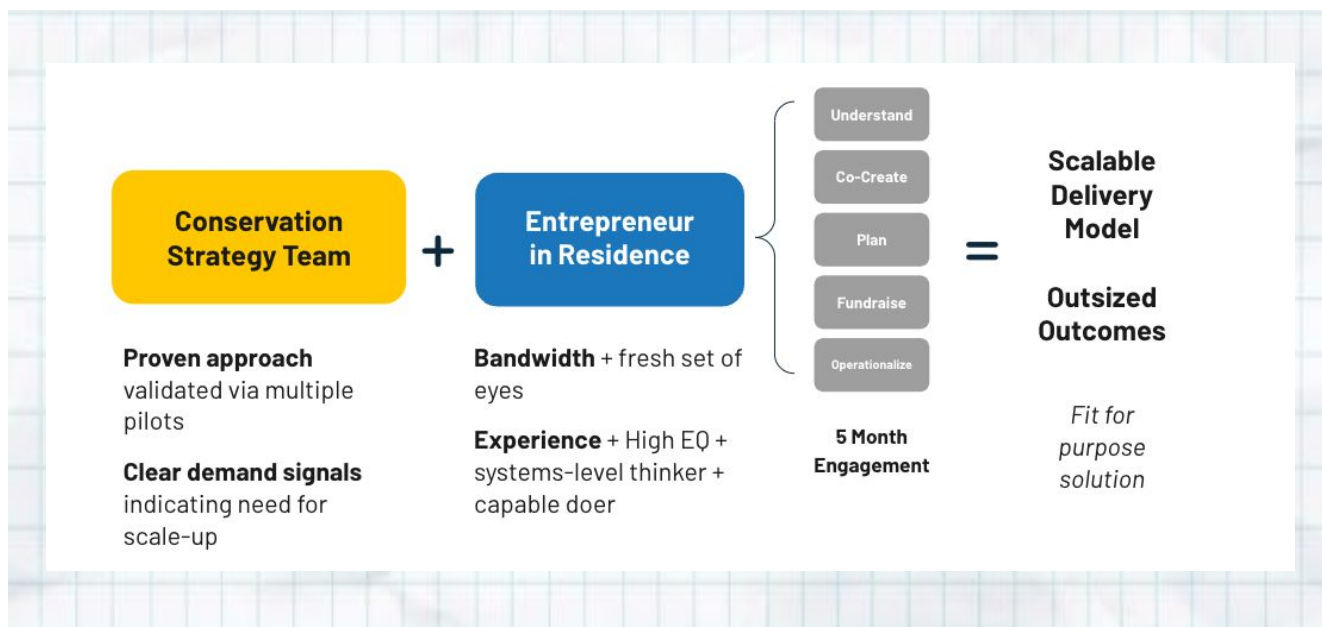
“Solutions don’t go anywhere on their own and a model is just a model: It’s execution that creates impact. The social sector does not function like a market for impact — you can’t dump an idea in the water supply and expect it to flourish. For the most part, if you have an idea, you own it, and if you don’t drive it toward scale, nobody will.”

— KEVIN STARR, CEO, MULAGO FOUNDATION
IN THE STANFORD SOCIAL INNOVATION REVIEW

Is Your Team Ready to Scale?

The Scale Lab, an initiative of the Agility Lab, supports conservation teams globally with the **tools** and **capacity** to effectively scale up their efforts.

- **Tools:** Provide resources for scaling, including guidance on incorporating scaling concepts into your work's strategy and execution. Resources include scaling research, frameworks, DIY tools, and templates.
- **Capacity:** Includes Entrepreneur In Residence (EIR) engagements to provide capacity for teams to validate, build, and adapt durable delivery models to scale their work.



An Agility Lab Entrepreneur in Residence (EIR) is assigned to work side-by-side with high-priority TNC conservation teams, dedicating 15 to 30 hours per week over two to 12 months to plan, test, build, and fundraise for a scalable delivery model. Engagement commitment and length depend on the team's specific needs and budget. Together, EIRs and conservation teams co-develop a business plan and subsequent fundraising strategy for a scalable delivery model, alongside the program leadership team and steering committee, fundraisers, regional colleagues, partners, and potential funders, that cultivates key enabling conditions. In 2024, the Scale Lab had five entrepreneur-in-residence engagements; see one exciting example on the next page!

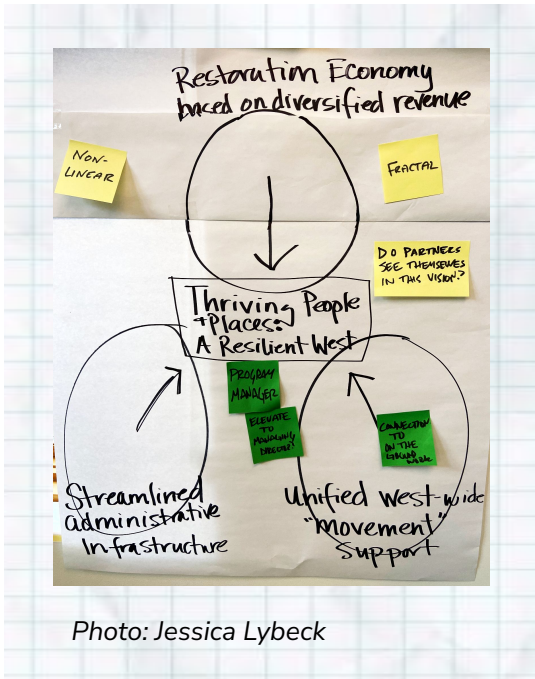
Get in touch with The Scale Lab.

Are you interested in scaling support for your work or a scale presentation for your next gathering?

[LEARN MORE & CONTACT US →](#)



Case Study: The Riparian Restoration Team x Scale Lab EIR



Over 2,000 miles of streams in the U.S. are in need of restoration and repair. A \$10 million grant from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was awarded to scale low-tech process-based restoration (LTPBR) in seven priority landscapes across five states, with sights set on changing policy enabling conditions to scale impact across North America.

The Scale Lab helped guide the Riparian Restoration Team (see photo of their team and workshop on the first page) as it applied the tactic in designing its three guiding pillars. While this team must perfect their own work and deliver guaranteed outcomes to the BLM, they must also consider how their delivery model for LTPBR can support the implementation of this practice at scale.

The delivery model is guided by the three pillars below:

- Build the local workforce and restoration economy to support continuous LTPBR restoration projects
- Identify diversified and sustained revenue that allows restoration to go to scale
- Influence federal and state policy to facilitate a west-wide restoration movement

“I highly recommend bringing an Entrepreneur in Residence into your next complex engagement; it was like rocket fuel to get things rolling in the right direction!”

— NANCY SMITH, COLORADO RIVER PROGRAM + CO-LEAD RIPARIAN RESTORATION