# LEAN IMPACT JOURNEY

IMPACT

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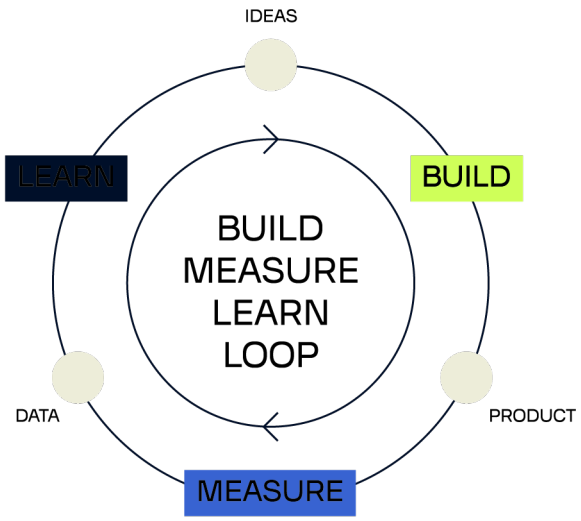
# EDITORIAL

As an impact entrepreneur or change maker, you're not only striving for economic success – you also want to drive positive social and environmental change. The Lean Impact Guide is here to support you in that mission.

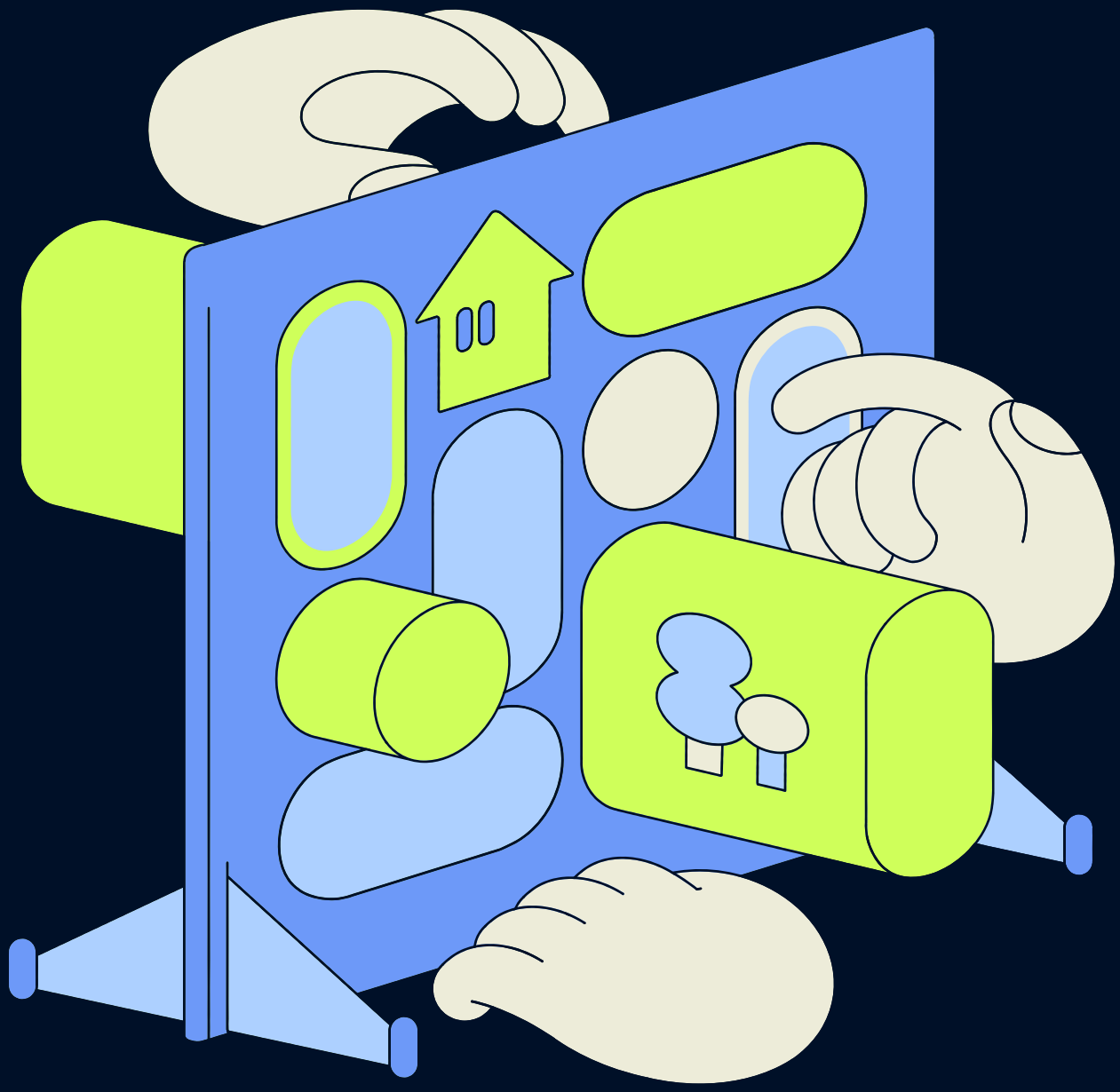
Lean Impact, developed by Ann Mei Chang, is based on the principles of the Lean Startup, but expands on them to effectively tackle social and environmental challenges. While Lean Startup focuses on the rapid development and validation of commercial products with an emphasis on profitability, Lean Impact aims to maximize social value.

With the Lean Impact approach, you can develop effective solutions using minimal resources, test them quickly, and continuously improve them. At the core of this method is the Build-Measure-Learn feedback cycle: you create an initial version of your solution, collect user data, and refine it based on those insights. This allows you to respond sustainably to real needs and maximize your impact.

Use the Lean Impact Guide to refine your ideas and make the social change you seek both measurable and visible. The guide complements our IMMPACT Maturity Model, which was developed through the collaborative IMMPACT project (Bertelsmann Stiftung, SEND, Bundesverband Impact Investing, PHINEO, BHT).
The methodology behind the Lean Impact Journey is grounded in the Lean Impact approach by Ann Mei Chang and the Lean Startup principles by Eric Ries, adapted specifically for startups. During development, we took a participatory approach – working closely with project partners and incorporating feedback from a sounding board of German experts in impact management and measurement. We also used AI technology to enhance the depth and quality of the method descriptions.
This methodology is designed to offer startups a structured yet flexible framework for efficiently developing impactful solutions, combining best practices from lean methods with a strong focus on creating positive societal impact.



# IDEATION PHASE



# 1 PROBLEM, TARGET GROUP AND STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

BUILD

## PROBLEM, TARGET GROUP AND STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS: YOUR FIRST STEP TOWARDS LAUNCHING AN IMPACT STARTUP

When you're developing a sustainable solution to a social problem through your impact startup, you're likely to begin with a lot of questions: Who's actually affected? What are the root causes and consequences? And how can we effectively address them?

To create impact where it matters most, it's essential to fully understand the problem, your target group, and the key stakeholders. Of course, every startup comes with its own unique challenges. That's why this chapter offers guidance you can tailor to your situation.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you're planning to launch an impact startup – or already deep in the process with your team.
- you know what problem you want to solve but don't yet fully understand who your target group is.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- clearly define the social problem and understand its root causes.
- identify the effects of the problem.
- define your target group and stakeholders.

### Define the core problem

The first step is to clearly define the problem you want to solve. This sets the foundation for analyzing its root causes and consequences. Describe the issue from the perspective of the people affected by it. Try to be as

specific as possible and base this on what you currently know.

Social problems often exist on different levels: social, environmental, and economic.

- Social dimension: his relates to how people interact and how society is structured. It includes topics like social justice, education, health, and community networks.
- Environmental dimension: This involves climate and environmental issues, such as global warming, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, or water scarcity.
- Economic dimension: This covers financial and economic factors like income levels, wealth distribution, or economic development.

EXAMPLE
"Many people in rural areas of Lebanon lack access to clean drinking water."

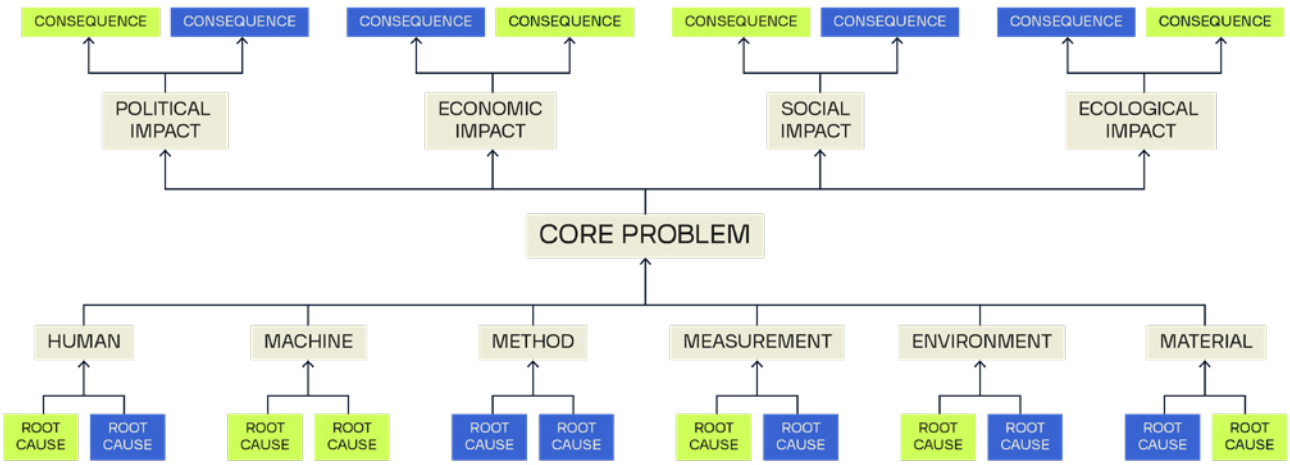
## Identify the root causes of the problem

To fully understand the core problem, you can break down its causes in four steps. Start by asking: Why does this problem exist?

### 1. IDENTIFY KEY CATEGORIES OF ROOT CAUSES

Sort the problem into main causes and assign them to the following categories:

- Social trends (e.g., demographic shifts, urbanization, digitalization, regulations, laws, standards)
- Use of technology (e.g., fossil or renewable energy, e-learning platforms, telemedicine)
- Economic conditions (e.g., unemployment, income inequality, inflation)
- Cultural understanding (e.g., traditions, customs, values, social norms)
- Environmental conditions (e.g., climate change, resource availability, natural disasters)
- Institutions (e.g., schools, healthcare providers, local organizations, community initiatives)
- Political conditions (e.g., government stability, international trade agreements, sanctions)
- Individual needs of specific groups (e.g., access to education, healthcare, housing)
- Public knowledge and awareness (e.g., education levels, awareness, tech literacy)



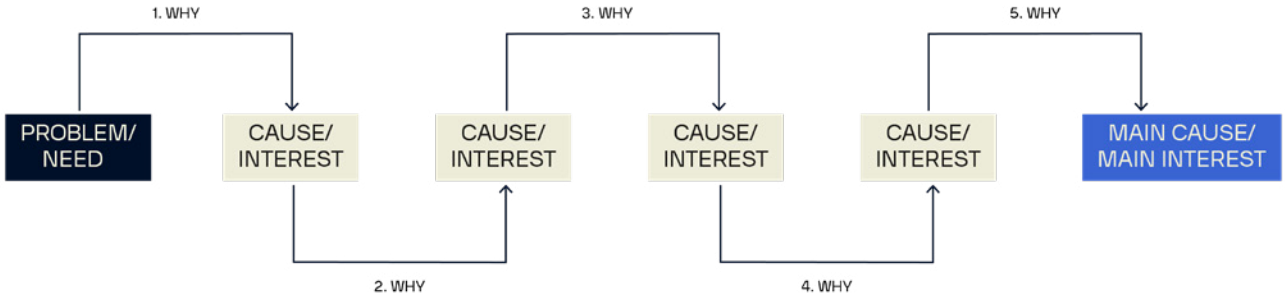
## 2. DIG INTO THE CAUSES USING THE 5 WHYS TECHNIQUE

To explore the problem more deeply, ask "Why is this happening?" for each cause you've identified – and repeat that question five times. This helps uncover the root causes. These deeper insights form the foundation of your problem and give you a fuller understanding of it.

EXAMPLE

If the core problem is "Many people in rural areas of Lebanon lack access to clean drinking water," a 5 Whys analysis might look like this:

- Why don't they have access to clean drinking water? – Because there are no water treatment facilities.
- Why are there no water treatment facilities? – Because there isn't enough funding.
- Why isn't there enough funding? – Because local authorities don't allocate sufficient budgets.
- Why don't local authorities allocate enough budgets? – Because the issue isn't seen as a priority.
- Why isn't it a priority? – Because there's low awareness of the health risks linked to unsafe water.




1) Why Method

## 3. USE RESEARCH TO SUPPORT YOUR ANALYSIS

Use databases like Google Scholar, JSTOR, or PubMed to find relevant studies and data. Public reports (e.g., from the UNDP or national governments), statistics, documentaries, news features, and publications from associations can also be helpful – just make sure to fact-check your sources.

Attending networking events, conferences, industry meetups, or expos can also give you valuable insights. This data-driven approach gives you objective perspectives on the root causes of the problem – and helps confirm or challenge your assumptions.

# Analyze the effects of the problem

Once you've explored the causes, the next step is to identify the effects. What consequences does the problem have for the people affected – and for their broader environment?

### 1. USE THE 5 WHYS TECHNIQUE TO EXPLORE THE EFFECTS

Use the same method as before. For each effect, ask: "What does this lead to?" Repeat the question to uncover deeper, systemic impacts – whether environmental, political, social, economic, cultural or even spiritual.

### 2. BACK UP YOUR ANALYSIS WITH CURRENT RESEARCH

Use recent studies and data to better understand the long-term effects of the problem. How you can do this is described above under Identify the root causes of the problem.

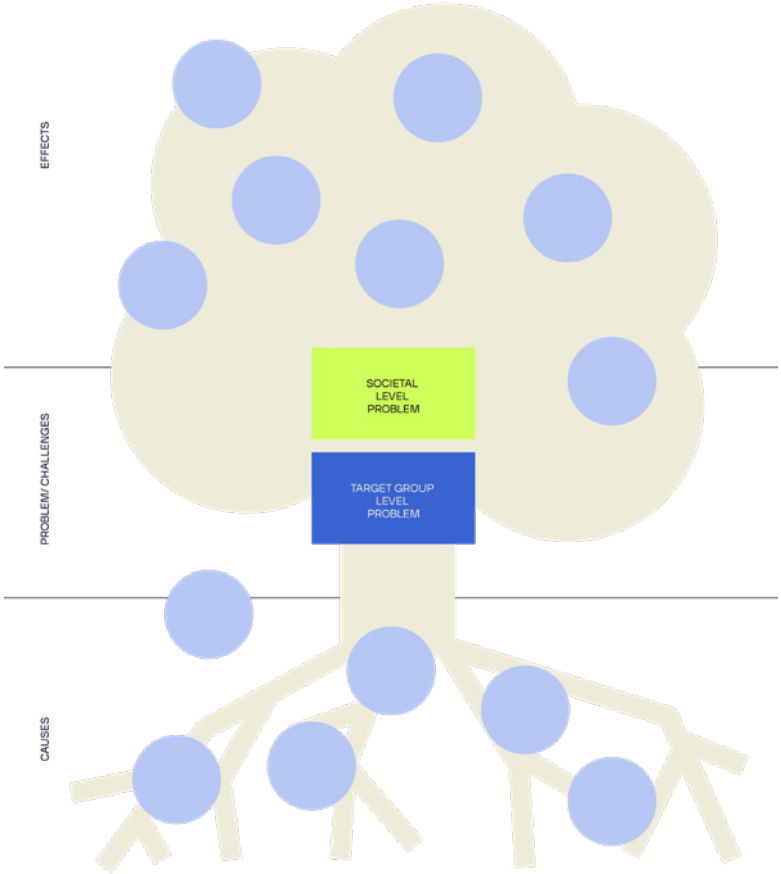
### 3. VISUALIZE THE PROBLEM WITH A PROBLEM TREE

A problem tree is a visual tool that maps out the causes and effects of the issue – and can also be useful when presenting your work.

Here's how to build a one:

- Draw a box in the center of your diagram and write the core problem in it.
- Below it, list the direct causes. Add deeper causes underneath those.
- Above the core problem, write the immediate effects. Then, above those, list the ripple effects.
- The problem tree branches upwards and downwards.
- Use arrows or lines to show any connections between causes or effects. Leave placeholders for any missing pieces you'll fill in later.

You can sketch the problem tree using a basic drawing tool or just pen and paper.



## Consider the systemic context

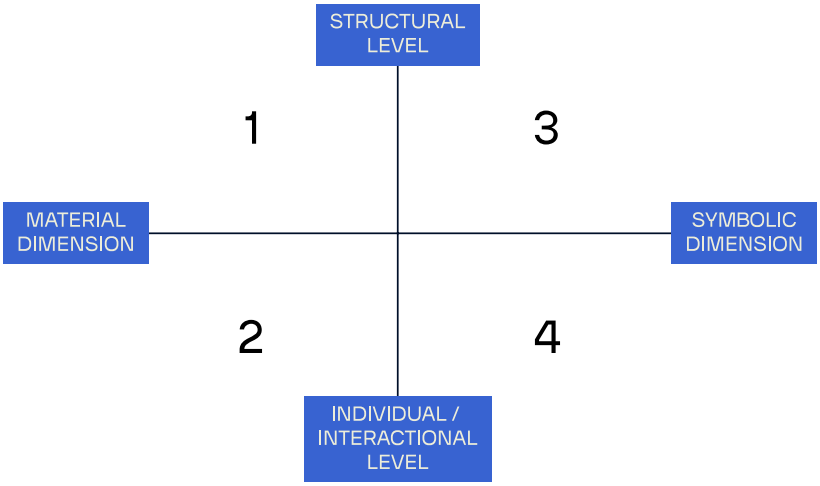
To fully understand the problem, you should place it in a broader systemic context. This helps you design interventions that address the right causes – at the right level.

### 1. Use the social change matrix to map your problem in context

The social change matrix helps you place the problem in a broader system by dividing it into four quadrants:

- Quadrant 1: Material and structural – Problems that affect large groups and require structural change, such as legal or institutional reforms
- Quadrant 2: Material and individual – Outcomes of structural problems that impact individuals or small groups, such as lack of education or poverty
- Quadrant 3: Symbolic and structural – Problems related to public perception or collective beliefs that require changes in public discourse
- Quadrant 4: Symbolic and individual – Problems tied to personal attitudes or self-perception, like low self-esteem

Think about how your problem shows up in each quadrant. Do all four need to be considered? Where do the root causes and effects sit, and which ones should you address? Material change is tangible and measurable. Symbolic change deals with cultural norms and social attitudes.




2) Social Change Matrix

Structural changes happens at a system or society level. Individual changes affects personal behavior and mindset.

Sometimes, however, change on an individual level – material or symbolic – can spark broader systemic shifts. In other words, change doesn't only come from the top down; it can also start bottom up. A shift in values, for example, can eventually transform structural or material conditions

EXAMPLE
Let's say your core problem is "low environmental awareness among the public". This would fall under Quadrant 3 (symbolic and structural) because it reflects public perception and calls for a shift in public discourse. Potential solutions might include awareness campaigns or policy initiatives to strengthen environmental consciousness (symbolic), and actions that promote behavior change (material).

## Define your target groups and stakeholders

Based on your problem analysis, you can now clearly define your target groups and stakeholders.
Think about who is directly responsible for the root causes of and who is affected by the consequences. These are likely your potential target groups and stakeholders.

### 1. Who are your target groups?

Your target group includes the people, organizations or systems you want to create impact for. The ones you want to bring real change to are your direct target group. If needed, you can break this group down further into subgroups to tailor your solution more precisely.

### 2. Who are your stakeholders?

Stakeholders include any persons or groups who have an interest in your solution or who can influence its success. Important: All target groups are stakeholders, but not all stakeholders are part of your target group.

A stakeholder analysis can help you answer key questions:

- Who are the relevant internal and external stakeholders?
- What are their expectations, concerns, and hopes?
- How might they support – or challenge – your solution?

EXAMPLES OF STAKEHOLDERS:
Internal stakeholders: your target group, team members, leadership.
External stakeholders: investors, government agencies, NGOs, partner organizations, grassroots initiatives, or companies.

TARGET GROUP VS. CUSTOMERS
In the Lean Impact Journey we make a distinction between your target group when working on your impact model and solution, and your customers when developing your business model.

How you use these two terms depends on what your solution looks like. In this playbook, the target group refers to both the people who use your solution and those who benefit from it.

Depending on your solution, these might be the same people – or not.

→ NEXT CHAPTER: VALIDATE YOUR FINDINGS
You've completed the first major step! You now understand the root causes and effects of the social problem and have identified your potential target group and key stakeholders.

In the next chapter you'll learn how to validate your findings through real conversations with your target group and stakeholders.

MEASURE

# COLLECTING DATA ON TARGET GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS: HOW TO RUN A SOLID ANALYSIS

To drive real change with your impact startup, you and your team need a deep understanding of your target group's needs and expectations – as well as those of your key stakeholders. You also need to validate your assumptions about the social or environmental issue you're tackling. This section shows you how to collect the right data to build a strong foundation for analysis and maximize your impact.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you're planning to launch an impact startup – or already deep in the process with your team.
- you've done an initial problem analysis.
- you have a rough idea of who your target group and stakeholders are.
- you're interested in learning about the Lean Impact approach.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- test your assumptions through real conversations with your target group.
- better understand their needs, interests, and the factors that shape their behavior.
- make sure your solution is actually relevant and useful.
- .apply the Build — Measure — Learn cycle from Lean Impact effectively.

There are different ways to gather data on your target groups and stakeholders – but nothing beats talking directly to the people affected. It's the fastest and most effective way to get real insights.

We focus here on qualitative interviews with your target group. These give you rich, detailed answers (open questions) that help uncover opinions, needs, experiences, and challenges. To complement your analysis, you can also run quantitative interviews using standardized questionnaires (closed questions) for broader, data-driven insights.

What to find out in these interviews ...

- Is the problem you've identified actually relevant for the person you're speaking with?
- How are they and their environment affected, and what are the consequences for them?
- Who else might be impacted?

Also hold one-on-one interviews with stakeholders – people who are directly or indirectly affected by your solution or have the power to influence it. This helps you better understand their interests and how your solution might impact them. Examples of stakeholders include advocacy groups, activists, NGOs, self-help groups, influencers, researchers, or public sector representatives.

# 1. Collecting data through interviews and surveys

### 1. CHOOSE THE RIGHT PEOPLE TO INTERVIEW

Who you talk to matters. To get meaningful results, aim for a diverse mix of perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences. In addition to members of your target group, you can also speak with experts or people working in similar contexts.

### 2. DEVELOP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR YOUR TARGET GROUP

The questions you ask will depend on where you are in your startup journey: Have you already identified a problem and want to find out whether your assumed target group sees it as relevant? (path 1)? Or have you already defined your target group and want to find out what problem you can help them solve (path 2)?

Typical background questions to get you started:

- What's your name and job title?
- What industry do you work in, and how long have you been in this role?
- What are your main responsibilities in your current position?

Typical questions for path 1:

- Have you ever encountered the following problem in your work: [beschreiben Sie Ihr Problem]?
- How do you usually deal with [relevanter Herausforderung oder Aufgabe]?
- What do you think are the main causes of this problem? Why (5x)?
- How much does this problem affect your productivity or efficiency?
- What impact does this problem have on your work or your organization?
- What steps have you taken so far to address this issue?
- What impact does this issue have on your work or organization?
- If this problem isn't relevant to you, why do you think that is?
- Do you know anyone in your industry or in similar roles who might be facing this issue?
- Who do you think is most likely to encounter this problem?
- Do you think this issue could become relevant for you or others in the future? If so, why?

Typical questions for path 2:

- Can you describe a specific problem that really frustrates you? How often does it come up?
- What do you think are the main causes and consequences of this problem? Why (5x)?
- What goes through your mind when you're trying to deal with?
- What concerns or worries do you have when you think about this problem?
- How do you usually feel when you're facing this problem?
- How much does this problem affect your productivity or efficiency?
- What impact does this problem have on your work or your organization?
- What role do external factors like market shifts, new tech, or changing values play in this issue?
- What problem would need to be solved first to make your work more effective and enjoyable?

THE 5-WHYS TECHNIQUE

Use the 5 Whys technique to explore both the questions causes and effects of the problem (see "Problem, target group, and stakeholder analysis: Your first step towards launching an impact startup"?"). For each identified cause, ask "Why is this happening?" and repeat this question up to five times. For each identified consequence, ask "What does this lead to?" and repeat two to three times.

### 3. WRITE A CLEAR AND FRIENDLY INTERVIEW INVITATION

Be clear about what participants can expect. Many people will want to know in advance what's involved and whether they need to prepare. Let them know how long the interview will take, what the purpose is, and reassure them that no preparation is needed. Thank them in advance for their time and highlight how important their input is for your project.

### 4. CREATE A COMFORTABLE INTERVIEW SETTING

A good conversationstarts with trust. Begin by briefly introducing yourself, your project, and the purpose of the interview. Make sure the atmosphere is relaxed and respectful. Be friendly, open, and give participants the space to ask questions or raise concerns at any time.

### 5. USE AN ADDITIONAL METHOD IF NEEDED

If your target group has trouble expressing themselves – or if the answers you're getting aren't deep enough – there are other ways to gain insights. For example, you could observe your target group in their everyday environment to see firsthand how they deal with challenges and what problems actually exist. You could also run a stakeholder workshop to gather input and ideas from those connected to the issue.

→ NEXT CHAPTER: REALITY CHECK

You've completed your data collection – these results will later serve as a key reference for measuring impact.

But first, in the next chapter, you'll learn how to test your findings against reality to validate your problem and target group analysis..

LEARN

# PROBLEM AND TARGET GROUP ANALYSIS: HOW TO VALIDATE FOR IMPACT STARTUPS

To get your impact startup on the road to success, you need to make sure your problem and target group analysis is solid and wel
l-founded. Here we show you how to validate your problem and target group analysis with the collected data — i.e. how to repeatedly revise and adapt it, use findings in a structured way and ensure that your solution is well tailored to the needs of your target group.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you're starting – or already working with your team on – an impact-driven startup.
- you've collected relevant data on the problems and challenges your target group and stakeholders face.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- test and challenge your assumptions.
- validate the data you've collected.
- do all of this in a clear and structured way.

## Validate your assumptions about the problem

These four steps will help you sharpen your problem analysis and develop solutions that truly fit your target group's needs.

### 1. ORGANIZE YOUR INTERVIEW DATA AND IDENTIFY THEMES

Gather all your notes, quotes, and observations from the interviews – use sticky notes or a digital tool.

Group similar responses together and look for recurring themes or patterns. Clustering insights into categories helps you prioritize and understand which needs are most urgent. For example, you might discover that certain challenges come up often or that your target group shares common behaviors.

### 2. REVIEW YOUR ASSUMPTIONS CRITICALLY

Take a close look at the assumptions you've made about the problem and your target group. Do the interview responses match your earlier research and expectations? Or do they challenge them?

### 3. UPDATE YOUR PROBLEM TREE AND SOCIAL CHANGE MATRIX

Use the validated insights from your interviews to refine your problem tree and your social change matrix. This gives you a well-grounded problem analysis of the issue – which is also useful for your communication or pitch deck.

### 4. CREATE A TARGET GROUP PROFILE

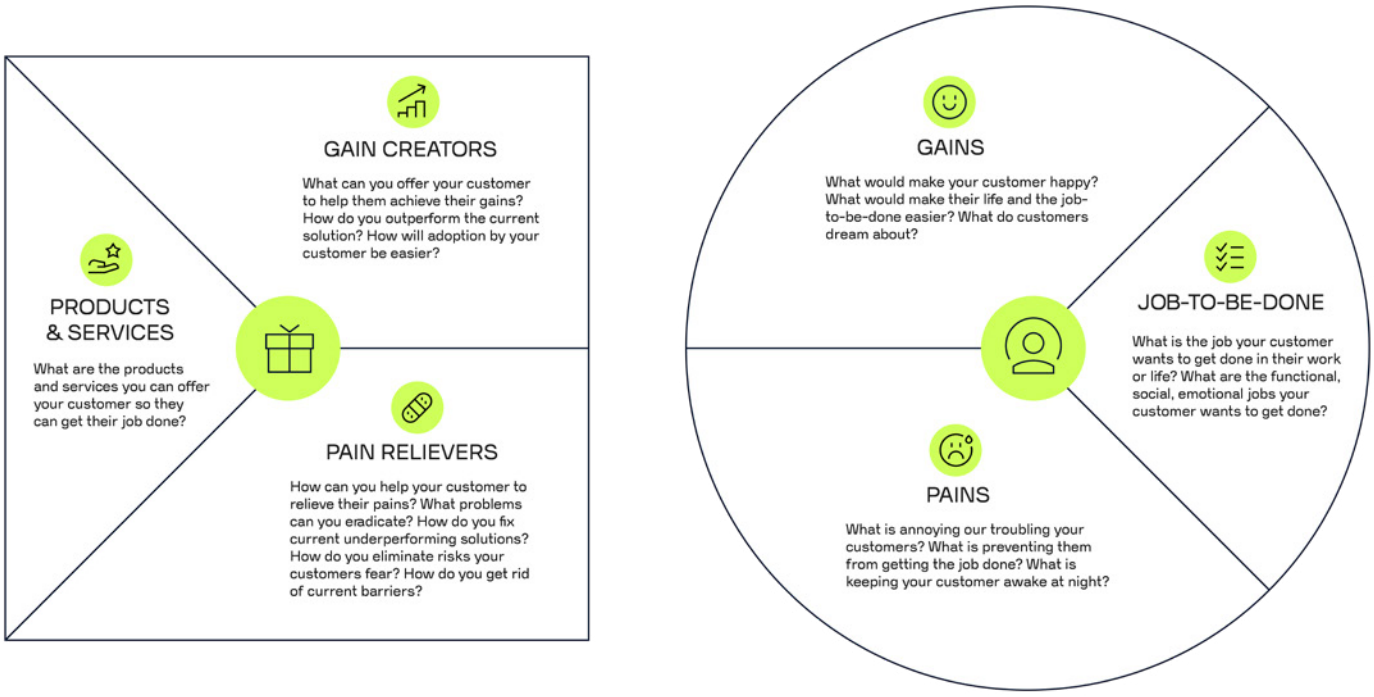
You can create this using either a persona or the value proposition canvas (a leaner alternative).

Personas are fictional but realistic profiles that help you understand your audience and design better solutions. You should consider the following points for each persona.

For each persona, include:

- A name and image to make them more relatable.
- Age, gender, education, job, location, income.
- Behavior patterns (e.g., What tech do they use?)
- Their goals and needs.
- Key pain points and challenges.
- Motivations and values – what drives them, what matters to them?

The value proposition canvas is another great tool to make sure your solution aligns with real needs. Start with the customer side (your target group) – you'll complete the solution side later during solution design.




3) Value Proposition Canvas

On the left-hand side, write down the challenges (pains) that your target group faces and which improvements will help them. On the right-hand side (circle), write which solutions your impact startup offers to support the target group. This lets you clearly match your solutions to your audience's needs – and check whether you're actually adding value.

→ NEXT CHAPTER: SOLUTION DESIGN
You've clearly defined the social problem, identified its root causes, and have analyzed the effects.

You also have a solid understanding of your target group's needs and challenges – and a persona or representative profile to work with. If all of that checks out, you're ready to move on to solution design.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROBLEM, TARGET GROUP AND STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

1. Take your time
Resist the urge to jump straight into solutions. Give yourself enough time for a solid analysis – but don't get lost in the details. We recommend the 10:10 rule: aim for 90% confidence, leave 10% room for flexibility.

2. Go deeper with stakeholders
Interview potential stakeholders in more depth. Observe how your target group behaves in real-life situations

3. Rework your problem statement
Challenge your original assumptions. Try framing the problem from different perspectives. Use methods like the 5 Whys technique to get to the root causes.

4. Mix your validation methods
Combine qualitative and quantitative research methods. Conduct experiments to test your assumptions.

5. Consider the bigger picture
Think systemically. Analyze the broader context and any external influencing factors. Map out the full ecosystem around the problem.

6. Stay flexible
Be open to changing your mind. New insights might challenge your initial thinking. Compare your findings with industry benchmarks or research studies.

# 2
# SOLUTION DESIGN

BUILD

## SOLUTION DESIGN: CREATING A SOLUTION THAT DRIVES REAL IMPACT

You've identified the problem – now it's time to develop innovative, impact-driven solutions. Tools like the impact ladder and SWOT analysis can help you move forward.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...
- you're planning to launch an impact startup – or already deep in the process with your team.
- you know what problem you want to solve, along with its causes and effects
- you understand your target group, their needs, and the other stakeholders involved.
- you've created a persona or a representative profile of your target group..

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...
- develop innovative approaches to tackle a social challenge.
- build hypotheses about the impact potential of your ideas.

## Review existing solutions and identify opportunities for innovation

Many social challenges already have solutions – developed and implemented by bold, committed people. If you're familiar with these solutions, you can adopt specific aspects or fill the gaps they leave behind.

### 1. DO YOUR RESEARCH

Start by exploring existing solutions, initiatives, and projects related to your problem. Look into government programs, nonprofits, private initiatives, tech-based approaches, and local efforts. The goal is to understand what's already being done – and what's missing.

### 2. USE A SWOT ANALYSIS TO EVALUATE EXISTING SOLUTIONS

Analyze how existing solutions work: Who do they reach? How effective are they? What impact have they had?

A SWOT analysis can help you identify strengths and weaknesses, spot opportunities, and understand the risks. Here's how to apply it:

- Identify strengths: What does this solution do well? What sets it apart? Why has it been successful?
- Identify weaknesses: Where are the gaps or challenges? What could be improved? What limits its impact?
- Identify opportunities: Examine the external factors that can have a positive impact on your solution. What trends, tools, or partnerships could make it even stronger? Is there potential for scaling or improvement?
- Recognize risks (threats): What risks could undermine its success? Are there competitors, funding gaps, or negative trends that might get in the way?

4) SWOT Analyse

### 3. Develop at least two solution ideas

Look for areas where new approaches can close gaps or push the field forward. These could include new technologies, creative business models, or fresh partnerships. Maybe there's an existing idea that hasn't been tried in your region – that could be your starting point.

Create at least two solution ideas that differ in one key aspect. This allows you to compare them later with your target group. For each version, write a clear hypothesis about why it might work better. That way, you'll be able to test and learn which approach has the most impact.

## First steps toward a potential business model

At this stage, you should start thinking about how to distinguish between your customers (those who pay for the solution) and your target group (those who benefit from it). This distinction is especially important for social enterprises and impact startups, since the people who benefit aren't always the ones footing the bill.

REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES

1. Customers and target group are the same

An app designed to support people with depression: Users pay for access to the app's features and directly benefit from tools like therapy modules, mood tracking, and peer support networks. In this case, the paying customer and the target group are one and the same.

2. Customers and target group are different

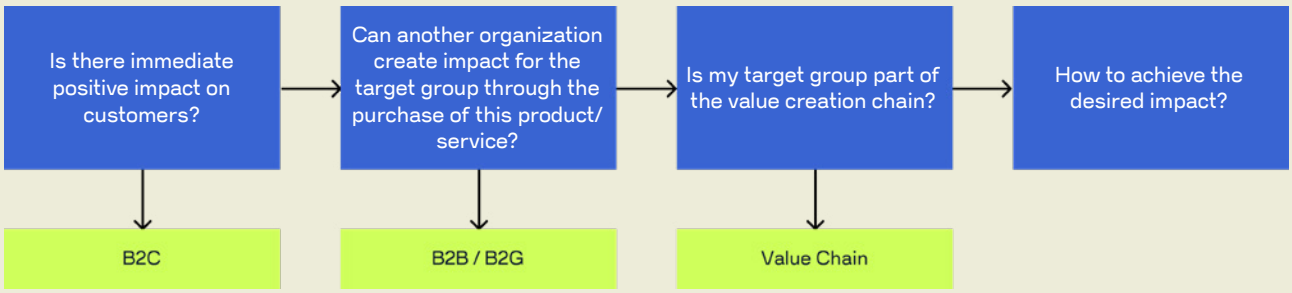
A company that makes sustainable water filters for use in developing countries: Here, the customers are aid organizations or governments that purchase the filters. The target group is the local population, who gains access to clean drinking water. In this case, a third party pays for the solution on behalf of the people who benefit from it.

3. The target group is part of the value chain

A coffee company wants to sell fairly traded, sustainably produced coffee in Germany. It ensures eco-friendly farming practices, fair wages, and safe working conditions, while keeping transport as sustainable and short as possible. In this model, impact is created across the value chain, and the customer in Germany pays for the product.

4. If none of these models apply

Think about how you can still create impact. That might include donating a share of your revenue or partnering with one or more nonprofits. But make sure your product or service also meets high sustainability standards on its own.




This chart highlights key questions to help you start developing a business model. Your model can combine multiple strategies..

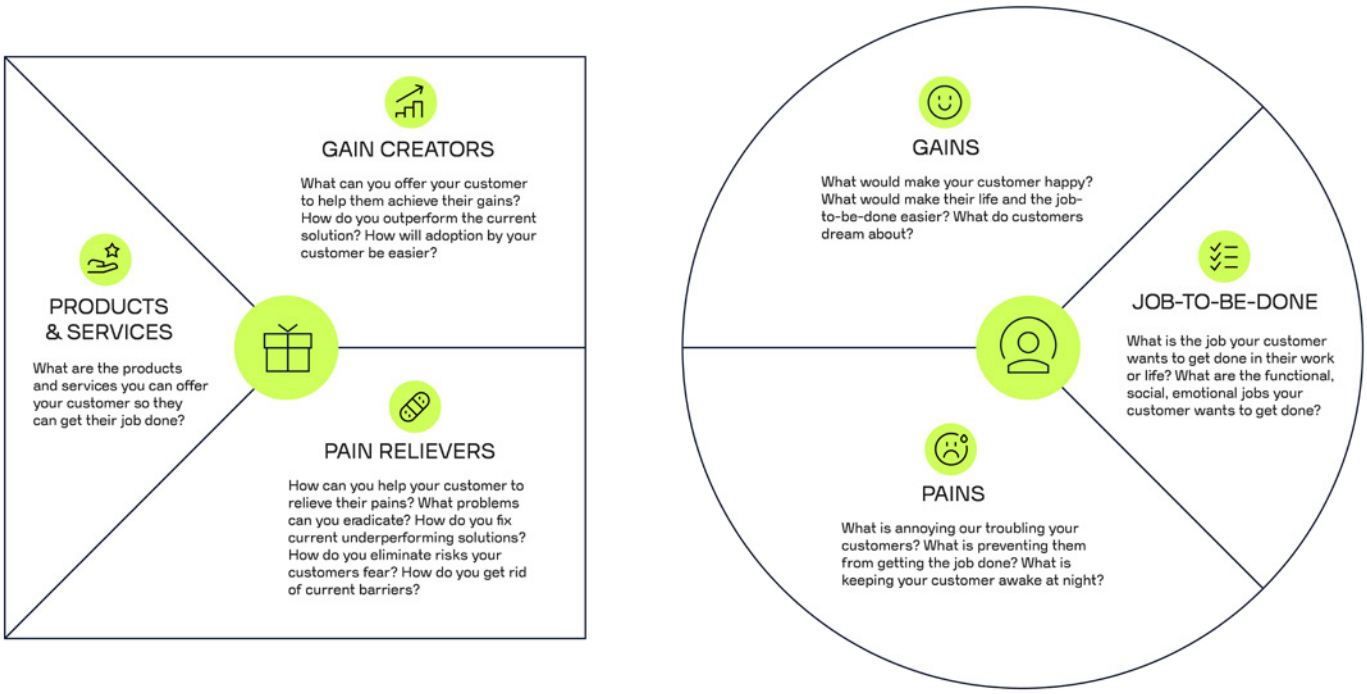
## Align your solution with customer needs

The value proposition canvas helps make sure your solution truly fits your customers. It has two parts: the customer side and the offering side. If your business creates direct impact for your customers, you've already worked through the customer side while analyzing the problem, your target group, and key stakeholders.

If you realize in this step that your customers are actually a third party helping you create impact, go back and fill out the customer side of the value proposition canvas again. Then move on to the offering side. This includes:

- Products and services: List what you offer. Include everything your impact startup provides – both tangible and intangible, like community or support.
- Problem solvers (pain relievers): Show how your solution helps solve the customer's problems. Make sure these are tailored to the specific pain points you've identified. Focus on solving the biggest one.
- Gain creators: Explain how your solution adds value and makes life better for your target group. What benefits do they get? Go beyond functionality – think about emotional connection and loyalty too.

In the end, compare both sides. The value proposition canvas is a tool you'll come back to again and again. Reviewing and refining it helps make sure your solutions stay effective.

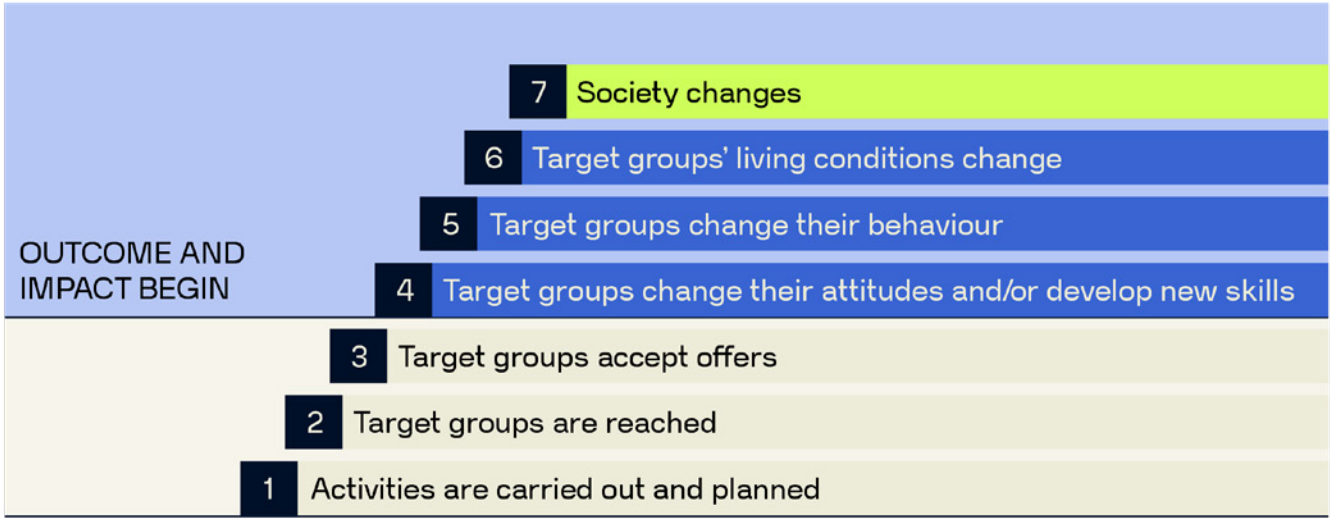



3) Value Proposition Canvas

# Test the impact potential of your ideas with the Impact Ladder

To build an impact-driven business, you need an impact logic that shows how your activities lead to long-term outcomes. The impact ladder helps you to clearly formulate your measures and goals. It shows the individual stages — from the inputs (resources), through the activities, to the results and long-term effects. Try to fill the impact ladder from top to bottom.

A RANGE OF IMPACT MODELS
There are several ways to structure your impact logic – like the IOOI model, Theory of Change, LogFrame, or the impact chain. In this playbook, we use the Impact Ladder.




5) Wirkungstreppe

## 1. Fill in the Impact Ladder for your solution ideas

Now it's time to test whether your ideas can solve the social problem you've identified and create the impact you're aiming for. Work through each step of the impact ladder to map your logic. Start with Step 1:

Step 1: Activities take place as planned (output)
Define the concrete actions or activities needed to implement your idea. These are your first outputs and the foundation for everything that follows. Ask yourselves:
What specific activities do we need to carry out?

Step 2: Target group is reached (output)
Estimate how many people in your target group you'll reach with your solution. This is another output and a key metric for measuring your project's success. Ask:
How many people in our target group do we want to reach with our solution?

Step 3: Target group engages with the solution (output)
Define how you expect your target group to accept and use your solution. This step is crucial to understanding how your idea creates change. Ask:
How should our target group respond to and engage with our offering??

Step 4: Awareness or skills of the target group change (outcome)
Describe the knowledge, attitudes, or skills your target group should gain. This is where impact begins – these are measurable outcomes that track progress. Ask:

What specific knowledge, mindset, or skills should our target group develop?

Step 5: Target group changes behavior (outcome)
Define what new behaviors you expect to see in your target group. Behavior change is a key milestone on the way to deeper outcomes. Ask:
What concrete actions or behaviors should change within our target group?

Step 6: The target group's living conditions change (outcome)
Describe how your solution improves the living conditions of your target group. This is the core outcome of your work. To define it clearly, ask:
What specific improvements in their lives are we aiming for?

Step 7: Society changes (impact)
Spell out your long-term goal – the broader societal change you want to help create. This is the ultimate impact. Ask:
What long-term change in society are we working toward?

Once your Impact Ladder is in place, think about the resources, means and inputs you'll need to carry out your activities. That includes funding, staff, materials, technology, as well as knowledge and networks.

ONE IMPACT LADDER PER TARGET GROUP
You've identified multiple target groups for your solution? In that case, it's best to create a separate impact ladder for each group. Then look closely at where these ladders intersect or overlap. That said, try to keep the number of target groups as small as possible – otherwise, your impact logic may lose focus..

→ NEXT CHAPTER: TEST YOUR SOLUTION IDEAS
You've made real progress: you've developed innovative solutions to address your problem and built an Impact Ladder.

The next step is to test your ideas with your target group to see if they hold up in practice. That's what we'll tackle in the next chapter.

TIPS FROM PHINEO EXPERTS:
COMMON MISTAKES WHEN BUILDING YOUR IMPACT LADDER

1. The target group isn't clearly defined in your goals
If it's unclear who your solution is actually for, your goals won't be effective.
What you can do: Link each impact goal to your target group. Example: "Children from educationally disadvantaged families, ages 6 to 8, are able to read better."

2. The goals are not formulated in a clear sentence. At best, they are listed as bullet points.
What you can do: Write your goals as clear, specific sentences. The more precise your goals are, the easier it is to define indicators for measuring success.

3. The goals are framed negatively.
What you can do: Phrase goals in a positive way. Positivity drives motivation and energy. Example: "Children ages 6 to 8 are able to read" is much stronger than "Children ages 6 to 8 no longer read poorly."

4. You've combined multiple goals with "and."
For example: "Children gain more knowledge and greater self-confidence." These are two separate goals that require different indicators and different ways of measuring progress. What you can do: Break them down into two clear sentences – one for each goal.

5. You're addressing different target groups in the same goal.
What you can do: Create a separate Impact Ladder for each target group. Then think about where those ladders overlap.

6. You're counting everyone who uses your service as part of your target group.
What you can do: Be specific about who your actual target group is, who belongs to a sub-group, and who falls outside your focus. What really matters for impact: that your actual target group is the one engaging with your solution.

7. You're aiming for unrealistic outcomes.
The fact that people in highly vulnerable situations – such as those experiencing homelessness, long-term unemployment, or addiction – actually use your solution may already indicate a change in behavior. Expecting them to transition quickly into full-time employment may not be realistic. What you can do: Reassess your assumptions realistically and talk them through with others. Keep your goals grounded in reality.

8. You're mixing up Step 4 and Step 5 – or linking them with "and."
Here's the difference: Step 4 is about internal change – new knowledge, skills, awareness, or attitudes. Step 5 is about external action – what people actually do differently as a result.

9. Many people struggle to tell the difference between Step 6 and Step 7 of the Impact Ladder.
Here's a simple rule of thumb: Up to and including Step 6, the focus is on individuals – people you reach directly or indirectly through an intermediary group, like parents, educators, or caregivers. -

Step 7, on the other hand, is about broader societal impact or change within a larger system. That doesn't have to involve an entire country – it could refer to a neighborhood, a district, or a specific region, depending on the scope of your project.

MEASURE

# SOLUTION DESIGN: HOW IMPACT STARTUPS CAN TEST THEIR IDEAS

You've already developed innovative ideas to tackle a problem your impact startup is targeting? Now it's time to test your assumptions and find out which solution works best. Talking to your target group will help you get there.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...
- you're planning to launch an impact startup or are already working on one with your team.
- you've developed innovative solutions to a specific problem.
- you understand your target group and their needs.
- you've created an Impact Ladder.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...
- collect feedback on your solution ideas.
- identify the most promising approach.
- identify areas for improvement.

## Collect feedback on your solution ideas

To test how effective your ideas really are, the best approach is to get direct input from your target group. Interviews are a great way to do this. With clear, focused questions, you can assess the potential, acceptance, and impact of your ideas—and gain valuable insights for further development. Follow these four steps:

### 1. CHOOSE THE RIGHT INTERVIEW PARTNERS

This step is key to getting meaningful results. Make sure to include a range of perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences. Alongside people from your target group, consider speaking with experts and others working in similar fields.

### 2. CREATE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR YOUR TARGET GROUP

The following question ideas are just a starting point – adapt them to fit your solution and your audience. Depending on the question, you can offer multiple-choice options, rating scales, or open-ended answers.

Evaluate the proposed solution
- What aspects of our solution do you like most?
- Are there any parts you find problematic or ineffective?
- How easy is our solution to understand and use?
- What suggestions do you have to improve our concept?

Relevance and acceptance of the solution
- How likely are you to use our solution?
- What would motivate you to actively use it?
- What might prevent you from using it?

Assessing potential impact
- To what extent do you agree that our solution could lead to positive change in your environment?
- What specific positive changes could our solution bring about?

Feasibility and resources
- How realistic do you think implementing our solution in your environment is?
- What challenges or barriers might arise?
- What resources or support would you need to use it successfully?
- Would you be able to use the solution on your own, or would you need help?

Cooperation and engagement
- How willing are you to actively contribute to improving and adapting our solution?
- What kind of support or collaboration could you offer to help us develop the solution further?

### 3. WRITE A CLEAR, FRIENDLY INVITATION TO THE INTERVIEW

Be transparent about what participants can expect. Many people will wonder if they need to prepare or how much time it will take. Explain the purpose of the interview, how long it will last, and make it clear that no preparation is needed. Thank them in advance for their time and emphasize how valuable their input is to the project.

### 4. CREATE A COMFORTABLE ATMOSPHERE

This is key to open, honest conversations. Start by briefly introducing yourselves and your project, and explain why you're doing the interview. Make sure participants feel at ease – be friendly, keep the setting relaxed, and let them know they can ask questions or share concerns at any time.

→ NEXT CHAPTER: REALITY CHECK

You've gathered feedback, identified areas for improvement, and learned which ideas resonate most.

Now it's time to run a reality check and prioritize your next steps..

LEARN

# SOLUTION DESIGN FOR IMPACT STARTUPS: REALITY CHECK FOR YOUR IDEAS

Before you invest time and resources into building a prototype, it's worth validating and refining your ideas— meaning you revise and adapt them based on feedback from your target audience and the insights you've gathered. This not only saves effort but also boosts your chances of success.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you're planning to launch an impact startup or are already working on one with your team.
- you understand your target group and their needs.
- you've tested your solution ideas and collected feedback.
- you've created an Impact Ladder.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- confirm or improve your solution ideas.
- sharpen your impact logic and refine your Impact Ladder.
- prioritize your next steps.

## Validate your assumptions about your solution ideas

By systematically checking your assumptions and comparing them with insights from interviews, you can sharpen your ideas, set priorities, and develop a clear impact logic. We recommend the following three steps:

### 1. GROUP YOUR INTERVIEW INSIGHTS BY TOPIC

Collect and note down all statements, observations, and quotes from your interviews – either on sticky notes or in a digital format.

Group similar responses and identify recurring themes and patterns. These clusters help you structure your insights, set priorities, and see which ideas resonated most with your audience.

### 2. REVIEW YOUR ASSUMPTIONS CRITICALLY

Take a close look at the assumptions you've made about your solution. Do the interview responses align with your research and expectations?

### 3. REFINE YOUR IMPACT LOGIC USING YOUR IMPACT LADDER

Use the Impact Ladder you created in "Solution design: Creating a solution that drives real impact" to map the path from problem to solution to impact and ensure that your impact logic is coherent. Supplement and update your Impact Ladder with your validated insights – these impact goals will later guide your impact measurement.

# Effort-impact matrix: are your ideas worth implementing?

To see which of your ideas offer the most value for a reasonable amount of effort, use the effort-impact-matrix. This tool is especially helpful for social startups with limited resources. You can estimate impact and effort based on your interview findings and a rough input calculation.

## 1. DEFINE THE X AND Y AXES

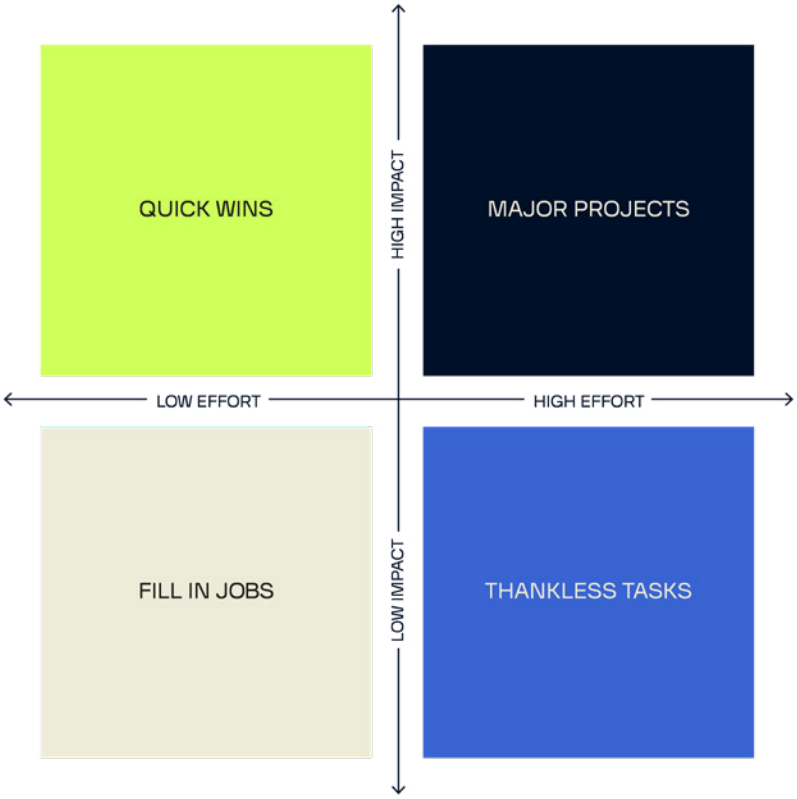
- X-axis (Effort/feasibility): This measures how difficult an idea is to implement—consider time, cost, required resources, or technical complexity. The scale runs from "high effort/difficult to implement" (right) to "low effort/easy to implement" (left).
- Y-axis (impact): This represents the potential social impact of your idea, from "low impact" (bottom) to "high impact" (top).

## 2. ASSESS AND PLACE YOUR IDEAS

- Evaluate each of your ideas using the two criteria:
- Impact: How much benefit or change could the idea generate?
- Effort/feasibility: How complex, costly, or resource-intensive is it to implement?
- Then, plot each idea on the matrix accordingly.

## 3. PRIORITIZE YOUR SOLUTIONS

- Quick wins (top left): High impact, low effort – start here. These ideas are easy to implement and deliver big results.
- Major projects (top right): High impact, high effort. These projects are worth doing, but they need careful planning and significant resources.
- Fill-ins (bottom left): Low impact, low effort – Nice-to-haves if you have extra time or capacity.
- Thankless tasks (bottom right): Low impact, high effort – best avoided; they're not worth the investment




5) Effort-Impact-Matrix

→ NEXT CHAPTER: BUILD YOUR PROTOTYPE
Can you clearly define the problem, target group, and expected impact, and back it all up with data? Have you developed a solution idea that's been well received? Great. Do you also have the financial, technical, and human resources you'll need?

If so, you're ready to move on to prototyping .

HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP VALIDATE YOUR IDEAS AND IMPACT LOGIC

1. Find more creative solutions

Use creativity techniques like brainstorming or mind mapping. Look at the problem from different angles by involving more stakeholders. Explore how similar challenges have been tackled in other industries or contexts.

2. Take an iterative approach
Test parts of your solution before building a full prototype. Use your Impact Ladder to structure these test steps logically – and refine them as you go.

3. Prioritize key features
Create a ranked list of features based on what matters most to your target group. Focus on the core elements that address the problem most effectively.

4. Evaluate your ideas more systematically
Define clear criteria to assess your solution ideas. Use a comparison table to objectively evaluate different options, factoring in feasibility, cost, and potential impact.

5. Shorten your feedback loops
Start gathering feedback earlier – and do it more often. It'll help you adjust faster and stay on track.

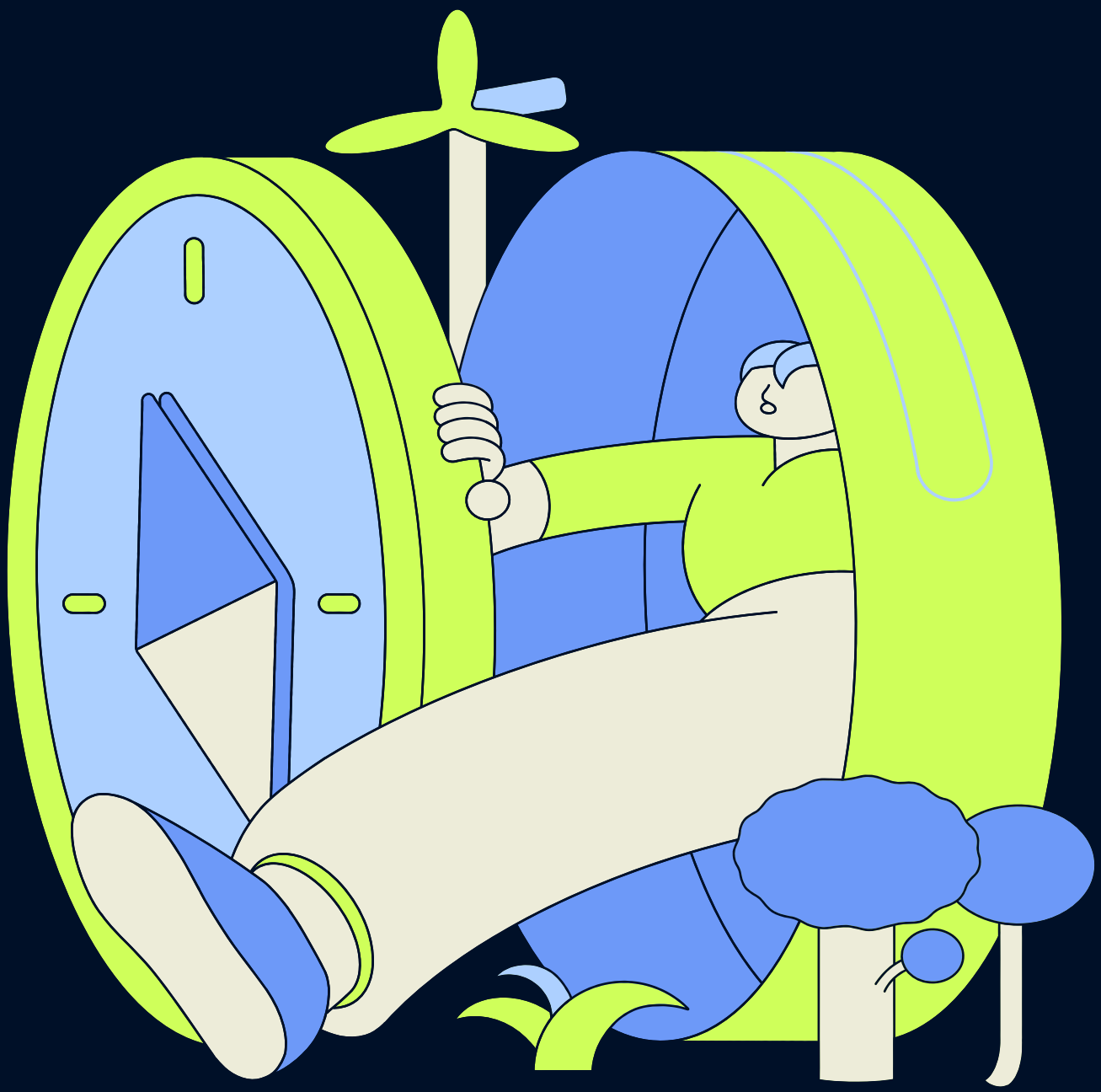
TIPS TO HELP YOU VALIDATE THE PROBLEM AND YOUR TARGET GROUP

1. Analyze the problem more thoroughly
Make sure you truly understand the underlying issue. Go deeper with your situational analysis to get a clearer picture of the current state. Revisit and question your original assumptions.

2. Deepen your understanding of the target group
Conduct more interviews or surveys to gain deeper insights into your target groups' needs and pain points.

3. Reassess your goals
Check whether your goals are still relevant and achievable. Define clear, measurable success criteria for your solution ideas..

# PROTOTYPING PHASE



# 1 PROTOTYPE DEVELOPMENT AND MARKET ANALYSIS

BUILD

## PROTOTYPING FOR IMPACT STARTUPS: BUILD YOUR FIRST PROTOTYPE AND IDENTIFY KEY METRICS

In the prototyping phase, you turn your validated idea into a simple version of your solution and start gathering real feedback from your target audience. Here, you'll learn how to build a functional prototype, and how to start measuring your impact early using one key metric.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you're planning to found an impact startup or are already deep into it with your team.
- you have a clear understanding of your target group.
- you can clearly define the problem, your solution, and the impact you aim to create.
- you have the resources to build a prototype.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- develop a working prototype.
- identify your one metric that matters (OMTM) for early-stage impact measurement.

### Build a simple prototype

For your first prototype, focus on the core functions that solve the main problem your target group is facing. Here's how to get started:

#### 1. IDENTIFY THE MOST IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS

Figure out which core functions are essential to solving the main issue facing your target group. This might include specific services like one-on-one support, the core content of a workshop, or tangible tools within a particular project

### 2. START WITH THE SIMPLEST VERSION OF YOUR SOLUTION

Begin with the most basic version of your solution and build from there. It doesn't need to be perfect or polished – just a rough draft that shows how your solution could work . This is your low fidelity prototype. Here are some common examples:

- Landing page: Create a simple website to showcase your solution. If possible, include calls-to-action that test users can click – and set up conversion tracking to measure how they respond.
- Physical products: Use basic materials like paper, cardboard, or LEGO to bring your idea to life. Test it with your group (e.g., through focus groups) and gather their feedback.
- Software: Build wireframes or clickable mockups. Let people interact with them and observe their behavior.
- Services: Use simple formats like role-playing or visual mockups to illustrate your concept. A service blueprint can help map out key processes, touchpoints with your target group , and intended impact. Tools like Miro, Mural, Canva, or Figma are great for visualizing this. Watch how people engage with your mock service and take notes on their reactions.

## Find your key metric for early-stage impact (Impact Ladder – Level 5)

At this point, it's important that you've already created an Impact Ladder for your project. If you haven't done that yet, it's best to do so now. We provide a step-by-step guide to building such a ladder in chapter "Solution design: Creating a solution that drives real impact."

### 1. FOCUS ON OUTCOMES

Choose a metric that sits at level 5 of your Impact Ladder and directly reflects measurable progress toward your main goal. In addition to this impact metric, the next step is to measure how appealing and useful your solution is. You'll find more on that in chapter "Prototype in real-world testing: Collect feedback and measure impact."

WHY LEVEL 5?

- Direct impact: Level 5 reflects changes in behavior – clear, measurable outcomes driven by your prototype.
- Meaningful results: It shows concrete changes but is still short-term enough to be realistic for a prototype, unlike level 6, which is often too long-term.
- Faster feedback loop: Changes at level 5 are easier to track quickly, which is crucial when iterating on a prototype.
- Relevance for stakeholders: Behavioral change is often more compelling to funders and partners than just output numbers.

EXAMPLES OF LEVEL 5 INDICATORS:

- Frequency and quality of actions by the target group that reflect behavior change
- Number of participants applying new skills in their daily lives
- Shifts in the target group's purchasing habits after an intervention
- Use of preferred communication channels after training
- Changes in online behavior, like increased interaction with specific digital content or platforms

### 2. USE SMART CRITERIA

Define your one metric that matters (OMTM) using the SMART framework.

- Specific: Clearly defined and unambiguous
- Measurable: Quantifiable
- Achievable: Realistic given your current resources
- Relevant: Aligned with your broader objectives
- Time-bound: Set within a clear timeframe (two to four months).

### 3. PREPARE TO TRACK YOUR KEY METRIC

Set up a system to measure your key metric accurately and consistently. Start by defining a baseline – this is your reference point for comparing results before and after your intervention (e.g., number of people aware of the importance of healthy eating or equipped with stress resilience skills). Ideally, use official statistics to establish your baseline. Avoid relying on self-assessments alone, as that could increase the risk of impact washing.

Set clear target values so you can track exactly how much progress you're making during the prototyping phase. And remember: being impact-driven is an iterative process. You'll need to make adjustments and keep learning as you go!!

→ NEXT CHAPTER: GATHERING FEEDBACK

You did it! You've built your first prototype and defined the key metrics for an initial impact assessment.

In the next chapter, you'll test both by gathering feedback from your target group and collecting initial outcome data. This will help you spot what needs improving.

MEASURE

# PROTOTYPE IN REAL-WORLD TESTING: COLLECT FEEDBACK AND MEASURE IMPACT

Already built a prototype for your impact startup? Now it's time to gather real data on how it's used and what impact it has. Whether your prototype is digital or physical, thorough testing is essential to improve it. In this chapter, we introduce different testing methods you can use depending on the type of prototype.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you're planning to found an impact startup or are already in the middle of building one with your team.
- you have a clear understanding of your target group.
- you can clearly define the problem, your solution, and the impact you aim to create.
- you've developed a functional prototype.
- you've defined a key metric (OMTM) to measure early impact.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- gather valuable feedback from your target group.
- collect initial data on output and outcome indicators.
- identify specific areas for improvement.

## Landing page testing

Campaign tests are a simple and cost-effective way to find out how well your prototype resonates with your target audience. They offer valuable insights into what grabs attention and drives engagement.

### 1. SET CLEAR TEST GOALS

Decide which aspects of your prototype you want to test (e.g., participant interests, conversion rate, messaging, engagement). Define measurable KPIs (e.g., click-through rate, sign-ups, inquiries).

### 2. SET UP YOUR CAMPAIGNS

GOOGLE ADS

- Create a search network campaign.
- Choose relevant keywords that match your prototype.
- Write clear, compelling ad copy that communicates your offer.

LINKEDIN ADS

- Use sponsored content or text ads.
- Narrow your target group by industry, job title, company size, etc.
- Create engaging ads with a strong, clear promise.

### 3. A/B TEST DIFFERENT AD VARIATIONS

Try out different audiences, keywords, or messages to see what works best. Start with a small budget to reduce risk, then increase your spend gradually based on what performs well.

# Testing digital and non-digital prototypes: check accessibility and acceptance

Use testing to make sure your solution iseasy to use and meets the needs of the target group. You can test both digital and non-digital prototypes – like a software tool, app, physical product, or service

## 1. DEFINE CLEAR GOALS

Decide exactly what you want to test – this could be a website, an app, a role-play exercise, or a click-through dummy. You can run both qualitative and quantitative tests. In practice, qualitative testing is more common at this stage.

QUALITATIVE USABILITY TESTS:
These tests focus on how people use your prototype. They're great for spotting usability issues and improving the experience.

QUANTITATIVE USABILITY TESTS:
These tests look at measurable outcomes – like task success rates or time spent on a task – and help you set benchmarks.

## 2. CHOOSE YOUR TESTING METHOD

There are several effective methods to choose from:

- One-on-one interviews: Talk to individual participants about their experience with your prototype.
- Field tests: Observe people using your prototype in a real-world setting, then interview them.
- Focus groups: Bring together potential users to discuss your prototype in a group setting.
- Expert reviews: Ask professionals in your field to evaluate your prototype.

## 3. RECRUIT PARTICIPANTS

Select people who match your target group. Aim for 5 to 8 participants to gather meaningful insights.

TARGET GROUP VS. CUSTOMERS
In the Lean Impact Journey, we distinguish between the target group when talking about your impact model and product, and customers when it comes to your business model.

How you use these two terms in your startup depends on your solution. In this playbook, the target group refers both to people who use the solution and to those who benefit from it.
Sometimes those groups are the same. If they're not, make sure to recruit test participants from both..

## 4. CREATE A TEST SCENARIO AND TASKS

Design realistic usage scenarios for your prototype and define clear tasks. Make sure the scenarios are relevant and easy to understand – clear, specific, and measurable. Decide whether the test will take place in a lab, remotely, or in the real-life setting where your solution will be used. Ensure all tools and materials are working properly.

## 5. RUN THE TEST

During the tests, ask participants to think out loud as they use the prototype. Watch closely how they interact with it and document your insights so you can make targeted improvements.

USER TESTING
The terms "user testing" or "usability testing" come from the software sector – but they can be easily adapted to non-digital innovations . Here are a few tips:

- Refer to "participants" or "target groups" instead of "users."
- Focus on aspects of your solution instead of features.
- Uses physical prototypes, role-plays or simulations.
- Clearly describe the scenarios in which your solution can be used.
- Create a realistic environment to observe participants' reactions.

## A/B testing: Compare different versions of your prototype

A/B testing lets you compare different versions of your prototype to find out which one creates the greatest possible impact. You can test things like navigation elements, buttons, and visuals – as well as different formats for coaching, training, support services, design choices, or core features. This helps you see which version of your prototype delivers the best results. Show two different versions (version A and version B) to different parts of your target group – randomly assigned.

### 1. DEFINE CLEAR GOALS

Select the aspects of your prototype you want to test. Set specific metrics and success criteria . It's important to define SMART metrics that will help you measure how well your solution works. These could be conversion rates, behavior changes, or qualitative indicators – depending on your product or service. You'll find more on the SMART method under "How to build your first prototype and find your key metric." Make sure to split your test group randomly between Version A and Version B.

### 2. COLLECT FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

After the A/B test, gather feedback from participants – for example, through a survey. It can include multiple choice, open-ended questions, or rating scales. Here are some typical questions:

- What were your first impressions of the version you saw?
- Was there anything missing?
- How satisfied were you with the version you used?
- Which elements did you find especially helpful?
- What didn't you like or found confusing?
- How did you feel about the design and ease of use?
- What changes would you make to improve this version?
- How likely are you to click the button in version A/B?
- What would you change about the version you were shown?

In addition to written surveys , it can be helpful to invite some participants for short follow-up interviews. This allows you to dig deeper into the A/B test results and combine quantitative data with personal insights, giving you a better understanding of how your target group experiences your solution.

## Measure your key metric (OMTM) at level 5 of the Impact Ladder

### 1. ASK YOUR TARGET GROUP ABOUT EARLY IMPACT

To understand the early social or environmental impact of your prototype, it's important to measure your one metric that matters (OMTM). This helps you see whether you're on the right track to achieving long-term im-

pact.

To find out whether your prototype is already making a difference at level 5 of the Impact Ladder, you can ask questions like:

- How has the behavior of your target group changed as a result of using the prototype?
- What specific skills or abilities have users gained or improved through the prototype?
- In what ways has the prototype positively affected the quality of life or work situationof your target group?
- What measurable improvements related to the core problem have been observed thanks to the prototype?
- How lastingare the behavior changes or improvements you've achieved?

→ NEXT CHAPTER: MARKET ANALYSIS
At this point, you've collected feedback from participants, gathered initial data on outcome indicators, and identified where and how your prototype can be improved.

Before you validate those findings and build your business model, we recommend doing a market analysis. You'll work on that in the next chapter.

BUILD

# MARKET ANALYSIS FOR IMPACT STARTUPS: HOW TO CARVE OUT YOUR SPACE

Before you dive into what your prototype is telling you and start shaping your business model, it's essential to understand the market you're entering. A clear, well-informed market analysis lays the groundwork to grow your impact startup and find the right product–market fit..

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you're getting ready to found an impact startup – or already building one with your team.
- you know exactly who your target group is.
- you can clearly explain the problem, your solution, and the impact you want to make.
- you've got the resources to build a prototype.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you want exploring your market size and how it's evolving.
- you want to spot trends and understand outside forces that could shape your market.

## Step-by-step market analysis

A strong market analysis helps you understand your product's potential and how to position it effectively. It provides essential insights to shape your product and business model – including market size and growth, your competition, alternative solutions, and your customer segments and their needs.

### 1. IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM YOU WANT TO SOLVE

Before diving into market numbers, make sure you can clearly define the problem you're addressing. Ask yourself:

- Problem and your USP: What problem are you solving? What makes your approach stand out? Clarity here will guide the rest of your analysis.
- Impact angle: How does your solution differ from traditional ones in terms of social or environmental benefit? Be specific and keep it short – what's the positive change you're driving?

Ideally, you have already tackled this in "Problem and target group analysis: How to validate for impact startups" and have clearly defined your solution in "Solution design: Creating a solution that drives real impact". If not, consider the following steps:

### 2. DETERMINE YOUR TOTAL ADDRESSABLE MARKET (TAM)

Your total addressable market (TAM) is the full market your solution could reach in theory. The basic formula:

Total number of potential customers x average annual revenue per customer

To size your TAM, look for up-to-date industry reports, market data, and open sources – think government publications or trade association data. Also ask yourself the following questions:

- How big is the market really?
- Which products or services are truly part of the same market as yours?
- Who could benefit from your solution, even if you're not reaching them yet?

### 3. DEFINE YOUR SERVICEABLE AVAILABLE MARKET (SAM)

Your serviceable available market (SAM) is the portion of the TAM you could realistically serve. It's the audience you could reach if resources weren't a limiting factor. The formula is as follows:

Number of reachable customers x average annual revenue per customer

To calculate the SAM, narrow down your target group by geography, demographics, industry, or other filters. Consider your product specifications and sales capacity and ask yourself the following questions:

- Which customer segments are most likely to benefit from your solution?
- Are there geographic, demographic, or behavioral factors that shape your market?
- Are there technical, legal, or logistical barriers that could limit your reach?

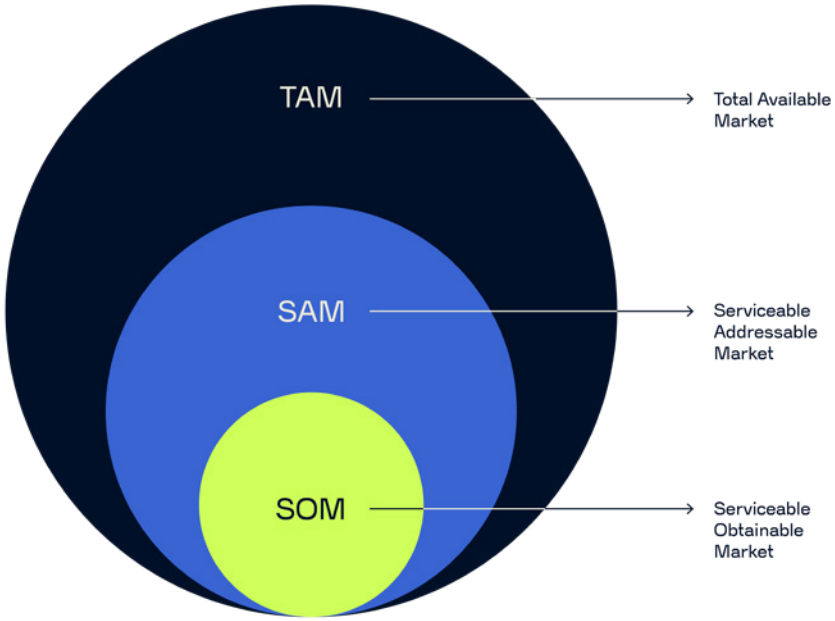
### 4. ESTIMATE YOUR SERVICEABLE OBTAINABLE MARKET (SOM)

Your serviceable obtainable market (SOM) is the slice of the market you can realistically capture with the resources and capacity you have right now.

Realistically achievable market share x SAM

To calculate it, assess where you stand in the market and how competitive your space is. If you've already explored existing alternatives in chapter „Solution design: Creating a solution that drives real impact", you're off to a good start. Next, look at the resources you can actually use to win market share – like your sales capacity, marketing budget, and partnerships. And ask yourself the following questions:

- With the team and tools you have today, how much of your SAM can you actually reach?
- What competitive dynamics could limit or boost your ability to grow?
- How long will it take to get there?




6) TAM SAM SOM Analysis

### 5. DRAW CLEAR LINES BETWEEN TAM, SAM, AND SOM

To make your market analysis solid and credible, define each segment – TAM, SAM, and SOM – clearly and separately. Avoid overlaps, use distinct criteria, and document your assumptions and sources so others can follow your logic. And ask yourself the following questions:

- Have you clearly defined non-overlapping criteria for TAM, SAM, and SOM?
- Can you clearly delineate each area?
- Are you sure you're not counting part of your SAM again in your TAM?

### 6. EXAMINE TRENDS AND EXTERNAL FORCES

Now it's time to zoom out and consider the bigger picture. What industry trends, policy shifts, or social trends could accelerate – or block – your impact? Look at things like emerging technologies, regulatory developments, or growing interest in sustainable finance. Then think through what external risks – such as legal changes or economic volatility – might affect your path. Also ask yourself the following questions:

- What trends could shape the success of your startup?
- What external shifts should you keep an eye on so you can adapt quickly?
- Are there any political or legal changes that could affect your users or your solution?

→ NEXT UP: VALIDATE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

You've just wrapped up a key milestone – mapping out your market and identifying the trends that could influence your startup's future.

,Now it's time to stress-test your assumptions. In the next chapter, we'll walk you through how to connect with your target audience and get real feedback on your idea.

MEASURE

# REALITY CHECK FOR IMPACT STARTUPS: MAKE SURE YOUR MARKET ANALYSIS HOLDS UP

Before you build out a business model, take a moment to make sure your view of the market is grounded—and that your solution actually solves the problem you've identified. Testing your market analysis helps you catch blind spots and adjust your solution to better match what the market really needs.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you're getting ready to found an impact startup—or already building one with your team.
- you know exactly who your target group is.
- you can clearly explain the problem, your solution, and the impact you want to make.
- you've got the resources to build a prototype.
- you've already carried out a market analysis.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- test your assumptions about the market and your competitive edge.
- get direct feedback from industry experts and potential users.

## How to validate your market analysis in 5 steps

The following steps will help you to validate your analysis through data comparison, expert feedback and primary research, identify deviations and adapt your strategy accordingly.

### 1. COMPARES DATA FROM DIFFERENT SOURCES

To validate your analysis, you should compare results from different sources and methods. Combine quantitative and qualitative data to get a more comprehensive picture. Look for similarities and deviations — these can provide important clues as to where there is still room for improvement.

### 2. GET EXPERTS INVOLVED

Have your market analysis carried out by industry experts or experienced market participants. Feedback from these experts helps you to identify blind spots and assess your assumptions more realistically.

### 3. CONDUCTS PRIMARY RESEARCH

Primary research is another step to test your assumptions. This is about collecting new data directly rather than relying on existing sources. Conduct your own surveys or interviews with potential customers to ensure that the data you are relying on holds up in practice.

### 4. PERFORMS COMPARISONS WITH INDUSTRY BENCHMARKS

Compare your results with standards and statistics from your industry. If there are deviations, analyze them carefully — are they an indication of a gap in the market or have you perhaps made the wrong assumptions?

### 5. GET FEEDBACK FROM COLLEAGUES THROUGH PEER REVIEWS

Ask your colleagues for peer reviews. Discuss the methodology of your analysis and the conclusions drawn from it. This will ensure that your assessments are sound.

→ NEXT CHAPTER: BUILDING A BUSINESS MODEL

You have reviewed your assumptions about the market and your competitive advantages.

In the next chapter it's time to validate the findings of your prototype and develop a business model. If you have not yet defined your One Metric That Matters (OMTM) and methods for measuring impact, we recommend that you do so first in chapter "Prototyping for impact startups: Developing your first prototype and finding key metrics" to do so.

LEARN

# FROM PROTOTYPE TO IMPACT: BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL FOR YOUR IMPACT STARTUP

A prototype isn't just about proving your idea works, it also has to make sense from a business perspective and create real impact. In this chapter, you'll connect the dots between the impact-driven side of your work ("Prototype in real-world testing: Collect feedback and measure impact") and the business side ("Reality check for impact startups: Make sure your market analysis holds up") to start building a model that's both viable and mission-aligned.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you're planning to launch an impact startup or already working on one with your team.
- you have a clear understanding of your target group.
- you can clearly define the problem, your solution, and the intended impact.
- you've got the resources to build a prototype.
- you've already conducted a market analysis.
- you've defined a key metric (OMTM) for early impact tracking and chosen your approach to measuring impact.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- refine your prototype based on feedback and market insights.
- build a business model that's built to last.
- sharpen your impact metrics even further.

## Making sense of your prototype test data

Analyzing your prototype test results is essential for making informed decisions as you refine your solution.

### 1. ORGANIZE YOUR INTERVIEW DATA AND SPOT PATTERNS

Start by collecting all your notes, observations, and recordings in one place. Then group the data by test task or by different parts of the prototype. Identify patterns and trends by looking for recurring issues or comments – especially moments that stood out as particularly smooth or frustrating.

### 2. DIG INTO THE DATA

Prioritize your findings by rating how serious each issue is. Prioritize problems that multiple participants experienced. Quantify your results by calculating success rates for specific tasks and measuring time spent on different interactions.

For qualitative feedback, take time to understand comments in context. Highlight key phrases, recurring themes, and anything that signals deeper user needs or challenges.

### 3. VISUALIZE WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED

Use charts or heat maps to highlight how participants interacted with your prototype. Customer journey maps or user flow diagrams are also helpful – they show each step a participant takes, from entry points to actions, decisions, and end goals. These visuals make it easier to spot friction points and areas for improvement.

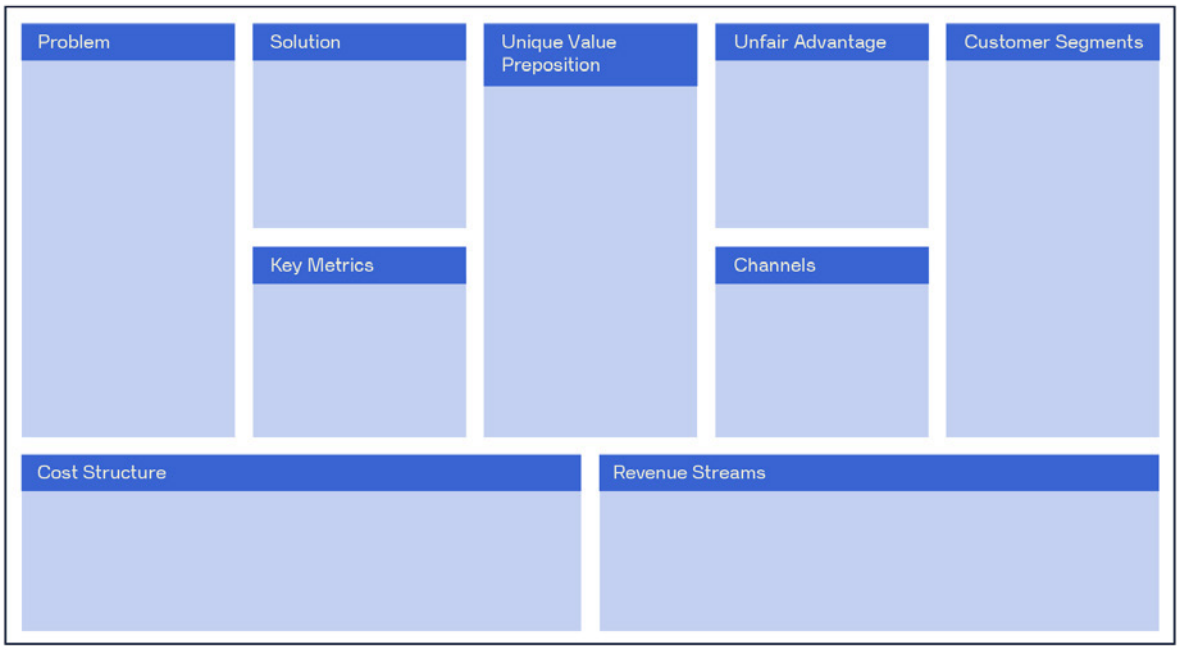
> WHAT'S A CUSTOMER JOURNEY?
> Originally from the software sector, the customer journey can be adapted for any technology-based innovation. To apply it beyond digital products:
> - Think in terms of participants or your target group – not just "users."
> - Track interactions instead of clicks or conversions.

### 4. REVISIT YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

Your test results may reveal that you misunderstood the core problem, focused on the wrong part of the solution, or selected the wrong test audience. Don't hesitate to revise your assumptions based on what you've learned – and if needed, run another round of testing. If the results shift how you think about your impact, update your impact model and metrics to reflect those new insights.

# Developing a business model and connecting it to your impact strategy

A strong business model is the foundation of of any successful impact startup. One useful tool to help you map it out is the Lean Canvas .




7) Lean Canvas

Here are a few steps to get you started.

## 1. CLEARLY DEFINE THE PROBLEM

Identify the one to three most important group faces. Then describe how those problems are currently being addressed – or not – by existing solutions.

→ If you're feeling stuck here, go back to the chapter
"Problem, target group, and stakeholder analysis: Your first step toward launching an impact startup."

TARGET GROUP VS. CUSTOMERS
In the Lean Impact Journey, we distinguish between your target group – when you're focusing on your impact and product – and your customers – when you're working on your business model.
How you apply this distinction for your startup depends on your solution. In this playbook, the target group refers to the people who use or benefit from your solution. In some cases, these may be the same people; in others, they may not.

Keep in mind: your customers and target group may interact the solution differently with or benefit from your solution in different ways. To keep things clear, you can use two colors to show both groups in your Lean Canvas..

## 2. WRITE A CLEAR UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION (UVP)

Create a simple, compelling core message that explains what makes your solution unique – and worth choosing. This is your unique value proposition (UVP). It should clearly express the value your solution delivers

to customers and answer the question: Why you? Focus on how your startup meets customer needs better, faster, or more meaningfully than existing alternatives.

### 3. DEFINE YOUR CUSTOMER SEGMENTS

Identify who your customers and early adopters are, and describe these groups in detail.

> → If you're feeling stuck here, go back to the chapter "Problem, target group, and stakeholder analysis: Your first step toward launching an impact startup."

### 4. CHOOSE THE RIGHT CHANNELS

Decide how you'll reach your customers. Are they easier to engage online or offline? Does it make more sense to connect with them directly or through partners or platforms?

### 5. DESCRIBE YOUR SOLUTION CLEARLY

Once you've figured out how to reach your potential customers, describe your solution in a way that's short, sharp, and easy to understand.

> → If you're feeling stuck here, go back to the chapter "Solution design: Creating a solution that drives real impact."

### 6. DEFINE YOUR UNFAIR ADVANTAGE

An unfair advantage refers to aspects of your business model that competitors can't easily copy or replicate. It's about the unique features or resources that set your startup apart and are hard to imitate. Think about what makes your solution truly distinctive and difficult to duplicate – like a patent, for example.

### 7. MAP OUT AND ASSESS POTENTIAL REVENUE STREAMS

Now it's time to explore how your startup could make money. Some common revenue models include:

- Direct sale of products or services
- Subscriptions
- Freemium (a free version with paid upgrades)
- Licensing
- Consulting services
- Partnerships and sponsoring

Once you've listed the options, evaluate each one based on:

- How well it supports your impact goals
- Its long-term sustainability
- Its potential to scale with your startup

### 8. EXPLORE CREATIVE BUSINESS MODELS

Consider ways to use profitable parts of your business to support areas that may generate less revenue but deliver high impact. A few options:

- Hybrid model: Mix different revenue streams to spread risk.
- Impact-based pricing: Adjust your pricing based on the social or environmental value your solution creates.
- Cross-subsidization: Use profits from one part of your business to fund less profitable, high-impact activities.

### 9. EXAMINE YOUR COSTS

Map out the major costs tied to both your business model and your impact model. Use color-coding or categories to keep things clear – development, marketing, team, etc. Be sure to include the cost of impact measurement and reporting.

### 10. SET YOUR KEY METRICS

Define the most important (impact) metrics that you'll use to measure success. Use what you've learned from testing to refine your approach, and make sure both your solution and business model are built on solid ground. Your impact measurement should evolve as your startup grows. Use insights from prototype testing and market research to adjust them over time. This will increase your chances of achieving long-term impact and success, even as your business model evolves.

### → NEXT CHAPTER: DEVELOP YOUR MVP

At this point, you've likely validated your prototype, demonstrated the impact and market potential of your solution and your business model and laid the groundwork for a sustainable business model. In other words ...

- You've successfully tested your prototype and received positive feedback.
- You have early proof that your solution creates real outcomes for your target group.
- There are clear signs that there is a market for your solution and that it is scalable.
- You've developed a business model that supports both growth and impact.

If all that sounds like you, you're ready to move on to the next chapter and build the first basic version of your solution, your MVP.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFULLY VALIDATING YOUR PROTOTYPE, IMPACT POTENTIAL, MARKET FIT, AND BUSINESS MODEL

1. Strike a balance between research and testing
Don't spend too much time researching at the expense of real-world testing. Use your research as a starting point for practical experiments instead.

2. Dig deep into market potential
Focus on actual demand – hypothetical interest isn't enough at this stage. Make sure to test whether potential customers are truly willing to pay for your solution.

3. Stay open to feedback
Be flexible and ready to adjust your solution and impact metrics based on the feedback you receive. Treat criticism as a valuable learning opportunity to sharpen your impact.

4. Test your prototype early
Don't wait too long to start testing. Your prototype doesn't need to be perfect – start as soon as you have a basic version ready to go.

5. Use real data
Validate your assumptions and impact metrics using actual data – not guesses. Run interviews, surveys, and tests with potential customers.

6. Focus on the core problem
Make sure you're solving the right problem. Don't waste time or resources on distractions..

# 2 MVP DEVELOPMENT AND FINANCING STRATEGY

BUILD

## DEVELOP YOUR MVP: TEST YOUR SOLUTION UNDER REAL-WORLD CONDITIONS

Once you've built a prototype, the next step is creating a minimal viable product (MVP). The goal? To learn as much as possible about your customers and target audience while using as few resources as possible. An MVP lets you test your solution under real conditions. Adding early impact indicators at this stage can also help you track short- and mid-term changes in your target group. A quick reminder: both MVP development and impact measurement are ongoing processes. To maximize your impact, you should continuously refine both based on what you learn.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you're starting – or already working with your team on – an impact-driven startup.
- you can clearly define your target group, the problem you're solving, your solution, and your intended impact.
- you've built and validated a working prototype.
- you've seen early evidence of outcomes from your solution.
- you've identified a market and your solution has the potential to scale.
- you've developed an initial business model.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- develop a minimum viable product (MVP).
- expand your impact measurement to include outcome-level changes.

MVP VS. PROTOTYPE: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?
Prototypes and minimum viable products (MVPs) are both key tools in product development – but they serve very different purposes. Here's how they compare:

- Purpose and functionality: A prototype is mainly used to visualize the design and test early ideas. It has limited features and is often the first tangible version of a new concept. An MVP, on the other hand, includes the core features needed to function and is used to test usability, design, and overall functionality.
- Field of application and development phase: Prototypes are typically tested internally or with a small group of target users. MVPs are tested among a broader market segment and represent the first version of the product that delivers real value to real users.
- Purpose and maturity: Prototypes are tested internally – they're not meant for public use. The ideas they test are still evolving and thus prone to error. MVPs, on the other hand, while minimal, are ready to go live. They're functional and designed to be used by customers in real settings.
- Objective: Prototypes are aimed at spotting flaws and testing how a product looks or behaves across devices. MVPs are built to generate early feedback from the market and learn what it takes to grow into a full-fledged solution.

## How to build your MVP and define impact indicators

Before you begin, decide which features your MVP really needs – and which can wait:

### 1. PRIORIZE KEY FEATURES FOR YOUR MVP

Start by making a list of all potential features. Then group and rank them using the MoSCoW method.

THE MOSCOW METHOD

The MoSCoW method is a framework for prioritizing what matters when building your MVP. It helps you evaluate features and requirements by sorting them into four clear categories, based on how essential they are to your product's success:

- Must have: These are the nonnegotiable features. Without them, your MVP doesn't work or fails to meet your users' core needs.
- Should have: These features add value, but they aren't immediately critical. Include them if time and resources allow.
- Could have: Nice-to-haves. They aren't essential and can be added later if time and resources allow.
- Won't have (this time): Features you're consciously choosing to leave out of the first version.

Start by focusing only on the "must haves." Develop the MVP with those features that will have the biggest impact on whether your solution succeeds. For more help with prioritizing, check out the empact-effort matrix in the chapter "Solution design for impact startups: A reality check for your solution ideas."

## Plan your resources for building the MVP

From day one, be clear about the resources you'll need. A solid resource plan helps you avoid both overallocation and underuse – key to delivering a functional, valuable product without burning out your team or overstretching your budget

### 1. IDENTIFY THE RESOURCES YOU NEED

Break your project into smaller, manageable work packages and estimate the effort required for each one. Then define what resources you'll need to make it happen. These might include:

- Personnel: Developers, designers, project managers, workshop facilitator
- Technology: Tools for development, server infrastructure, software licenses
- Finances: Budget for development, marketing, or outside services

### 2. PLAN YOUR TEAM CAPACITY

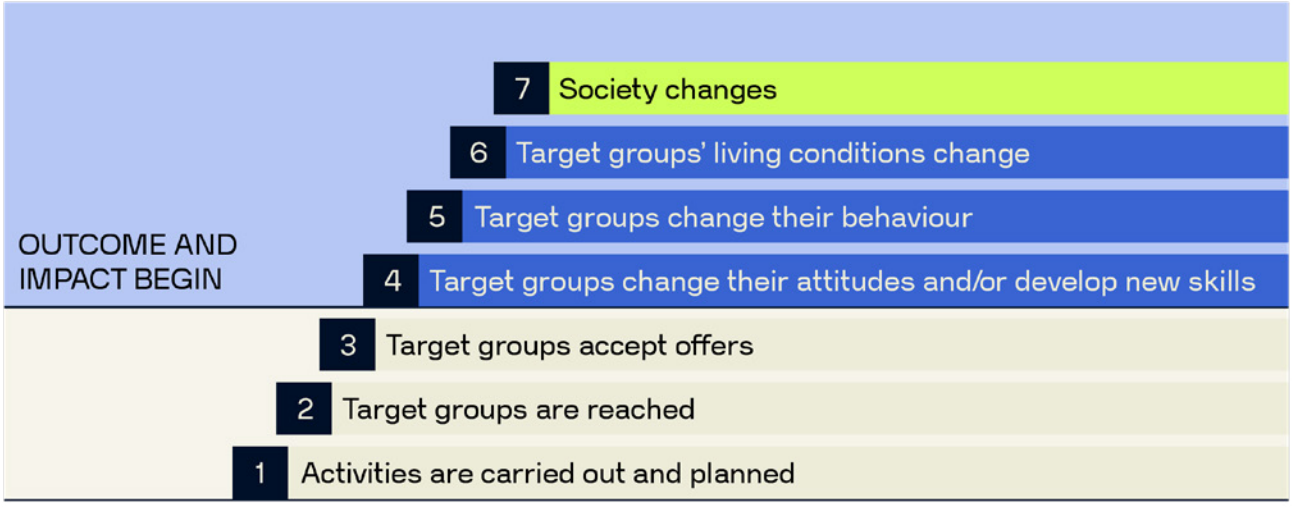
Assign tasks based on each team member's availability and workload. Build in buffer time to handle unexpected issues. Clear task assignments and early identification of bottlenecks will help your team work more efficiently – and prevent burnout or long-term absences.

### 3. ESTIMATE YOUR COSTS

Calculate your total costs by combining personnel, tech expenses, and any outsourced services. A detailed cost breakdown helps you create a realistic budget and manage it effectively. It also comes in handy when pitching to investors – clear numbers increase your chances of securing funding.

# Define indicators for your impact goals

Now it's time to choose the right metrics to measure the actual impact of your MVP – up to level 6 on the Impact Ladder.




5) Wirkungstreppe

## 1. FOCUS ON OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

By measuring your results up to level 6 of the Impact Ladder, you can start to see whether your solution is creating meaningful improvements in people's lives.

Why measure up to level 6 ?

- Prove real change: You're not just tracking shifts in awareness or behavior (levels 4 and 5) – you're capturing actual improvements in the living conditions of your target group (level 6)
- Start measuring impact early: Even if your MVP does not yet have the full impact of a mature product, measuring up to level 6 can give you early signals of its potential for broader social impact (level 7).
- Validate your concept: You'll have a better sense of whether your MVP has the potential to drive lasting change over time.
- Spot challenges early on: Metrics at level 6 can help you identify obstacles before they grow into bigger issues.
- Make better decisions: Data at this level gives you a stronger foundation for deciding how to develop or adjust your MVP going forward.
- Build stronger arguments for stakeholders: Clear evidence of real-life improvements (level 6) is compelling for investors, funders, and partners who want to see impact backed by results.

EXAMPLE INDICATORS FOR MEASURING IMPACT UP TO LEVEL 6 OF THE IMPACT LADDER:

Step 1 — Activities take place as planned
- Number of workshops/trainings/events delivered
- Percentage of project activities implemented as planned
- Number of staff/volunteers involved
- Quantity of materials distributed (e.g., flyers, textbooks)
- Timely delivery of project milestones

- Number of products developed or manufactured
- Number of trees planted in a reforestation project

Step 2 — Target groups are reached
- Number of applications/registrations for a program
- Reach across various communication channels (e.g., social media followers, newsletter subscribers)
- Number of customers aware of the product
- Area of renaturalized land (in hectares)

Step 3 — Target groups accept the offering
- Participation rates in events/programs
- Completion rates for courses/programs
- Purchase or usage rates of your products or services
- Participant satisfaction rates
- Repeat participation, purchases, or product usage
- Tree survival rate after six months in reforestation efforts

Step 4 — Target groups gain awareness or skills
- Number of participants who have gained new knowledge on a specific topic
- Shifts in attitudeswithin the target group
- Number of participants demonstrating new skills after a workshop or training
- Increased motivation to change behavior, triggered by internal or external incentives
- Increase in number of opportunities for participants to apply their new skills
- Number of customers who can accurately describe the product's features after purchase
- Increase in biodiversity in renaturalized areas

Step 5 — Target group changes behavior
- Number of people who adopt new behaviors as a result of participation, use or purchase (e.g., more sustainable consumption habits)
- Number of participants actively involved in new initiatives or projects
- Number of new collaborations or partnerships formed as a result of the initiative
- Return of endangered species to the ecosystem

Step 6 — Target group's living conditions improve
- Percentage of the target group with improved social or economic conditions (e.g., access to better jobs or education)
- Number of individuals whose income or financial stability increased through participation or product use
- Improvements in health or well-being of the target group
- Higher customer satisfaction related to the core problem your solution addresses
- Measurable improvement in air quality (e.g., lower levels of particulate matter or $NO_2$ in urban areas)
- Increased carbon capture from reforested areas

## 2. SET CLEAR GOALS

Define clear, measurable, realistic, and time-bound goals for your impact indicators by using the SMART framework:

- Specific: Focused and clearly defined
- Measurable: Quantifiable

- Achievable: Realistic given your current resources
- Relevant: Aligned with your broader objectives
- Time-bound: Set within a clear timeframe (two to four months)

### 3. ESTABLISH A BASELINE

Your baseline is the starting point for measuring change. It helps you compare the situation before and after your intervention – like the number of people who understand healthy eating or have basic stress resilience skills.

Whenever possible, base your baseline on official statistics, not self-reported figures. Relying on self-assessment increases the risk of overstating your impact (also known as impact washing).

### 4. SET UP A MEASUREMENT SYSTEM AND DATA COLLECTION PLAN

By defining your objectives, indicators, data sources and responsibilities, you create a solid foundation for your MVP and ensure that all important aspects are taken into account. A simple Excel spreadsheet can serve as your data collection plan. It should include the following columns:

| Goal | Indicator | Base value (baseline) | Target value |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data source (e.g., internal records, surveys, observations or external sources) | Survey method (e.g., questionnaires, interviews, observations or document analyses) | When/how often is it collected? | Who collects the data? |
| Who analyzes the data? | | | |

### 5. SHARE YOUR IMPACT DATA IN A CLEAR AND COMPELLING WAY (E.G., THROUGH AN IMPACT DASHBOARD)

An impact dashboard gives you a quick, easy-to-read overview of your most important KPIs – no need to dig through long reports. It helps you spot trends early, make faster data-driven decisions, and boost transparency with your stakeholders.

You can build your dashboard in something simple like an Excel spreadsheet or use specialized tools – it all depends on your needs and resources.

→ NEXT CHAPTER: REALITY CHECK

You're now well-positioned to develop an MVP that not only works but creates real impact.

Once your MVP is ready, we recommend conducting a reality check. In the next chapter, you'll learn how to collect reliable data on how well your solution is received, how effective it is, and whether it has the potential to scale.

MEASURE

# PUTTING YOUR MVP TO THE TEST: MEASURING YOUR STARTUP'S IMPACT

Your MVP is ready — now what? It's time to test how well your solution is received and what impact it really has. In this phase, you'll gather key data to make informed decisions about how to move forward..

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you're starting an impact startup or already deep in the process with your team.
- you can clearly define your target group, the problem you're solving, your solution, and its intended impact.
- you've developed a validated prototype.
- you've already gathered some initial evidence of impact at the outcome level.
- you've identified a market and built an initial business model.
- you've developed a Minimal Viable Product (MVP).
- you're able to ensure the impact of your solution at the outcome level.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- gather direct feedback on your MVP from your target audience.
- identify issues in product development.
- collect data on both output and outcome indicators for impact measurement.
- assess how scalable your solution really is.

## Testing your MVP's accessibility and acceptance

Is your MVP truly accessible and convincing to your target group? Test it with pilot customers and test users to uncover weak spots and gain insights for improvement. These four steps will guide you through the process

### 1. SET CLEAR TESTING GOALS

Start by defining what exactly you want to test. Is it a website, an app, a workshop, or a consulting service? Use qualitative tests to gather feedback on the user experience and spot issues, and quantitative tests to collect measurable data like time spent on a task or task success rates. This data can serve as useful benchmarks for your project.

### 2. RECRUIT PARTICIPANTS

Next, recruit the right participants. Ideally, reach out to early adopters who represent your target group (see "From prototype to impact: Building a sustainable business model for your impact startup." For meaningful results, aim for five to ten test subjects per target group segment.

**TARGET GROUP VS. CUSTOMERS**

In the Lean Impact Journey we distinguish between your target group when talking about your impact model and the product – and customers when talking about your business model.

How you apply these two terms depends on your specific solution. In this playbook, the target group includes both the users of your solution and those who benefit from it.

Depending on your solution, those groups may overlap. If they don't, make sure to test your MVP with people from both.

### 3. CREATE A TEST SCENARIO AND TASKS

Now it's time to create realistic test scenarios that show how your MVP will actually be used, and design tasks that go along with them. Make sure the scenarios are relevant and easy to understand – clear, specific, and measurable. Decide whether you'll run the tests in a controlled setting, remotely, or in the participants' everyday environment. And make sure all the tools and materials are ready to go.

### 4. RUN THE TEST

During the test, ask participants to think out loud as they use your MVP. Carefully observe how they interact with it and document your findings so you can make targeted improvements.

USER TESTING

User testing comes from the software sector but works just as well for non-digital innovations. Here are some suggestions for adapting the method to your needs: :

- Talk about participants or the target group instead of "users."
- Consider elements or aspects of your solution instead of "functions."
- Use physical prototypes, role-playing games or simulations instead of digital interfaces.
- Build realistic scenarios that show how and where your solution would be used.

## How quickly does your MVP deliver added value?

TTo check how efficient your solution is, you can calculate the Time To Value (TTV) . TTV measures how long it takes for your target audience to experience the first noticeable benefit from your solution. It helps you to assess the efficiency of your MVP and spot areas for improvement.

### 1. DEFINE THE VALUE, STARTING POINT, AND END POINT

First, clarify what added value means for your target group. That could be reaching a goal, using a key feature, or gaining useful knowledge.

Then define when the clock starts ticking — maybe it's at signup, registration, purchase, or participation – and when the value becomes noticeable, for example by solving a problem or successfully using your solution.

### 2. MEASURE THE TIME AND CALCULATE THE AVERAGE

Track the time between the start and end points using tracking tools like Google Analytics or heatmaps for tech-based solutions. For non-digital offers, Excel sheets or participant tracking can do the job.

> EXAMPLE
> A participant signs up at 9 am and completes a successful action at 11 am.
> TTV = 2 hours.

Add up the TTVs for all participants and divide by the number of participants.

> EXAMPLE
> A needs 2 hours, B 4 hours and C 3 hours.
> Average TTV = (2 + 4 + 3) / 3 = 3 hours.

### 3. SEGMENT YOUR DATA

Look at differences between groups or scenarios to spot opportunities for improvement. For example: How does the TTV differ between new users and existing users?

## Improve with A/B testing

A/B testing is a powerful way to improve your MVP. You create two different versions of your solution and test which one performs better with your target group. To get meaningful results, show each version to a different group and collect specific data – such as preferences, understanding, or participant expectations. These insights help you refine your MVP.

Example questions you can ask:

- Preference – Which version do you prefer, and why?
- Understanding – What message does version A/B convey?
- Usage – How likely are you to take [action]?
- Emotion – What emotions does version A/B trigger in you?
- Improvements – What would you change to make version A/B better?
- Context – In what situation would you prefer version A/B?
- Comparison – What differences do you notice between the versions?
- Open-ended – Which version better meets your needs, and why?

## Run pilot measurements to track your impact

How do you know your MVP is making a real difference? Pilot measurements let you test its impact across levels 1 to 6 of the Impact Ladder. Use targeted questions and tracking tools to highlight your success and continue improving your MVP.

### 1. SET UP TRACKING TOOLS

Choose tools or software or methods that fit your data collection needs (e.g., surveys, databases, analytics tools). Make sure tracking is built into your existing workflows from the start.

Here are some methods you can use:

- Quantitative data collection: Count services delivered or products used, measure activity levels or the number of people reached, conduct structured observations
- Qualitative methods: Use semi-structured or open interviews, observations, document reviews, or before-and-after surveys

Ideally, you've already created a data collection plan in the previous chapter "Develop your MVP: Test your solution under real-world conditions." If not, take a moment to go back and do that now.

## 2. USE THE IMPACT LADDER TO ASSESS YOUR MVP

To see whether your MVP is creating impact across levels 1–6 of the Impact Ladder, you can ask questions like:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | Activities take place as planned | • Were you able to use all planned elements of the MVP?<br>• Did you run into any technical issues or barriers? |
| Step 2 | Target groups are reached | • How did you hear about our solution?<br>• Do you feel like you're part of the target group? |
| Step 3 | Target groups accept the offering | • How satisfied are you overall with the solution?<br>• Would you use it again or recommend it? |
| Step 4 | Target group gains awareness or skills | • What new knowledge did you gain by using our solution?<br>• Has your perspective on [relevantes Thema] changed?<br>• Do you now feel more motivated or better equipped to apply what you've learned? |
| Step 5 | Target group changes behavior | • Has our solution led you to make any changes in your daily life or work?<br>• What concrete steps have you taken after using it? |
| Step 6 | Target group's living conditions improve | • How has your personal or professional situation improved since using our solution?<br>• What specific positive changes can you attribute to it? |

→ NEXT CHAPTER: FUNDING STRATEGY

You've systematically tested your MVP, gathered feedback, and evaluated its impact. Before you start refining your MVP and theory of change, we recommend developing a funding strategy.

That's what we'll tackle next – so you can put both your MVP and your funding approach through a real-world stress test.

BUILD

# DEVELOPING A FUNDING STRATEGY FOR YOUR IMPACT STARTUP

A solid funding strategy is key to growing, scaling and sustaining your startup. It gives you the resources you need to bring your vision to life and create long-term impact.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you're launching an impact startup or already deep in the process with your team.
- you can clearly define your target group, the problem you're solving, your solution and the impact you want to create.
- you've developed a validated prototype.
- you have some initial evidence of impact at the outcome level.
- you've identified a market for your solution and developed an initial business model.
- you've built and tested a minimum viable product (MVP).
- you can track the impact of your solution on both the output and outcome levels.
- you have a sense of how your solution could scale.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- create a solid funding plan.
- identify the right investors and funding opportunities.
- build a pitch deck that connects your impact with your business model.

## Find the right funding sources

From classic options like equity and impact investors to innovative models like revenue-based financing, there are plenty of ways to fund your startup. The key is finding the right mix that fits your needs. In this chapter, you'll learn how to assess and combine funding options to build a strategy that's flexible, stable and ready to scale.

### 1. GET A CLEAR PICTURE OF YOUR FUNDING OPTIONS

Start by thinking about which types of funding align with your business model and impact goals. Some of the most common options include:

- Equity investment
- Impact investors, business angels and specialized VC funds
- Foundations and philanthropists
- Incubators and accelerators
- Bank loans
- Government programs that support sustainable businesses
- Crowdfunding focused on social or environmental projects

### 2. CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE FINANCING MODELS

Not every funding model fits every startup. Depending on your goals, alternatives like revenue-based financing, venture debt or peer-to-peer loans might give you more flexibility – without giving up control.

- Revenue-based financing: This model gives you capital in exchange for a percentage of your future revenue.
- Venture debt: A loan provided by specialized banks or debt funds to high-growth startups that already have venture capital backing. These lenders are willing to take on more risk than traditional banks.
- Peer-to-peer loans: Also known as P2P lending, this option connects borrowers directly with individual lenders – no banks involved.

### 3. EVALUATE YOUR OPTIONS

To make the best choice, assess each funding option based on availability, cost, level of control and flexibility. In many cases, a hybrid financing is the way to go, as it combines equity, debt and grants with innovative tools like social impact bonds. This gives you a strong financial foundation for growth and long-term success.

## Adapt your funding strategy

To guide your impact startup different stages of development, it's important to align your funding strategy with your growth phases, key milestones and different future scenarios.

- Phase-based planning: Match your funding options to your startup's current stage. Decide which type of financing makes the most sense at each point in your journey.
- Milestone-based planning: Tie your funding strategy to concrete milestones – like completing your MVP test or demonstrating your first measurable impact. That way, you stay focused on results.
- Scenario planning: Add flexibility by thinking ahead. Develop best-case, worst-case, and most likely scenarios so you're ready to adapt when things don't go exactly as planned.

## Get investor-ready

### 1. GATHER YOUR KEY DOCUMENTS

Transparency is everything when preparing to meet with investors. Make sure your materials are complete and up to date. The essentials include:

- your business model
- all relevant financial metrics and
- your measurable impact KPIs.

### 2. STRUCTURE YOUR PITCH DECK

A strong pitch shows potential investors what makes your startup stand out – and why it's worth backing. Break your presentation into clear sections:

- The problem
- Your solution
- Market potential
- Business model
- Team
- Impact

Focus on the value you're creating, and show how your startup combines social or environmental impact with financial sustainability. Use data to back up your case – and bring it to life with a compelling story that makes your vision tangible.

### 3. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Try out different approaches, test your pitch with friends, colleagues or mentors, and refine it along the way. Practice delivering it out loud – confidence and timing are key to convincing investors.

## Build your network and boost your visibility

Networking is just as important as a solid pitch. Go to events such as conferences, pitch nights and meetups. Join networks and communities for social entrepreneurs. Use platforms such as LinkedIn and startup directories to increase your visibility and connect with investors and partners. Keep your existing contacts – stay in touch and share regular updates with your supporters. Competitions and open callscan also help you secure funding and raise your profile in the field.

→ NEXT CHAPTER: TEST YOUR STRATEGY

You've developed your funding strategy and built a strong pitch for potential sponsors and investors.

In the next chapter, it's you'll put your strategy to the test – by pitching to real prospects and gathering valuable feedback..

MEASURE

# TESTING YOUR FINANCING STRATEGY: READY TO PITCH

It gets you ready for real-life fundraising rounds and helps build trust with investors and funders.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you're planning to launch an impact startup or already working on one with your team.
- you can clearly define your target group, the problem you're tackling, your solution and its impact.
- you've built and tested a validated prototype.
- you have initial proof of impact at the outcome level.
- you've identified a market for your solution and developed an initial business model.
- you've built and tested a minimum viable product (MVP).
- you can track the impact of your solution on both output and outcome levels.
- you have an idea of how to scale your solution.
- you've developed a funding strategy and a pitch deck.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- pitch your funding strategy to investors and funders.
- get feedback on your financial planning.
- refine your pitch deck accordingly.

## Get feedback on your funding strategy from potential investors

Talking to experts, getting targeted feedback from investors and regularly reviewing your progress will help you spot weak points in your funding strategy – and improve it over time.

### 1. TALK TO EXPERTS

One of the most important steps is connecting with experts. Financial advisors or investors can help you evaluate your strategy from an outside perspective, check legal requirements and identify potential risks. The insights you gain will help you fine-tune your planning and make sure it meets market expectations.

### 2. TEST YOUR PITCH WITH DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

The next step is to test your pitch deck – not just with potential investors, but also with stakeholders, your target group and experts from accelerators or startup hubs. Ask for specific feedback on your argumentation and financial projections. Working with pitch coaches is also a great way to sharpen your presentation skills and make your messaging more compelling.

SMART QUESTIONS TO ASK INVESTORS:

- How do you assess our funding gap and how we plan to use the capital?
- Do you think our growth forecasts and financial projections are realistic?

- What risks do you see in our business model?
- What other funding sources or models would you recommend?
- How do you rate our financing mix and diversification strategy?
- What milestones or KPIs should we aim for in this round of funding?
- How do you view our valuation and the terms of this round?
- How do you assess our strategy for maintaining a competitive edge?
- What's your take on our plans to expand our investor base and evolve our funding model?

## Keep an eye on how your funding strategy plays out

A successful funding strategy doesn't end with raising money – it needs to be monitored and adjusted continuously.

### 1. TRACK AND ANALYZE YOUR FINANCIAL METRICS

Start with regular cash flow analysis. A positive and growing cash flow is a good sign your strategy is working and your liquidity is under control. Keep an eye on key financial figures like EBIT, EBITDA or operating cash flow. Compare these values with your goals and industry benchmarks to spot weaknesses or areas for improvement.

Check whether you've met your funding targets. Were you able to secure the capital on time? Does the actual funding mix match your original plan? Asking these questions early helps you make adjustments and respond flexibly to new challenges.

Take a close look at the total costs of your financing, including interest and fees, and evaluate whether the results justify the expense . At the same time, your strategy should be flexible enough to respond to shifts in the market or to bring in additional capital when needed.

Use the insights you gain to keep improving your funding strategy. Be well-prepared for your next funding round – with a compelling story, solid numbers and a clear impact promise.

NEXT CHAPTER: VALIDATING YOUR FUNDING STRATEGY AND MVP

Ideally, by now you've reviewed both your financing strategy and your minimal viable product (MVP) – as well as your impact (→ see "Putting your MVP to the test: Measuring your startup's impact") .).

In the next step, we'll bring everything together. That way, you'll ensure your solution, business model and funding strategy are aligned and ready for your next growth phase.

LEARN

# MVP AND FUNDING STRATEGY: VALIDATE, OPTIMIZE, GROW

This chapter helps you align your solution, business model and funding strategy to lay the foundation for scaling your impact startup and preparing for the next growth phase.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you're planning to launch an impact startup or already working on one with your team.
- you can clearly define your target group, the problem you're tackling, your solution and its impact.
- you've developed a validated prototype.
- you have initial proof of impact at the outcome level.
- you've identified a market and built an initial business model.
- you've developed and tested a minimum viable product (MVP).
- you're able to track the impact of your solution at both output and outcome levels.
- you have a clear idea of how your solution can scale.
- you've developed and tested a funding strategy and a pitch deck.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- refine your MVP based on feedback and impact data.
- optimize your business model.
- finalize your funding strategy.

## Analyze MVP test data and turn insights into action

Evaluating your MVP test data is key to making informed decisions about how to improve and grow your solution.

### 1. ORGANIZE YOUR INTERVIEW DATA AND LOOK FOR PATTERNS

Start by bringing together all your notes, observations and recordings. Organize the data by grouping it according to test tasks or sections of your MVP. Pay close attention to repeated issues and common themes: What keeps coming up as a problem? What do users consistently praise? Spotting these patterns helps you zero in on what matters most and what should be improved first.

### 2. ANALYZE YOUR DATA

Prioritize the most important insights by assessing how serious the issues are. Focus on problems that came up for several participants. Back up your findings with numbers – track how many people completed key tasks successfully or how long it took them to navigate different steps.

For open-ended feedback, look at what people said in context. Pull out recurring words, ideas or reactions that can guide your next steps.

### 3. VISUALIZE YOUR RESULTS

Make your findings easy to understand by using diagrams or heat maps to highlight pain points. Create a user flow diagram to map out the typical customer journey through your MVP . This makes it easier to see where

people get stuck and where you can make meaningful improvements.

WHAT IS A CUSTOMER JOURNEY?
The idea of a customer journey comes from the software sector, but it works just as well for non-digital innovations. You can easily adapt the core principles to your own solution. For example:
- Instead of talking about users, refer to participants or target groups.
- Rather than tracking clicks or conversions, look at real-life interactions.

## Validate your funding strategy: win over investors

Your funding strategy isn't a one-time thing. It needs to evolve, as it is shaped by investor feedback and backed by data.

### 1. REVIEW AND ANALYZE INVESTOR FEEDBACK

Organizing the feedback you've received from potential investors is important. Grouptheir comments by topic – growth forecasts, risk factors, valuation, and so on. Look for patterns and recurring concerns across different conversations. Compare the feedback from different investors to identify the most common points of criticism and prioritize changes based on what matters most to investors.

### 2. LEARN FROM YOUR CASH FLOW AND KEY METRICS

Dig into your cash flow to see whether your financial strategy is actually working. Compare your operating cash flow and metrics like EBIT or EBITDA with your own forecasts and industry averages. If something's off, figure out why – and use those insights to improve. Also take a closer look at how your funding strategy affects your liquidity and long-term growth.

### 3. ADAPT YOUR STRATEGY AS YOU GO

Based on what you've learned, update your financial goals and projections. Refine your forecasts to make them more realistic. Build out a few "what-if" scenarios to prepare for different market conditions. Consider whether you need to tap into other funding sources.

### 4. MONITOR YOUR PROGRESS CONSISTENTLY

Set up a system to track your key financial numbers on a regular basis. Define clear thresholds that flag when something needs your attention. Run routine check-ins to review your numbers and adjust your funding strategy if needed.

When you combine these tools with regular feedback and real-world testing, you'll be able to strengthen your MVP, sharpen your financial plan, and refine your business model – setting the stage for sustainable growth and real impact.

→ NEXT CHAPTER: THE GROWTH PHASE
By now, you've ideally validated your MVP, confirmed your startup's impact and market potential, and built a solid funding model. You've also made sure the resources you need are in place. That means ...
- You've tested your MVP with early users and received positive feedback.
- You've set clear impact indicators and can measure your outcomes.
- You've seen real signs that a market exists – and that your solution can scale.
- You have a funding strategy in place and initial interest from investors or pilot customers.
- You've secured (or are actively building) the team, funding and infrastructure needed to grow.

If all that sounds familiar, you're ready to move into the growth phase with the help provided in the next chapter.

Stuck? These tips might help:

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFULLY VALIDATING YOUR MVP, IMPACT AND FUNDING STRATEGY

MVP validation

- Do your homework before building your MVP. Deep market research is key to understanding your target audience and the competitive landscape.
- Focus on the core features. Don't overload your MVP with too many bells and whistles.
- Set clear goals: What do you want to achieve, and how will you measure success?
- Actively collect feedback from participants – and stay open to change.
- Strike the right balance between "minimum" and "viable." Your MVP should be functional and engaging enough to generate meaningful feedback.

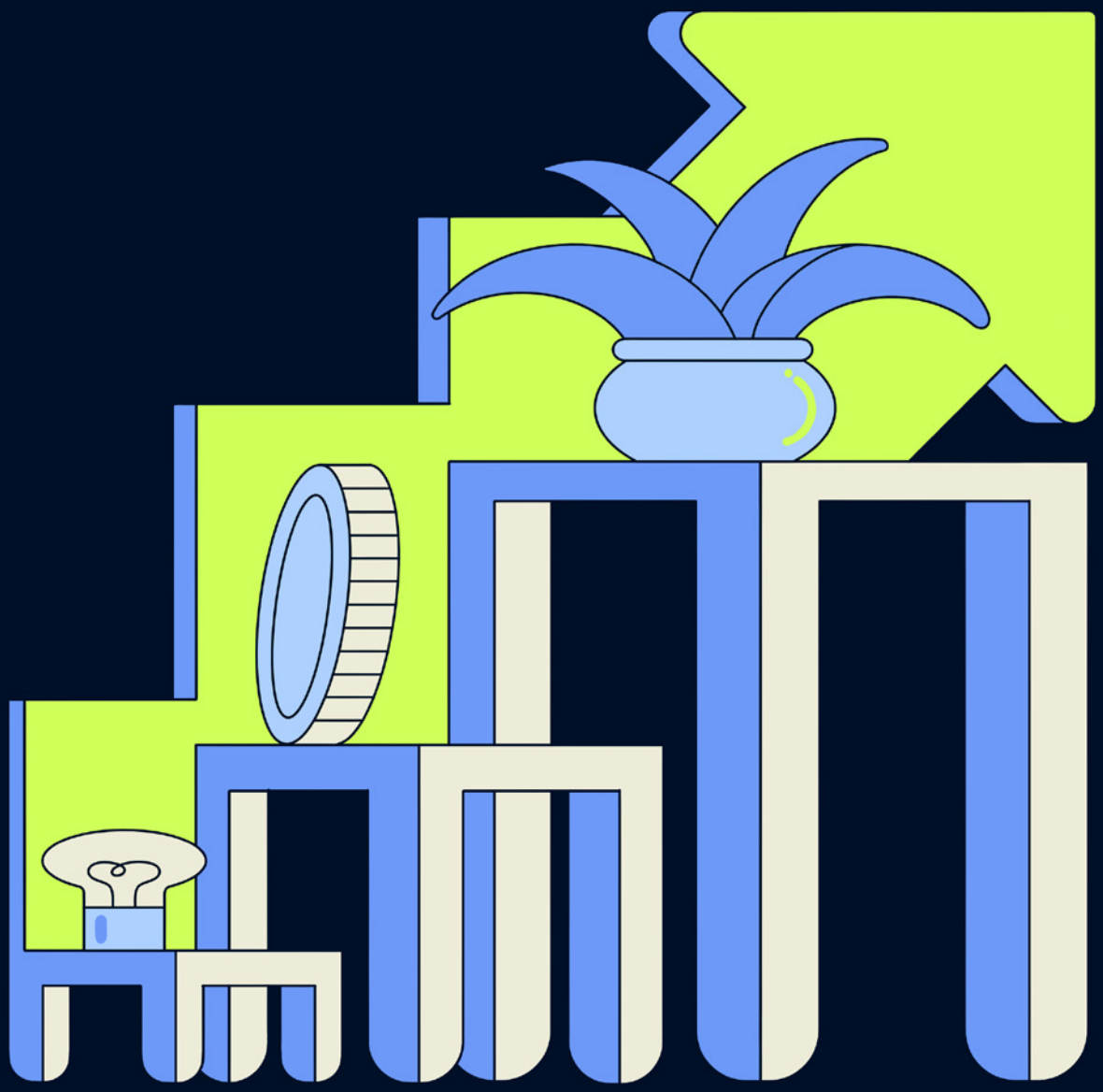
Impact validation at the output and outcome level

- Define clear, measurable indicators for both output and outcome.
- Build in methods to track those indicators from day one.
- Don't just focus on short-term outputs. Make room for medium- and long-term outcomes too.
- Be ready to revise your impact logic as real-world data comes in.

Funding strategy validation

- Don't overestimate how quickly you'll generate revenue.
- Explore different funding sources and models.
- Make sure your funding strategy aligns with your business model and growth strategy .
- Keep your valuation and funding rounds grounded in reality.
- Get ready for detailed due diligence processes.

# GROWTH PHASE



# PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH PLANNING

BUILD

## GROW WITH IMPACT: TEAM, PROCESSES, AND CULTURE FOR IMPACT STARTUPS

Long-term success isn't just about growth – it's about building the right team, setting up strong processes, and shaping a culture that supports your mission. This chapter will help you get your startup ready for the next phase of growth – while staying agile and competitive.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you've founded an impact startup.
- your target group, problem, solution, and impact are clearly defined.
- your minimal viable product (MVP) has been tested and validated.
- you've mapped out your impact potential, market opportunity, and funding model.
- you have the resources in place to grow.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- grow and develop your team with intention.
- build efficient structures and processes.
- reflect on and shape your organizational culture.

## Build and strengthen your team

As your startup scales, having the right team in place is essential. That means more than just hiring – it also means investing in the people you already have. Ask yourself: What skills are missing? And how can you close those gaps? A clear plan for skill-building, team development, and smart recruitment sets the stage for long-term, mission-driven growth.

### 1. PINPOINT THE SKILLS YOU NEED

Start by identifying the key skills required for each role on your team. Consider both hard skills (technical know-how) and soft skills (communication, leadership, etc.), keeping your long-term goals in mind.

Common hard skill gaps:

- Technical skills: Limited coding or AI knowledge can hold back product development.
- Financial skills: Weaknesses in budgeting or accounting can put your startup's future at risk.
- Project management: Without clear planning and execution, your team's efficiency takes a hit.
- Impact measurement: If you can't measure and track your social or environmental impact, it's tough to show results.

Common soft skill gaps:

- Teamwork or communication issues can strain collaboration – internally and with users or target groups.
- Limited creativity or problem-solving can stall innovation and slow momentum in tackling challenges.
- Lack of leadership or management skills can disrupt workflows, team dynamics, and your culture.

BRING ON AN IMPACT LEAD
Set up a dedicated role to track and steer your startup's impact. You don't always need to hire someone new.

You just need to make sure someone on your team has the time and tools to take it on.

Strong impact management helps you stay focused, show results to investors and stakeholders, and improve your solution over time. It's also becoming a must-have for standing out in a crowded market.

### 2. TAKE STOCK OF YOUR TEAM'S SKILLS AND SPOT THE GAPS

Once you've mapped out the skills your startup needs, it's time to see what your team already brings to the table. You can do this through performance reviews, self-assessments, or informal check-ins.

A skills matrix can help you match your team's current strengths with what's actually needed. Use it to identify the most important gaps – and focus on those first.

### 3. DIG INTO THE ROOT CAUSES AND IMPACT OF THOSE GAPS

Figure out what's behind the missing skills. Then look at how those gaps are holding your team back – from missed goals to slow progress.

### 4. BUILD A PRACTICAL ACTION PLAN

Then put together a clear plan. This might mean offering targeted training, hiring new people, or both. Set achievable goals and timelines.

| | |
|---|---|
| Team | |
| Date | |

| Employee Name | Role | Overall Skill Level (Average) | Overall Skill Level (Total Score) | Skill 1 | Comments and Next Steps | Skill 2 | Comments and Next Steps | Skill 3 | Comments and Next Steps |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| Employee 2 | | | | | | | | | |
| Employee 3 | | | | | | | | | |
| Employee 4 | | | | | | | | | |

8) Skill Gap Analysis Template

## Get clear on processes and responsibilities

When workflows are fuzzy and roles aren't defined, things can fall through the cracks. By streamlining your processes and clearly assigning responsibilities, you make teamwork smoother, boost transparency, and lay the groundwork for steady, sustainable growth.

### 1. PICK A PROCESS TO ANALYZE

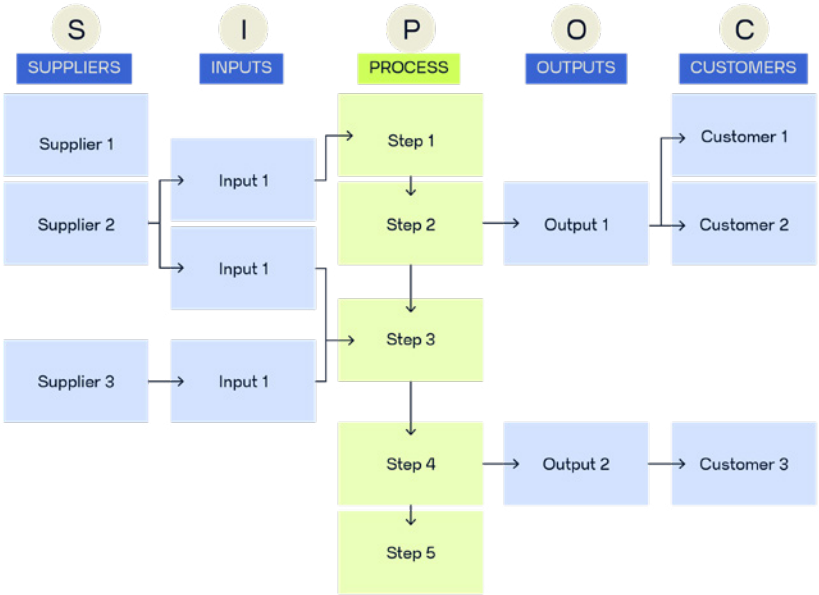
Choose one core process in your startup to focus on, and define clear starting and ending points. Ask yourself: What steps are truly necessary? Who's responsible for what? And how does this process affect your overall impact? Some examples of key processes include:

- Product development
- Marketing
- Procurement
- Sales
- Impact management
- Meetings
- Feedback and review

### 2. USE A SIPOC DIAGRAM TO MAP IT OUT

A SIPOC diagram is a simple way to visualize and break down a process. It helps you understand the key elements and pinpoint what drives success – or where improvements are needed. SIPOC stands for:

- Suppliers: Who provides the inputs for this process? This could be external partners, internal teams, or other stakeholders.
- Inputs (resources): What materials, tools, or information are needed to get the process started?
- Processes: What are the key steps, from beginning to end? Focus on listing five to seven main steps in order.
- Outputs (results): What's the end result of the process? This could be a product, service, report, or any other deliverable.
- Customers (clients): Who receives or benefits from the output? This could include external clients, internal teams, or anyone who relies on the results.




9) SIPOC-Diagramm

### 3. TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT EACH ACTIVITY IN THE PROCESS

Document every task needed to carry out the process from start to finish. To clearly define who's doing what – and improve efficiency – you can use the RACI method. RACI helps clarify roles by assigning each task to one or more of the following categories:

- Responsible: Who is directly responsible for completing the task? There can be more than one responsible person, but try to keep it manageable.
- Accountable: Who has final ownership of the task? Each task should have just one accountable person.
- Consulted: Who should be asked for input? These people should be involved before key decisions are made.
- Informed: Who needs to stay in the loop? These people aren't directly involved but should be kept up to date.

| Task/Role | Role 1 | Role 2 | Role 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Task 1 | R | R | I |
| Task 2 | A | C | C |
| Task 3 | A | I | I |

R Responsible
A Accountable
C Consulted
I Informed

10) RACI-Chart

### 4. CHECK HOW EACH ACTIVITY AFFECTS YOUR IMPACT

Every action you take can influence your startup's social, environmental, or economic impact – positively or negatively. To make sure you're using your resources wisely, take the following steps:

Evaluate how each activity affects your impact an to what extent. Use clear ata an KPI tracking (regular measurement of key values). Use your systems map from the "Impact management" to spot unintended side effects. This includes negative outcomes from your business model an your behavior across your the entire value chain (see note). Once you identify weak points, create targeted measures to eliminate them.

> ESG MANAGEMENT
> Want to improve how you manage ESG (environmental, social, and governance) factors in your processes? You'll find practical criteria to guide your approach → here.
>
> You can also explore whether a Social Life Cycle Assessment (S-LCA) is right for your solution. This method helps you understand and evaluate the social and socioeconomic impacts of your product or service across its entire life cycle. S-LCA gives you a clearer picture of where to make improvements and helps you move toward more sustainable and responsible production and consumption. Learn more about it → here.

## Reflect on your organizational culture

Your corporate culture is the backbone of your startup. It shapes how your team works together and how others see you. A strong, intentional culture can drive innovation, attract great talent, and bring your vision to life.

### 1. DEFINE YOUR CORE VALUES

Think about what really matters to you – values like transparency, sustainability, or bold thinking – and how those values show up in your work. Bring your team into the conversation with workshops or brainstorming sessions to build a shared set of values that feel authentic and relevant. Aim for three to five core values that reflect who you are and what you stand for. Keep them focused, practical, and tailored to your startup – not just buzzwords.

### 2. MAP OUT THE CULTURE YOU WANT

Start by taking stock of your current culture. Use anonymous surveys, one-on-one feedback, or team interviews to get honest input. Then ask: What kind of culture do we want to build? What will help us grow and stay true to our mission? Think about how you want people to collaborate, make decisions, and embody your values day to day.

Ask yourselves: What goals do we have? What needs to change? What makes strategic sense?

Think about how you want people to collaborate, make decisions, and embody your values day to day. Your ideal culture should support your goals, reflect your strategy, and fit your current challenges. To guide the process, try using the keep-start-stop method:

- Keep: What should be retained?
- Start: What should be started?
- Stop: What should be left behind?

### 3. BRING YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE TO LIFE

Defining your values is just the first step – what matters most is how they show up in day-to-day decisions and behavior. For example, if one of your values is sustainability, that might mean choosing to work with environmentally responsible suppliers. Every decision you make should reflect your values, even as your startup grows or conditions change. Create a clear, inspiring vision for the culture you're aiming for, such as: "We're building a culture that encourages open feedback and embraces innovation.

To track your progress, set measurable goals using the S.M.A.R.T. method.

Your goals should be:

- Specific: Clearly stated and well defined
- Measurable: Quantifiable
- Achievable: Realistic given your current resources
- Relevant: Aligned with your strategic goals
- Time-bound: Tied to a clear deadline

### 4. PUT IT ALL INTO A CODE OF CONDUCT

Turn your values and culture into a written code of conduct that everyone on your team can understand and follow. Have it reviewed by your legal team or external legal counsel. Make sure the document is easy to access – for employees and external partners – and available in all relevant languages. Hold regular training sessions to help your team understand how to apply the code in real-world situations.

> TIP
> Your impact handbook should be a key part of your code of conduct. For more on how to create one, check out the chapter "Scaling your impact: strategy, validation, and growth for startups."

→ NEXT STEP: STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

You've started building a team that's ready for growth, put smart systems in place, and laid the foundation for a strong organizational culture.

Before you dive into KPI tracking or create a baseline for measuring your impact, take time to develop strategies for sustainable growth and fine-tune your impact management strategy.

BUILD

# KEEP YOUR IMPACT STARTUP ON TRACK: STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Your minimum viable product (MVP) has shown that your solution works. Now you're entering the growth phase – the stage where you bring your product to market, reach new customers, and take your startup to the next level.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you've launched an impact-driven startup.
- you've clearly defined your target audience, the problem you're solving, and the impact you want to create.
- your MVP has been tested and validated.
- you've mapped out your impact potential, market opportunity, and financing model.
- you have the resources in place to scale.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- turn your MVP into a market-ready product.
- grow your customer base.
- build effective marketing and sales channels.
- develop growth strategies to set your startup up for long-term success.

## Get your MVP market-ready

Now it's time to turn your MVP into a compelling product customers actually want – and are willing to pay for.

### 1. OPTIMIZE YOUR SOLUTION

- Finish core features: Make sure every key function works seamlessly, even outside of a test environment.
- Increase efficiency: Streamline how your solution is delivered. For services that rely heavily on people, this may be harder – but look for ways to make things run smoother.
- Ensure scalability: Your technical infrastructure should be robust enough to grow with increasing demand.

### 2. KEEP DEVELOPING YOUR MVP

Use insights from your MVP test users (see"Putting your MVP to the test: Measuring your startup's impact") to refine the user experience. Regular user testing helps make sure new features meet expectations – and helps you avoid building the wrong thing.

TIP
Create a release plan that lays out which features you'll roll out next. Prioritize what brings the most value to your users..

### 3. EXPAND YOUR TEAM

As your product grows, so should your team. Bring in people with expertise in UX/UI design, product management, and marketing to round out your product development (see "Grow with impact: Team, processes, and culture for impact startups").

## From early adopters to a larger customer base

Scaling means reaching more of the people your solution is built for – and that takes a smart strategy. These five steps will help you move from early adopters to the mainstream:

> TARGET GROUP VS. CUSTOMERS
> In the Lean Impact Journey we differentiate between the target group when working on your product and impact model and customers when talking about your business model.
> How you use these two terms for your project depends on your solution. In this playbook, your target group includes both the people who use your solution and those who benefit from it.
> Some solutions will have a combination of both as a target group.

### 1. FOCUS ON THE FEATURES THAT MATTER MOST

Start by building the features that offer the greatest value to your target audience and customers. Keep things lean – expand the scope of your product gradually, adding new elements around the core solution.

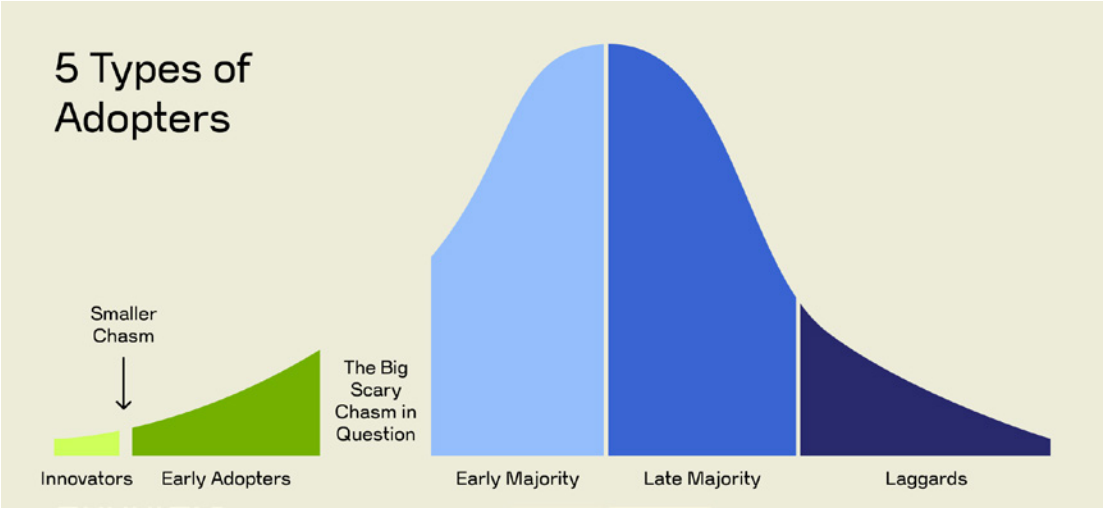
### 2. KEEP IMPROVING THE USER EXPERIENCE

Continuously refine the design, usability, and functionality of your solution. Use user-centered design methods to better understand how people interact with your product – and make sure it meets their needs in the real world.

### 3. EXPAND BEYOND EARLY ADOPTERS

Grow your customer base beyond the early adopters. Here's a general breakdown of adopter types to guide your strategy:

- Innovators (3%): Innovation enthusiasts who are eager to try new solutions.
- Early adopters (13%): Visionaries who quickly recognize value in new solutions.
- Early majority (34%): Practical users who want proven, reliable tools.
- Late majority (34%): More skeptical users who adopt only after widespread validation.
- Laggards (16%): Skeptics who are reluctant to adopt new solutions




11) 5 Types of Adpoters

### 4. TAILOR YOUR STRATEGY TO EACH GROUP

Speak to each audience in a way that resonates. For innovators and early adopters, emphasize creativity, bold thinking, and your long-term vision. When targeting the early majority, focus on ease of use and proven results. To win over the late majority, highlight social proof, endorsements, and a strong track record. For laggards, present your solution as the new industry standard.

### 5. SHARE SUCCESS STORIES

Use real-life examples from early adopters to help convince others to get on board.

## Build your marketing and sales channels

Without visibility and a clear sales strategy, even the best product will struggle to gain traction. Here's how to build both in a focused, strategic way.

### 1. ANALYZE WHERE YOU'RE STARTING FROM

First, gather as much insight as you can about your potential customers. Look at market data, run a competitor analysis to see which channels are working for others in your space, and assess your own performance Use tools like Google Analytics, social media dashboards, or customer surveys to get a sense of what's working and where there's room to grow.

A SWOT analysis can help you evaluate your current marketing and sales channels:

- Strengths: What's already working well? (e.g., strong social presence, good SEO, high conversion rates)
- Weaknesses: Where are the gaps? (e.g., unclear messaging, lack of capacity for running campaigns)
- Opportunities: What trends or partnerships could help you grow? (e.g., rising interest in ethical brands, potential collaborators)
- Threats: What challenges might slow you down? (e.g., competitors, limited budget, shifting market dynamics.

Once you have a clear picture, set goals using the S.M.A.R.T. framework. The indicators should be:

- Specific: Focused and clearly defined
- Measurable: Quantifiable
- Achievable: Realistic given your resources
- Relevant: Aligned with your broader objectives
- Time-bound: Set within a clear timeframe

### 2. DEFINE YOUR CUSTOMER GROUP

Create detailed profiles of your ideal customers, including their challenges, goals, and what they value most. You already started this process in "Problem and target group analysis: How to validate for impact startups". Now's the time to go deeper – with tools like personas or simplified version of the value proposition canvas.

> TARGET GROUP VS. CUSTOMERS
> In the Lean Impact Journey we differentiate between the target group when working on your product and impact model and customers when talking about your business model.
> How you use these two terms for your project depends on your solution. In this playbook, your target group includes both the people who use your solution and those who benefit from it.
> Sometimes that's the same group – sometimes it's not.

### 3. REFINE YOUR UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION (USP)

Your USP is what sets your solution apart – and it's the reason customers should choose you over anyone else. The Lean Canvas is a helpful tool to define your core value and communicate it clearly. In early stages, highlight bold ideas and your vision for change. As you grow, shift toward reliability and proven market fit.

Here's how to use the Lean Canvas to sharpen your USP:

1. Problem: What's the core issue your customers are facing? Your USP should speak directly to that.
2. Customer segments: Who exactly are your customers, and how does your solution meet their specific needs?
3. Unique value proposition (UVP): Distill your message: Why is your solution better? Think clear, punchy phrases like "Faster. Smarter. More sustainable."
4. Channels: Where will your message land best? Consider content marketing, social media, and testimonials.
5. Unfair advantage: What makes your USP difficult to copy? Maybe it's proprietary tech, deep domain knowledge, or a powerful network.

### 4. CHOOSE THE RIGHT MARKETING CHANNELS AND METHODS

Once your USP is clear, it's time to fine-tune your marketing. A SIPOC diagram can help you understand and improve the flow of your marketing activities (see "Grow with impact: Team, processes, and culture for impact startups"

EFFECTIVE MARKETING METHODS INCLUDE:

- Content marketing to provide valuable content
- Social selling through social platforms to connect, engage, and convert
- SEO to boost your visibility online
- Referral marketing, turning satisfied customers into advocates

### 5. CHOOSE THE RIGHT SALES CHANNELS

Build a multichannel sales strategy that combines both online and offline approaches. Revisit your existing sales processes and optimize them – again, a SIPOC diagram can help spot inefficiencies (see "Grow with impact: Team, processes, and culture for impact startups")

COMMON SALES CHANNELS INCLUDE:

- Direct channels such as physical retail (in-store sales), email marketing, e-commerce
- Indirect channels such as business partnerships, wholesalers, franchises
- Digital channels such as mobile apps, webinars, online training, and content-based sales like blogs, podcasts, and videos

### 6. TRAIN YOUR MARKETING AND SALES TEAM

Even the best strategies won't work if your team isn't prepared to execute them. Make regular training a priority to keep your team sharp and aligned. To identify skill gaps and plan learning opportunities, check out "Growing sustainably: Team, structure, and culture for impact startups."

# Develop multiple growth scenarios

Planning for long-term success means thinking beyond the ideal case. It's about anticipating different possibilities and preparing for what's ahead. Here's how to create solid, data-driven growth scenarios:

### 1. LOOK AT YOUR STARTUP'S PAST GROWTH

To make realistic projections, start by analyzing your historical growth. Review your revenue over the past few years and compare it with relevant industry benchmarks and competitors. Ask yourself: Has your growth also led to greater impact?

> EXAMPLE
> A tech startup grows 20% year over year for three consecutive years. That trend becomes the baseline for its future projections.

To get a clearer picture, use key metrics like the compound annual growth rate (CAGR), the revenue growth rate or the customer growth rate. The formula for the revenue growth rate is:

(Current year revenue – Previous year revenue) / Previous year revenue × 100

### 2. CONSIDER EXTERNAL FACTORS THAT AFFECT GROWTH

Don't just rely on internal data – external trends can shape your future just as much. A top-down approach, ooks at macro-level indicators like GDP growth, sector trends, or policy changes. A bottom-up approach starts with your own data – such as market share or monthly recurring revenue – and builds from there.

Expert insights, your management team's strategic vision, and overall market sentiment can also help you spot risks and opportunities. Look at market trends, shifts in customer behavior, and potential new markets to explore where you could expand next.

### 3. BUILD OUT REALISTIC GROWTH SCENARIOS

You can use your data to map out different growth paths: :

- Best-case scenario: Everything goes better than expected. Your solution gains fast traction, funding rounds are successful, and your impact exceeds targets. Think 50% more revenue or significantly higher customer numbers than planned.
- Base-case scenario: The steady middle ground. Growth follows historical trends, revenue is stable, and operations run as planned. Most customers pay on time, and the business scales gradually.
- Worst-case scenario: Here you assume the worst possible case. Growth stalls or declines. This could involve facing delays in product rollout, missed funding milestones, lower-than-expected impact, or unfavorable market conditions. The result would be a collapse in business.

> EXAMPLES
> : Customer payments are delayed, projects cannot be fully invoiced, or sales efforts fall short.

### 4. TURN EACH SCENARIO INTO A STRATEGY

Once your scenarios are in place, use them to guide your planning: Double down on opportunities in the best case, strengthen your foundation in the base case and minimize risk and stay agile in the worst case. This way, you can stay focused but flexible – ready to pivot when needed and in control of your growth.

→ NEXT STEP: IMPACT MEASUREMENT STRATEGY
You've laid the foundation for your startup's financial growth – now it's time to track your progress.

Before setting up KPIs or building your baseline scenario, make sure your team, your structures and your organizational culture are ready for the next phase and fine-tune your impact management strategy.

BUILD

# GROWING WITH PURPOSE: IMPACT MANAGEMENT FOR IMPACT STARTUPS

As your startup grows, so does its impact. This chapter helps you measure and manage that impact more effectively. The goal is to sharpen your impact indicators and identify any potential negative effects early on. That way, you stay focused on your mission – and credible in the eyes of investors and stakeholders.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you've launched an impact-driven startup.
- you've clearly defined your target group, the problem you're solving, and the impact you want to create.
- your MVP has been tested and validated.
- you've mapped out your impact potential, market opportunity, and financing model.
- the resources you need are in place.

→ In this section, you'll learn how to ...

- make sure your business model continues to deliver impact.
- develop impact indicators for step 7 of your Impact Ladder.
- spot and address risks and unintended effects early.

## Developing impact indicators for step 7 of your Impact Ladder

You've already worked your way through steps 1 to 6 – now it's time to tackle the final and most challenging stage: measuring the actual impact of your startup. This level is the hardest to reach, which makes it all the more important to approach it thoroughly. Here's how to get started with developing your impact indicators:

### 1. GATHER IDEAS FOR INDICATORS

Start by brainstorming indicators that could reflect the societal impact of your business model. Examples include:

- Measurable contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Changes in relevant social metrics (e.g., $CO_2$ reduction in your target region)
- Long-term improvement in quality-of-life indices
- Tangible shifts in laws or political systems

TIP
Uses resources such as the UN SDG indicators for inspiration.

### 2. STRUCTURE YOUR INDICATORS

A clear structure helps you use your indicators effectively later on. Group your ideas into meaningful categories. Make sure you include a mix of quantitative (measurable data) and qualitative (more subjective insights) indicators. See how they relate to one another – often, qualitative insights build on quantitative findings. For example, survey data can help interpret how a program has improved quality of life.

### 3. MAKE THEM S.M.AR.T.

The indicators should be formulated according to the S.M.A.R.T. principle:

- Specific: clearly defined and unambiguous
- Measurable: Quantifiable
- Attractive: Relevant to your goal
- Realistic: Achievable with available resources
- Time-bound: Has a clear timeline

### 4. PRIORITIZE YOUR INDICATORS

Not all indicators are equally useful, and too many can complicate your tracking efforts. Focus on the ones that best reflect your impact and can realistically be measured. Ask yourselves:

- Which indicators align most closely with your impact goals?
- Which data can you collect with your current resources?
- Which indicators matter most to your stakeholders or investors?

## Identify and address potential negative effects

Measuring your positive impact is important – but so is identifying potential negative effects your business model might cause. This 7-step guide helps you carry out a simple but effective risk analysis:

### 1. DEFINE THE SCOPE OF YOUR SYSTEM

Narrow down the area you want to assess so you can stay focused. Analyze the specific problem you aim to solve, without getting lost in too many details. This helps avoid overwhelm and lets you use your resources efficiently. For more on this, see → Chapter "Problem, target group, and stakeholder analysis: Your first step toward launching an impact startup."

### 2. IDENTIFY ALL RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

Make a list that includes both supporters and potential critics – customers, users, partners, decision-makers, and more. That way, you capture all perspectives. Details on this are found under → Chapter "Problem, target group, and stakeholder analysis: Your first step toward launching an impact startup."

### 3. MAP YOUR SYSTEM COMPONENTS

Create a visual map of the system your startup operates in. Connect the key actors, processes, and resources in your model. This will help you spot interactions, risks, and unintended side effects.

### 4. ANALYZE INTERACTIONS

Explore how your solution interacts with other parts of the system and look for feedback loops. Ask yourself whether it might trigger unexpected consequences or long-term side effects – for example, if helping one group unintentionally harms another.

### 5. ACCOUNT FOR EXTERNAL FACTORS

Identify outside influences – like political shifts, economic trends, or environmental risks – that could affect your business model. These can either strengthen or weaken your approach.

### 6. ASSESS POTENTIAL NEGATIVE IMPACTS

Examine which groups or systems might experience downsides as a result of your work. Estimate how likely and how serious those risks are so you can prioritize the most pressing ones. This forms the foundation for targeted responses.

### 7. DEVELOP MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Create strategies to reduce or eliminate the risks you've identified. That might mean adjusting your solution, shifting your focus, or changing how you deliver your product or service. The goal is to design your processes with both positive and negative impacts in mind.

CASE STUDY: TOMS SHOES

The story of TOMS Shoes shows how well-intentioned business models can lead to unintended consequences. The company's model of donating one pair of shoes for every pair sold – its "One for One" approach – ended up weakening local shoe markets in countries across the Global South. Steps like shifting toward local production helped reduce some of these negative effects.

1. System boundaries

TOMS' "One for One" model and its impact on local shoe industries in the Global South

2. Relevant stakeholders
TOMS Shoes, customers in industrialized countries, shoe recipients in the Global South, local shoe producers and retailers, local communities, NGOs, TOMS suppliers and manufacturers, investors
3. System components
TOMS' production and distribution, donation program, local shoe markets in the Global South, global supply chain, marketing and brand image, financial resources and investment

4. System interactions
Positive feedback loop: More sales lead to more donations, boosting the brand and driving further sales. Negative feedback loop: Donations can hurt local markets, worsening poverty and increasing long-term dependence on aid.

5. External influences
Global economic trends, shifts in consumer attitudes toward ethical products, political stability in recipient countries, advances in footwear production technology

6. Potential negative impacts
Displacement of local shoe producers and retailers; dependency on donated goods in recipient communities; potential quality concerns with donated shoes

7. Mitigation strategie
Focus on local production to support regional economies; expand the "One for One" model into areas like education and health; partner with local NGOs to support sustainable development; invest in training for local shoemakers and support local businesses

Important note: When evaluating potential negative effects, don't just consider financial impact. Ask how much control or influence your startup has over the root causes. Some societal problems can only be solved through regulatory action, since voluntary efforts may put impact-driven startups at a competitive disadvantage.
Also consider internal risks – such as poor labor conditions within your own company. To uncover these issues, start with process mapping as part of your ESG management strategy (see "Grow with impact: team, processes, and culture for impact startups").

ESG MANAGEMENT
→ Here you'll find criteria to help you build a solid ESG (environmental, social, and governance) management framework tailored to your processes.

You can also explore whether a Social Life Cycle Assessment (S-LCA) might be useful for your solution. S-LCA is a method for assessing the social and socio-economic impacts of products, services, or systems across their entire life cycle. It helps organizations understand, evaluate, and improve their social impact – ultimately contributing to more sustainable and responsible production and use of goods and services. Learn more → here.

→ NEXT STEP: TRACK YOUR KPIS

You've now laid the groundwork to secure the long-term impact of your business model – and identified potential risks or negative effects your work might create at different levels.

Before you move on to measuring KPIs and building a baseline scenario, take time to prepare your team, structure, and organizational culture for the growth phase and start shaping a strategy for your business growth.

MEASURE

# KPIS AND BEYOND: HOW TO MEASURE AND GROW YOUR STARTUP'S IMPACT

As your startup enters the growth phase, tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) becomes essential. KPIs help you measure progress, spot roadblocks early, and make informed, data-driven decisions. This is also the right time to track and analyze both financial and impact KPIs to learn from them and adjust your strategy – always keeping maximum impact in sight.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- your operational model is mature and proven.
- you've proven that your strategy works.
- you have sufficient financial and human resources.
- your organization is ready for change and growth.
- the scaling supports your mission and the broader systemic change you're working toward.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- develop measurable KPIs for your startup.
- set your startup up for sustainable growth and long-term impact.

## Track your KPIs step by step

To manage your impact effectively, you need clear, measurable KPIs – and a solid system to track them. Here's how to get started:

### 1. SET UP TRACKING TOOLS

Start by choosing the right tools to collect your data – surveys, databases, or analytics tools, for example. These should integrate smoothly into your existing processes to keep data collection as efficient as possible.

To track your KPIs, you can combine both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods include simple counts – like the number of products sold or people reached – and measurable outcomes, such as $CO_2$ savings or participation in specific activities. You can also use structured observations to systematically document certain processes or behaviors.

Qualitative methods give you deeper insight into how your target group thinks and feels. These might include semi-structured or open interviews that capture individual perspectives and feedback, or before-and-after surveys to measure changes in behavior or knowledge. Analyzing documents – like reports or feedback forms – can also reveal valuable patterns and insights.

### 2. TRACK YOUR KPIS ACROSS THE IMPACT LADDER

Your KPIs should reflect different levels of impact – from immediate outputs to long-term societal change. This helps you capture both short-term wins and your broader mission. Here are examples of KPIs at each level of the impact ladder:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | Activities take place as planned | Number of workshops/services delivered |
| Step 2 | Target groups are reached | Number of workshops held, users who accessed your solution, or people reached within your defined target group |
| Step 3 | Target groups accept the offering | Key figures such as sales, profit margins, growth rates or market share; user satisfaction scores like Net Promoter Score (NPS) or Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT) |
| Step 4 | Target group gains awareness or skills | Survey results showing increases in knowledge |
| Step 5 | Target group changes behavior | Percentage of users who have made lasting changes in behavior |
| Step 6 | Target group's living conditions improve | Measured improvements in income, well-being, or other quality-of-life indicators as a result of your solution |
| Step 7 | Broader societal change | System-level impact, such as reduced $CO_2$ emissions, long-term improvements in regional quality-of-life scores, policy changes, or measurable contributions to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) |

TIP
Revisit your KPIs regularly and update them as your startup evolves or new challenges emerge.

→ NÄCHSTER SCHRITT: KPIS MESSEN
Mit der Messung von KPIs und der Erstellung eines Referenzszenarios seid ihr einen weiteren wichtigen Schritt gegangen, um das nachhaltige Wachstum und den Impact eures Startups zu sichern.
Im nächsten Kapitel geht es daran, die KPIs und gesammelten Daten zu analysieren, um fundierte Entscheidungen zu treffen und Strategien zu entwickeln.

LEARN

# DATA-DRIVEN GROWTH: IS YOUR IMPACT STARTUP READY TO SCALE?

As your startup expands, so does your impact. But how do you make sure you're making the right decisions? The impact KPIs you developed in the last chapter give you a data-driven foundation to guide your next steps. They help you track progress, spot weaknesses, and improve your processes where it matters most. Take your time with this step. Research shows that 74% of failed startups scaled too soon. The key isn't just collecting impact data – it's using it to grow smarter.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- you've launched your impact-driven startup.
- you've clearly defined your target group, the problem you're solving, and the impact you want to create.
- your MVP has been tested and validated.
- you've mapped out your impact potential, market opportunity, and financing model.
- your structures, processes, and resources are stable.
- you have a plan in place for sustainable business growth.
- you've developed impact KPIs and a baseline scenario for measuring your impact.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- make informed decisions based on your KPIs and data.
- determine if and when your startup is ready to scale.

## Make data-driven decisions, step by step

Data is key to making smart business decisions. The steps below show you how to use your data effectively.

### 1. ANALYZE YOUR DATA REGULARLY

Your impact KPIs only matter if you actually use them. Run regular analyses to spot patterns and trends, and compare your targets with actual outcomes. Look for recurring issues or inefficiencies, and rank them by urgency and economic impact. This helps you set priorities and improve where it counts.

### 2. GET TO THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

To solve issues effectively, you need to understand the causes behind your challenges. Try using the 5 Whys method– ask "why" at least five times to uncover root causes (see "Problem, target group, and stakeholder analysis: Your first step toward launching an impact startup"). Also gather feedback from your team – different perspectives can reveal blind spots.

### 3. BUILD STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE YOUR PROCESSES

Based on your analysis, develop specific actions to improve. This could include team training, changes in program design, or reallocating resources. Start by testing new processes in small pilots before rolling them out across the organization (see "Putting your MVP to the test: Measuring your startup's impact").

### 4. KEEP IMPROVING YOUR STRATEGY

Your strategy shouldn't be set in stone. Review how your actions are working and adjust as needed. Use your KPIs as an early warning system to spot problems before they grow. Create a culture where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities (see "Grow with impact: Team, processes, and culture for impact startups"). True innovation comes from continuous improvement.

IMPACT AND MONETIZATION: WHEN AND HOW?

Sooner or later, you'll face the question of how to translate your impact into financial terms. The Bertelsmann Stiftung has analyzed leading mmpact measurement and valuation (IMV) approaches. Their study – based on expert interviews and a workshop – highlights which methods work best for startups, how to close existing gaps in measuring impact, and what next steps might look like.

Check out the publication (in German only): → Fit für die Zukunft – IMV-Ansätze

### 5. SHOW YOUR IMPACT DATA CLEARLY AND EFFECTIVELY (E.G., A DASHBOARD)

Impact dashboards offer a quick overview of your key KPIs without digging through long reports. They help you spot trends early and make faster, data-based decisions. Dashboards also boost transparency for your stakeholders.

You can build a simple dashboard in Excel or use dedicated tools – choose what fits your needs and resources.

## Scaling: Is now the right time?

Before you decide to scale, take an honest look at where your startup stands. These steps will help you assess whether you're truly ready:

### 1. RUN A QUICK CHECK

Start by asking yourselves:

- Is your operating model solid and tested?
- Have you proven that your approach works?
- Do you have enough financial and human resources?
- Is your organization ready for change and growth?
- Is there demand for your solution in new markets or regions?
- Does scaling align with your mission and your goal for systemic change?

> TIP
> Your growth strategy should match your broader goals. A useful rule of thumb: grow only as big as necessary, and as small as possible. Scaling too quickly can be counterproductive. In some cases, building strong networks or strategic assets may be the more sustainable path. And it's perfectly okay to decide that growth isn't your priority right now.

### 2. REVIEW YOUR ANSWERS HONESTLY AND CRITICALLY

Take a critical look at whether your startup is truly ready for the next step. If not, identify which areas need more development – whether it's your team, funding, or operational stability.

### 3. MAKE A CONCRETE PLAN

Outline clear next steps to close any gaps. This might include improving internal processes, strengthening partnerships, or launching a targeted fundraising campaign.

Growth isn't just about scaling – it's about evolving strategically. With data-driven decisions, smart process design, and a clear-eyed view of your strategy, you can build lasting impact.

### → WHAT'S NEXT: IS YOUR STARTUP READY TO SCALE

By now, you've either laid the groundwork for scaling – or made a conscious decision to hold off. Your impact startup is ready to scale if ...

- there's stable demand for your solution (you've achieved product-market fit)
- you've built a repeatable, profitable business model
- your impact model is scale-ready – with a solution that works and can grow, and a team that can guide the strategy
- your revenue is growing steadily and significantly
- you've built a solid, growing customer base
- your team is expanding and investing in skills development
- you've successfully completed Series A and Series B funding roundsnds
- you're shifting your focus from daily operations to long-term strategic planning

If you've decided to scale, the next chapter will walk you through different scaling strategies – and help you figure out which one fits your startup best.

Not sure how to move forward? These 6 tips might help.

TIPS TO GET YOUR STARTUP READY TO SCALE

1. Check your product-market fit
Run a detailed market analysis to better understand customer needs. Build detailed personas to define your ideal customers. Keep gathering feedback and adjust your solution as needed.

2. Refine your business model
Reevaluate your business model and see if it still fits your goals and resources. Test different models to find the most profitable one. Use an iterative approach to keep improving.

3. Reassess your impact model
Think about how your new target markets or user groups might affect your impact. Align your product with your purpose – not the other way around. You might also consider developing new products or services.

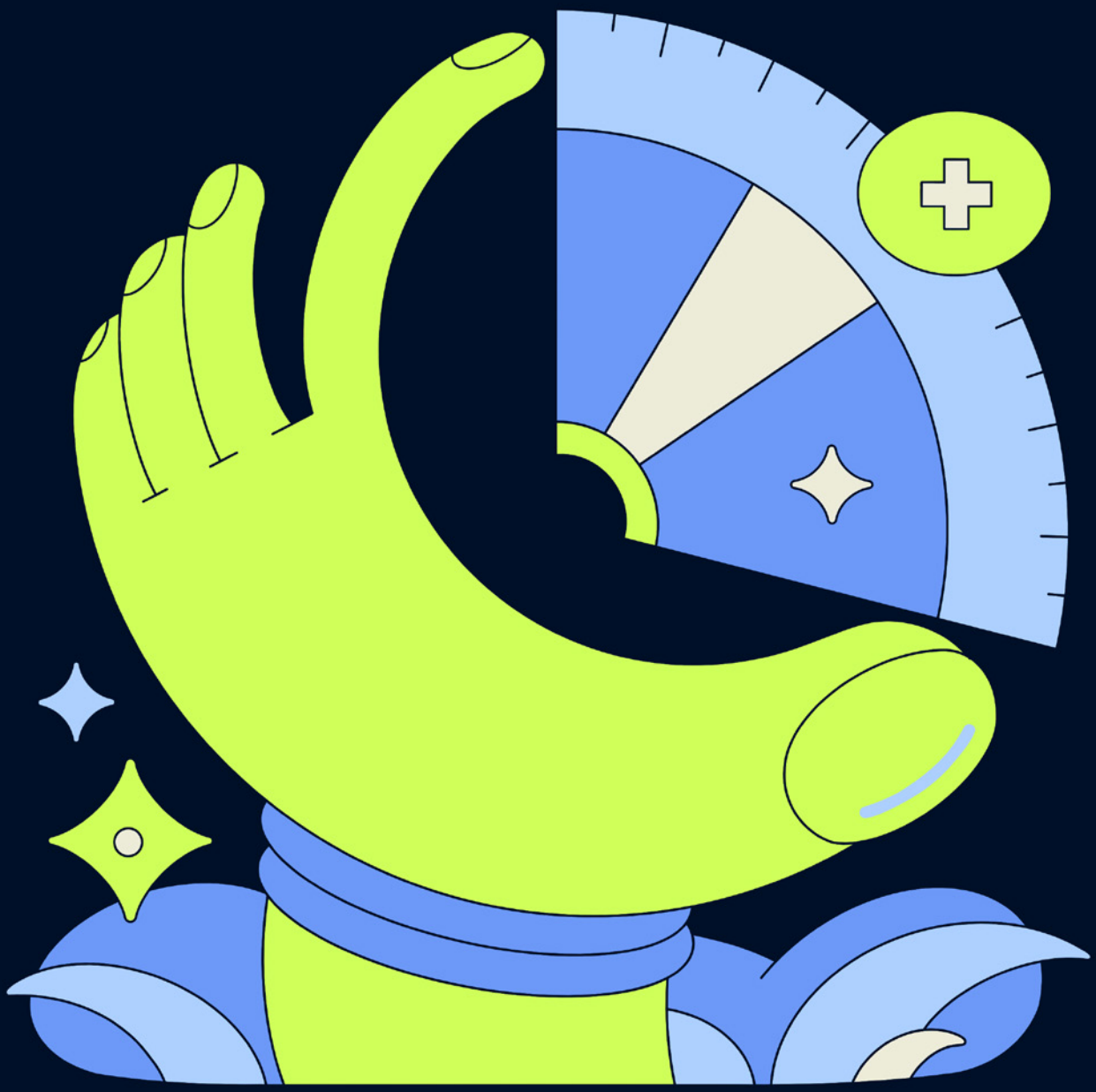
4. Improve customer acquisition
Create a strong value proposition that clearly highlights your unique benefits. Use social media and email marketing to reach potential customers. Network actively and build strategic partnerships.

5. Focus on growth
Identify your growth drivers and focus on them. Invest in expanding your team and upskilling your staff. Look for ways to scale your impact – like regional expansion or social franchising.

6. Strengthen your strategic planning
Set clear long-term goals and build a detailed plan to reach them. Set up regular strategy reviews to stay aligned and adjust as needed.

Remember: growth is a process. Stay flexible, learn from setbacks, and keep refining your strategy as the market evolves.

# SCALING PHASE



# SCALING

BUILD

## SCALING YOUR IMPACT: STRATEGY, VALIDATION, AND GROWTH FOR STARTUPS

Ready to take your impact to the next level? Then you need a clear strategy, reliable tools to measure your impact, and third-party validation. These are essential for making informed decisions, improving over time, and building trust with investors and partners. A structured approach to managing impact helps you focus your resources where they matter most – and maximize your long-term results. Without it, you risk wasting time, missing opportunities, and losing credibility.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- your operational model is mature and has proven itself in practice.
- you've shown that your approach makes a real difference.
- you have the funding and team in place to grow.
- your organization is ready to evolve.
- your growth strategy supports your mission and the broader change you're working toward.

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO...

- choose the right scaling strategy.
- build an advisory board that targets impact.
- train your team and develop a shared understanding of impact.
- prepare for third-party validation and scale your impact effectively.

## Build your scaling strategy

There are several strategies to use for growing the impact of your solution sustainably:

### EXPAND YOUR CAPACITY

Deepen your presence in your current region by building on what already works. Strengthen existing structures and processes to reach more people where you're already active.

### BRANCH OUT STRATEGICALLY

Enter new markets or launch new products and services. This could mean expanding into new regions, reaching different audiences, or offering new solutions to the same communities.

### CONTRACTUAL PARTNERSHIPS

Grow your reach by working with formal partners. Franchising, licensing, or similar models can help you ex-

pand faster while sharing the risks and resource load.

### SPREAD YOUR KNOW-HOW

Grow your impact without growing your organization. Focus on sharing your methods and ideas, such as through open-source tools, training materials, or even patent-sharing to empower others to replicate or adapt your approach.

> SCALING SOCIAL IMPACT
> In 2015, the Bertelsmann Stiftung conducted a Europe-wide study exploring what makes national and cross-border scaling strategies work → click here to read the full report.

Once you've chosen a scaling strategy, the next step is identifying what will make it work: the relevant success factors. That means looking at how easy your model is to replicate, how well you can mobilize resources, and whether your team has the leadership skills to manage growth effectively. It's also important to understand that entering a new market or targeting a new audience can change the context entirely. It's not just about new stakeholders – it can also mean new rules, dynamics, and system-wide effects. Similar problems don't always have the same root causes. To find out if you're facing something different, it's worth doing a fresh root cause analysis (see "Problem, target group and stakeholder analysis: Your first step towards launching an impact startup).

Set clear goals and milestones for scaling, map out the resources and changes your business model will need, and build in systems to regularly track your scaling progress. Keep gathering feedback from your target group and stakeholders – and be ready to adjust your approach when needed.

> SCALING VS. LINEAR GROWTH
> Linear growth means your revenue grows at the same rate as your resource input. With this type of growth, the scaling factor remains constant. This means that every additional hire or piece of equipment leads to a proportional increase in output.
>
> True scaling, on the other hand, is about doing more with less – growing your revenue and impact faster than your costs. That's what makes it a more efficient and sustainable path to growth.

# Build the foundation for managing impact

To scale successfully, you need more than a strategy – you need the right structures and know-how. Setting up an advisory board, developing an impact handbook, and training your team are all key steps. They'll help you manage your impact intentionally and make it a core part of your company culture.

### 1. BUILD AN ADVISORY BOARD

The right advisory board can shape your strategy, guide your growth, and sharpen your decision-making as you scale – giving you a real competitive edge. Bringing in impact experts, data scientists, and researchers can be especially valuable:

- Strategy support: They can help you develop and execute data-driven strategies, which is crucial for staying ahead of the curve
- Network: Impact professionals bring hands-on experience and can connect you to a broader impact community.
- Deep expertise: Researchers offer up-to-date insights and technical know-how that fuel innovation.
- Data analysis: Data scientists help you turn complex data into actionable insights and forecasts.

To build an effective advisory board that includes impact experts, data scientists and researchers ...

- set clear goals and expectations from the start,
- look for experts with relevant experience in your field,
- make sure your board reflects a mix of perspectives and skill sets,
- set up regular meetings and streamlined communication,
- involve the board in key decisions and high-impact moments.

### 2. TRAIN YOUR TEAM ON IMPACT

Creating an impact handbook and offering ongoing training for your employees helps make your strategy part of your everyday operations. Here's what that unlocks:

- Shared understanding: An impact handbook aligns everyone around your mission and impact goals.
- Greater impact: A team that understands impact can make more thoughtful, mission-aligned choices.
- Employee motivation: Communicating your impact vision boosts employee engagement.
- Clear communication: A consistent internal guide helps everyone tell your impact story with confidence.
- Competitive advantage: A well-trained team can clearly explain your impact to investors, customers, and partners.

To get started with creating an impact handbook and training your employees:

1. Clearly define your impact goals and metrics. For help, check out the chapter "Growth with purpose: impact management for impact startups."
2. Use collaborationor project management tools to co-create the handbook and keep it accessible.
3. Break it down into easy-to-follow sections – your mission, strategy, measurement methods, and best practices.
4. Add real examples and case studies to show what impact looks like in practice.
5. Develop interactive training formats like workshops or e-learning modules to bring the content to life.

IMPACT-FOCUSED TRAINING
→ SKala-CAMPUS offers personalized learning programs on impact – featuring guides, exercises, video tutorials, and advanced training. It's geared toward nonprofits, but many of the tools are just as useful for impact startups.

6. Set up regular impact check-ins to keep impact front and center, share updates, and invite ideas from your team. Encourage employees to pitch and test their own impact initiatives. If it fits your culture, tie impact goals to performance reviews or incentive programs to show they matter.
7. Include your impact handbook in your code of conduct.

TIP
If your strategy relies on partnerships or sharing your model with others, make sure your approach still delivers results in different settings. Share your impact handbook and code of conduct and stay in close touch with partners and users.

→ NEXT STEP: TRACK YOUR KPIS
You've laid the groundwork – defined your scaling strategy, set up an experienced advisory board, and thought through how to validate your impact.

Now it's time to measure your KPIs so you can make smart, data-driven decisions as you grow. That's what we'll tackle next.

MEASURE

# KPIS AND BEYOND: HOW TO MEASURE AND GROW YOUR STARTUP'S IMPACT

As your startup enters the growth phase, tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) becomes essential. KPIs help you measure progress, spot roadblocks early, and make informed, data-driven decisions. This is also the right time to track and analyze both financial and impact KPIs to learn from them and adjust your strategy – always keeping maximum impact in sight.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- your operational model is mature and proven.
- you've proven that your strategy works.
- you have sufficient financial and human resources.
- your organization is ready for change and growth.
- the scaling supports your mission and the broader systemic change you're working toward

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- develop measurable KPIs for your startup.
- set your startup up for sustainable growth and long-term impact.

## Track your KPIs step by step

To manage your impact effectively, you need clear, measurable KPIs – and a solid system to track them. Here's how to get started:

### 1. SET UP TRACKING TOOLS

Start by choosing the right tools to collect your data – surveys, databases, or analytics tools, for example. These should integrate smoothly into your existing processes to keep data collection as efficient as possible.

To track your KPIs, you can combine both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods include simple counts – like the number of products sold or people reached – and measurable outcomes, such as $CO_2$ savings or participation in specific activities. You can also use structured observations to systematically document certain processes or behaviors.

Qualitative methods give you deeper insight into how your target group thinks and feels. These might include semi-structured or open interviews that capture individual perspectives and feedback, or before-and-after surveys to measure changes in behavior or knowledge. Analyzing documents – like reports or feedback forms – can also reveal valuable patterns and insights.

### 2. TRACK YOUR KPIS ACROSS THE IMPACT LADDER

Your KPIs should reflect different levels of impact – from immediate outputs to long-term societal change. This helps you capture both short-term wins and your broader mission. Here are examples of KPIs at each level of the impact ladder.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | Activities take place as planned | Number of workshops/services delivered |
| Step 2 | Target groups are reached | Number of workshops held, users who accessed your solution, or people reached within your defined target group |
| Step 3 | Target groups accept the offering | Key figures such as sales, profit margins, growth rates or market share; user satisfaction scores like Net Promoter Score (NPS) or Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT) |
| Step 4 | Target group gains awareness or skills | Survey results showing increases in knowledge |
| Step 5 | Target group changes behavior | Percentage of users who have made lasting changes in behavior |
| Step 6 | Target group's living conditions improve | Measured improvements in income, well-being, or other quality-of-life indicators as a result of your solution |
| Step 7 | Broader societal change | System-level impact, such as reduced $CO_2$ emissions, long-term improvements in regional quality-of-life scores, policy changes, or measurable contributions to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) |

TIP
Revisit your KPIs regularly and update them as your startup evolves or new challenges emerge.

→ NEXT STEP: SCALE WITH DATA
By tracking your KPIs, you've taken another important step toward ensuring the sustainable growth and impact of your startup.

In the next chapter, we'll take a closer look at your KPIs and collected data to make informed decisions and shape effective strategies.

LEARN

# SCALE WITH DATA: MAKE IMPACT PART OF EVERY DECISION

Your startup is growing – and so is your impact. But how do you make sure you're making the right calls as you scale? The impact KPIs you developed in the last section give you a solid, data-driven foundation for smart decision-making. With the right metrics, you can track your progress, identify weak spots, and improve what's not working. The goal isn't just to collect impact data – it's to actively use it to guide your growth.

→ THIS SECTION IS FOR YOU IF ...

- your operations are solid and well-tested
- you've shown that your approach delivers results
- you have the financial and team capacity to scale
- your organization is open to change and ready to grow
- your growth strategy aligns with your mission and the systems-level change you're aiming for
- you've already mapped out a scaling strategy
- you're consistently tracking both financial and impact KPIs

→ IN THIS SECTION, YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO ...

- make KPI and data-driven decisions

## Make data-driven decisions, step by step

Data is the foundation of good business decisions. Here's how to use it effectively, one step at a time.

### 1. REVIEW YOUR DATA REGULARLY

Your impact KPIs are only useful if you actively analyze them. Look at your data on a regular basis to spot patterns and trends, and compare your targets with your actual results. Identify where issues or inefficiencies show up frequently, and sort them by urgency and cost. This helps you prioritize and focus your efforts where they matter most.

### 2. GET TO THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

To solve problems effectively, you need to understand what's really causing them. Try using the 5 Whys method: ask "Why?" at least five times to uncover the deeper causes (see chapter "Problem, target group and stakeholder analysis: Your first step towards launching an impact startup"). Feedback from your team can also shed light on issues you might not see on your own.

### 3. BUILD STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE YOUR PROCESSES

Once you understand the root cause, come up with clear actions to improve. This could mean training your team, adjusting your program design, or reallocating resources. Start small – run pilot projects to test new ideas before rolling them out across your startup (→ Chapter "Putting your MVP to the test: Measuring your startup's impact").

### 4. KEEP REFINING YOUR STRATEGY

Your strategy shouldn't be set in stone. Check regularly to see what's working, and adjust when needed. Use

your KPIs as an early warning system to catch issues before they grow. Build a culture that sees mistakes as learning opportunities (see "Grow sustainably: Building team, structure, and culture in impact startups"). Real innovation happens through ongoing improvement.

IMPACT AND MONETIZATION: WHEN AND HOWWIE?
At some point, you'll need to think about impact monetization – how to translate the value of your impact into economic terms. The Bertelsmann Stiftung has analyzed leading Impact Measurement and Valuation (IMV) approaches. Based on expert interviews and workshops, the study explores which methods are best suited for startups, how to close existing gaps in impact valuation, and what next steps might look like.

→ Read the report: Fit für die Zukunft – IMV-Ansätze

### 5. SHARE YOUR IMPACT DATA CLEARLY – USE AN IMPACT DASHBOARD

An impact dashboard gives you and your stakeholders a clear snapshot of your key KPIs – without digging through long reports. It helps you spot trends early and make faster, data-informed decisions. Plus, it increases transparency across your network.

You can build a simple dashboard in Excel or use specialized tools – it all depends on your needs and resources.

Can't get any further? Maybe the might help.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO SCALE YOUR STARTUP SUCCESSFULLY

1. Recheck your product-market fit
Run a thorough market analysis to better understand your customers' needs. Create detailed personas to sharpen your understanding of who you're targeting. Keep gathering customer feedback and adjust your offering as you go – stay flexible and responsive.

2. Refine your business model
Take a fresh look at your business model and see if it still fits your goals and resources. Don't be afraid to experiment – test different approaches to see what works best. Use an iterative process so you can keep improving over time.

3. Reevaluate your impact model
Consider the context of any new target groups or customer segments – shifts here can affect both your impact and your business model. Make sure your product aligns with your purpose and impact goals, not the other way around. If needed, think about expanding your offering with new products or services.

4. Level up your customer acquisition
Craft a strong value proposition that clearly highlights what sets you apart. Use tools like social media and email marketing to reach potential customers. Build relationships through networking and look for strategic partnerships.

5. Keep your focus on growth
Identify the main levers for growth in your business model and focus your energy there. Invest in growing your team and upskilling your people. Explore ways to scale your impact – whether that's through social franchising, licensing, or expanding into new regions.

6. Get better at strategic planning
Set clear long-term goals and build a roadmap to reach them. Regularly review your strategy and adjust as needed.

Remember that scaling is a process. Stay flexible, learn from what doesn't work, and keep adjusting your strategy to fit a changing market.

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