HELLO EUROPE

an initiative by: ASHOKA

6 ACTIONS TO ACCELERATE INNOVATIVE IDEAS

How can we accelerate citizen-led solutions to successfully address the world's most pressing issues? From our experience in launching *Hello Europe Accelerators*, we have distilled **6 key actions to improve effectiveness of accelerators to scale impactful social innovations**.

Many of the most pressing issues faced today by our societies are multi-layered, complex problems, and as such require innovative and collaborative solutions. This involves breaking traditional siloes that separate policy, business and the citizen sector, as well as creating effective ways for innovative and effective initiatives to scale across country borders. Social innovators are people who have developed innovative solutions that address the root causes of a social problem. For their ideas to spread, they need support from all the stakeholders involved in the ecosystem.[1] We believe that following these recommendations will unlock a more effective ecosystem that will enable these solutions to increase their impact more quickly and bring significant improvement to our societies.

1. ASSESS THE NEEDS OF THE ECOSYSTEM

To ensure that the innovative solutions match the needs of the ecosystem, it is essential to **gather the major stakeholders** in the selected field of intervention **and together define the main challenges that need to be addressed**.

When launching a new edition of our *Hello Europe Accelerator*, we run **"Ecosystem Workshops"** with the key local stakeholders working on the main challenges around the topic of interest (in our case, migration). We use design thinking tools (such as empathy maps, re-adapted customer journeys, stakeholder maps, etc.) that allow participants to define the key needs in the ecosystem together and enable us to understand how we can best contribute while searching for innovative solutions.

2. CONSIDER RUNNING REGULAR ACCELERATORS IN CITIES AND REGIONS

Accelerators fulfill the function of sourcing, analyzing, selecting and supporting the most innovative solutions to social problems. Running accelerators at the national, regional or city level is an effective way to bring these ideas to light and into new contexts that can benefit from them. Once the needs of the ecosystem have been assessed, *innovative citizen-led solutions* that have already been successful in solving those challenges *need to be identified* and assessed against well-defined criteria.

With the *Hello Europe Accelerator*, we identified over 370 innovative solutions and selected 90+ out of them to take part in our programs. When selecting innovators in a specific country, *we source solutions from our international network of Ashoka Fellows* who are interested in scaling to that country, *and local innovators* looking to grow their impact. Running accelerators regularly would ensure that the most innovative ideas are recruited to reach the contexts where they can fulfill their potential.

3. RESEARCH AND PUBLISH INFORMATION ON SCALING MECHANISMS

To scale innovative solutions, a one-size fits all type approach might prove ineffective. The social finance and venture philanthropy sector could and should support studies on different kinds of scaling mechanisms and lead this process to go beyond one scaling model (e.g. social franchise). Additionally, programs should provide different kinds of support for organizations at different phases: higher investment and specific topic mentoring for initiatives that have scaled well can efficiently support these initiatives to continue growing; approaches centered on seed-funding and more intense training and mentoring can work better for smaller organizations. The key to success is helping social innovators to understand the essence of their new idea and what parts they need to scale. To ensure that the scaling process is successful, *a series of questions should be posed to social innovators, to identify the best scaling approach for their organization*.

During the *Hello Europe Accelerator*, we usually prepare the social innovators to scale by asking them vital questions that help them *focus on the specific impact that they are best positioned to scale* (vs. scaling their entire organization or approach). We work with design thinking tools and we present them with different scaling models,[2] some of which they would not have thought about otherwise.

"Thanks to the program, I understood the advantage of having a systemic approach. The vision of my organization changed and the idea of who I can engage, who can help me, has changed. I never thought before of satisfying my clients together with other organizations. I think this is the most interesting part of the program".

- ONE OF OUR ACCELERATOR'S PARTICIPANTS

4. "MAKING CHANGEMAKERS" AS A KEY CRITERION

The best solutions will be great at creating and empowering changemakers within their organizations. By giving others the tools to create their own change, organizations not eventually reach a larger number, but they also dramatically increase the possibility of new innovation and organizations to emerge from their participants.[3] This is why we often include "empowering changemakers from the community" as a key criterion for selecting innovations.

We've also found that accelerators boost the participants' confidence in the relevance of the work they are doing. It increases their own identification as changemakers and social innovators. Telling their stories to each other and sharing them beyond the accelerator is also key to creating impact in the ecosystem.

"We felt more relevant and we felt that our work has an important value, which perhaps we ourselves do not emphasize often enough. The journey had a motivational impact: perceiving ourselves as changemakers is important in order to recognize that what you are doing has meaning and relevance."

- ONE OF OUR ACCELERATOR'S PARTICIPANTS

For the field of migration, a more effective approach to empower and support migrant leaders is needed. The sector is currently dominated by leaders that are not from a migrant background. There should be more efforts to **find and support leaders from a migrant background** for this kind of work, which means finding them earlier on and spreading their stories. We should support a new framework where people on the move are no longer perceived as passive subjects of compassion, but rather as resourceful changemakers, eager to contribute to their communities. For this purpose, Accelerator initiatives need to actively **include migrants and refugees (or other leaders from the communities being served) in design and leadership processes** from the very beginning and ensure that they contribute.

Throughout the several editions of the *Hello Europe Accelerator*, we increased the number of leaders with a migrant background: in our latest editions, migrant leaders represented the 50-100% of the selected participants. We also include leaders from migrant and refugee backgrounds in the planning, creation and execution of the program – for example by having people on the move joining our "ecosystem workshops" and contributing to define the migrant's journey in the local context. We also aim to share their stories with the widest audience, to empower others and change the narrative.

5. CREATE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC FUNDS EXCLUSIVELY FOR SCALING

For social innovations to grow, we need funders and public funds to invest specifically in scaling processes. Private funders should devote patient funding to this process, knowing that it takes time. We also envision regional and global innovation funds that fund scaling efforts for established organizations. Specific spaces and gatherings for networking amongst innovators, funders and potential replicators need to be a regular feature in the sector.

In every edition of our *Hello Europe Accelerator*, we matched social innovators with potential partners – both from the private and public sector – who were specifically interested in scaling or replicating effective solutions in the field of migration. We enabled quality meetings, by facilitating informal conversation on the side of the events we organized, and following-up afterwards.

In many editions, we created open and crowd-funded **Innovation Funds** that went directly to the social innovators to support their scaling plan. This was a key incentive to raise capital for social innovators and/or their replicating partners to help them kick-off the scaling process.

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6. RECRUIT OTHER ORGANIZATIONS TO SUPPORT AND CONNECT SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS LOCALLY

Action is needed from organizations that can support social innovators locally, with adapted fees and co-funding structures (some non-profit funds, or pro-bono, some fee-for-service). It is also essential that social innovators are provided with *tailored mentorship support*. Often, this kind of resource is available through existing networks and organizations that are well-positioned to help the solutions to adjust their scaling strategy to the local context.

During our *Hello Europe Accelerators* we connected social innovators with experts and pro-bono support that help them develop or refine their scaling strategy. Many of the mentors end up sharing lots of useful contacts with the social innovators they work with, which supports the creation of new collaborations.

¹ For a definition of the phenomena composing an ecosystem for social innovations, see the MIT's "System for innovation-driven entrepreneurship", which takes into account the following: foundational institutions (i.e. rules, norms and practices that are taken for granted); the innovation capacity (i.e. the capacity of a place to generate new ideas and transit them to practice, thus creating an impact); the entrepreneurship capacity (i.e. conditions for forming enterprises); comparative advantage of a place; and the resulting impact from the comination of the previous elements. Learn more here: https://innovation.mit.edu/assets/Assessing-iEcosystems-V2-Final.pdf.

² For an overview of different scaling models, see our Portoflio of Solutions, "How citizens sectors scale" (p. 58)

³ Our latest study on Ashoka fellows shows that many of the most successful social innovators were empowered as changemakers at a young age. Cf. The Unlonely Planet, p.28f (access at https://www.ashoka.org/es-es/files/unlonelyplanetfinalpdf).