Parents+

Implementation guide

What is the implementation guide?

Our guide features a compilation of key considerations for implementation, informed by insights from years of experience.

Our suggestions take into account on-the-ground logistics and project management details, as well as a set of questions to consider at the system-strengthening level. We also include a dedicated section on scale, **yet we recommend thinking about scale from the very beginning and all throughout the implementation journey**.

In each section of our implementation guide, we list a curated selection of tools, templates, in-depth research, and real-world examples for those interested in a deeper dive. These references are accessible online on the Starter Kit website.

We appreciate that each project context is different and invite you to read our suggestions in any order that feels right.

Zoom-ins – available online
Putting implementation guidance into practice

Zoom-ins provide a close-up on projects that have been implemented or are under implementation, often at scale, in different contexts. Our goal in sharing these examples is to bring our implementation guidance to life, and to share experiences and lessons learned about what worked well in a variety of different settings and contexts.

Zoom-ins focus on the elements of each project that we felt were interesting to share here and that could be grasped in a couple of minutes. They also include links to resources where more information is available. You can browse through the zoom-ins and filter by programme, by location, and by implementation element in focus. **Zoom-ins are available online on the Starter Kit website.**

Implementation guide

Built on **lessons learned** from Parents+, this guide is a tool to support your planning and thinking, it is not a set of rigid guidelines.
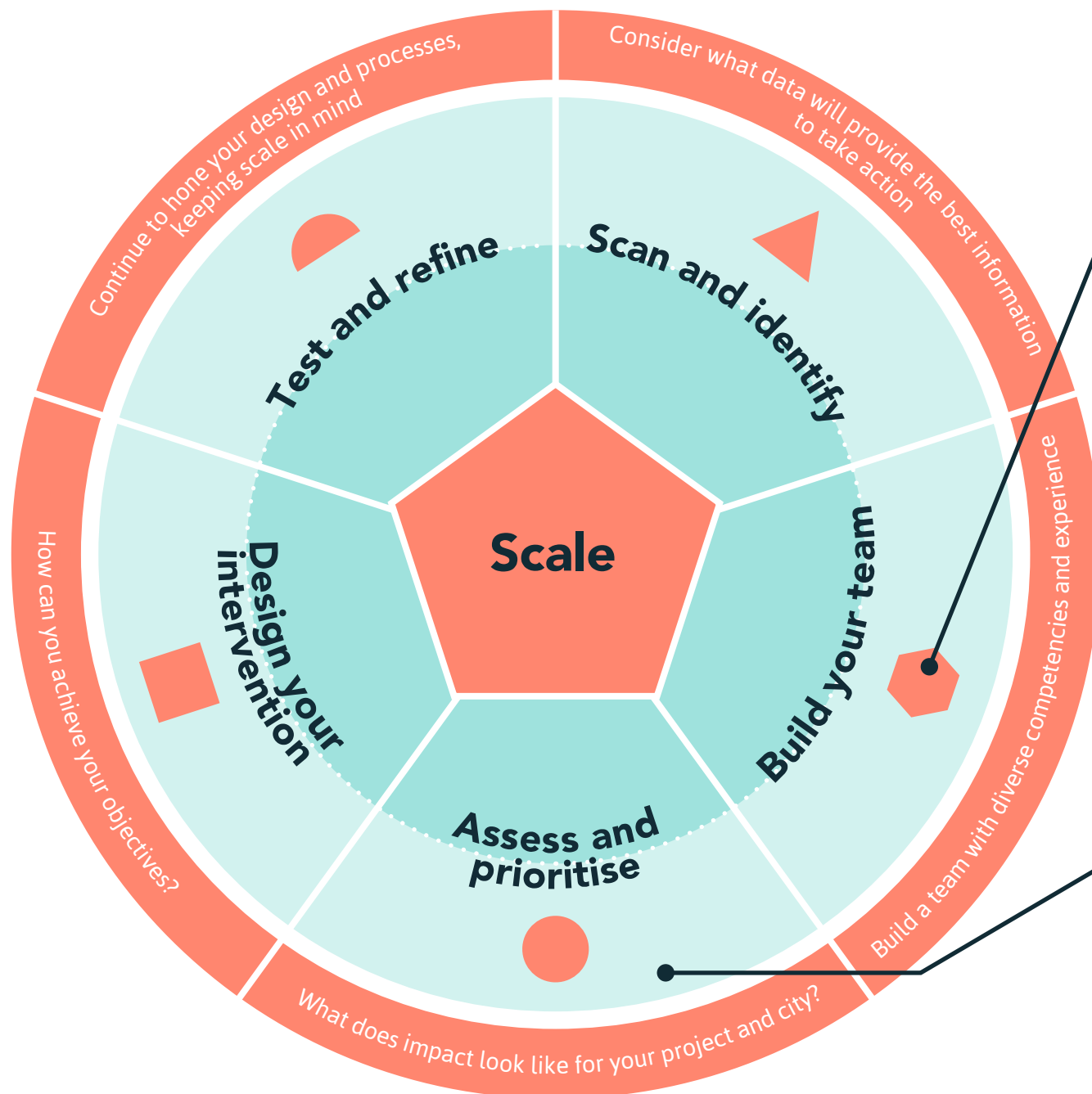
What are you implementing?

Parents+ programmes of all shapes, whether inspired by the ideas for action section of this Starter Kit or from other sources.

Core objective

The core objective is to have a positive **impact at scale** on caregiver well-being and caregiving behaviours, in turn promoting the healthy development of babies and toddlers.

Continue to hone your design and processes, keeping scale in mind

Consider what data will provide the best information to take action

Build a team with diverse competencies and experience

What does impact look like for your project and city?

How can you achieve your objectives?

Test and refine

Scan and identify

Build your team

Design your intervention

Assess and prioritise

Scale

Actions

The actions do not follow each other in sequence, as **implementation is not linear.** They may overlap, merge and have different weight depending on context.

Some projects may start with testing while scanning, for example, while others may go straight to scale. Intervention areas may vary greatly within a city or a country, and so will the implementation processes.
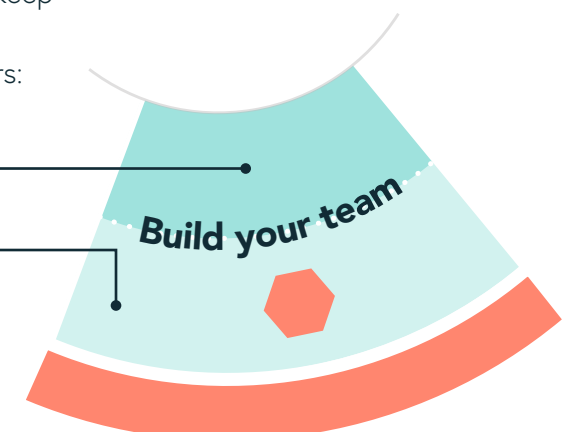
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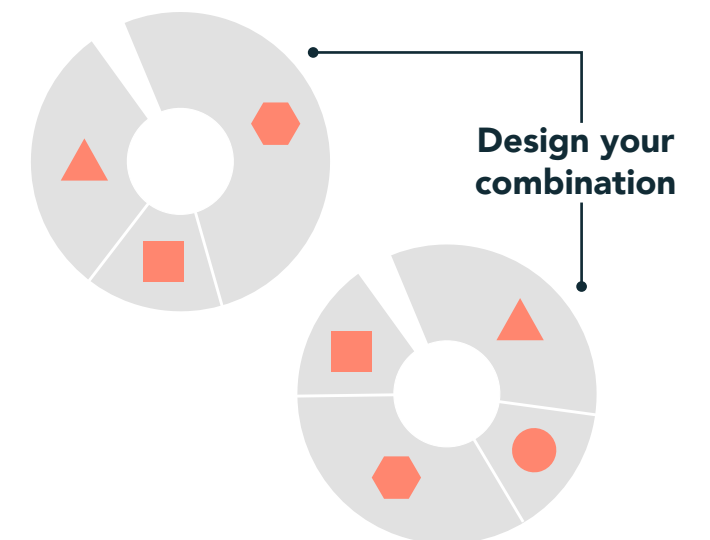
Considerations

For each action, you will find detailed descriptions, principles to keep in mind, and management tips for the highest impact on babies, toddlers and caregivers. These insights are divided into two layers:

On the ground

systems-level support

Build your team

▲ Scan and identify

Consider what data will provide the best information to take action

On the Ground

Gather and synthesise existing data

- **What national and municipal data on early childhood development services and indicators already exists? What does it tell you?** The relevance of each dataset certainly varies, but identifying existing data on the availability and uptake of social services; on health, education, environment and socioeconomic indicators; and on family access and use of transportation and public space can illuminate key gaps and needs.

- **Where do the highest concentration of families in need live?** Consider mapping these areas, particularly for families with children under 5, against income levels and other context-specific vulnerability indicators, as well as the location of existing early childhood services and programmes. Keep in mind that many families live in informal settlements or other areas not always captured under formal governance systems. Understanding where these maps overlap and diverge can help inform how and where you implement projects. For example, if the areas where the greatest number of vulnerabl e families live are the same as those without access to green spaces, you may consider working on improving access to nature.

  🔧 **Urban Network Analysis Toolbox**

  ✅ **Istanbul, Turkey**

  ✅ **Developing a municipal Child Abuse Monitor in the Netherlands**

- **What is the day-to-day experience of caregivers with babies and toddlers?** Consider conducting surveys or holding focus groups to understand caregivers' journeys through the city – their stress points and places of refuge. Consider also developing formative research to understand the rationale behind the adoption of certain caregiving behaviours that impact the development babies and toddlers.

  🔧 **Empathy tools to sensitise leaders and designers**

  🔧 **Urban95 journeys**

  🔧 **880 Cities' report on engaging families**

What infrastructure already exists?

- **What public spaces already exist for families?** ? i.e. parks and play spaces.

- **How do transport services already support families?** i.e. subsidised family fares for travel, walkability, etc.

- **What health, education and social services exist for young children and caregivers, and where are they located?** Think about quality, access, coverage, utilisation. Are there any gaps that you can identify? What initiatives already focus on the well-being of families, with a specific focus on their relation to the physical environment, or on women's and children's access to the city and services?

  🔧 **Urban95 diagnostic tool (when available)**

Systems-level support

Identify allies and supporters

- **Who is already advocating for babies, toddlers and caregivers?** Caregiver needs are often invisible to decision makers, and babies and toddlers are unable to speak up for themselves; we believe that advocacy on their behalf is especially important. Which political and civil society leaders, organisations and coalitions are already sensitised to the importance of and need for early childhood development programming? Could they actively support your implementation efforts through their advocacy, influence and budget resources?

  ✅ **Tel Aviv-Yafo, Israel**

  ✅ **Engaging the private sector in Romania (ECM)**

- **Which leaders, agencies and organisations already work closely with caregivers and children?** These might include individuals and entities engaged in health, education or social services, but they could also be youth movements, environmental NGOs, national governments or community organisations. Does their work touch other areas where bundling of services might be appropriate?

- **Who are your local experts in early childhood development?** Can you connect them with other stakeholders who can influence the well-being of babies, toddlers and their caregivers, such as city leaders, city managers, politicians, people from the budget allocation ministry/unit, transport agencies, or women's health frontline workers?

Strive to understand urban or national planning processes in place

- **What moments of opportunity exist in your city's planning process?** For Urban95, consider how often municipal plans and regulations are updated, and who updates them. Exploring these processes and the architects behind them can help you identify local timelines with which to align and leaders with whom to engage. For Parents+, consider the funding cycles of existing complementary programmes.

- **Is a large part of the population living in areas not easily reached by the planning system (informal neighbourhoods)?** Consider alternative ways to reach these population, such as partnering with community organisations and (non-spatial) government initiatives intervening in the area from other agencies such as social services or health.

  🔧 **Arup's Early Childhood Urban Framework (informal settlements)**

- **What sources of potential funding exist?** Consider government budgets at various levels and funding from different institutions, international organisations, international development banks, foundations and the private sector. For example, if you're looking to organise a parent-coaching event in a park, funding could come from social services or health budgets, or from parks and gardens department budgets, or local business owners. Or from a mix of sources. We appreciate that information on funding for early childhood initiatives can feel opaque and inaccessible; we have considerable work ahead of us to try to understand them.

🛑 Build your team

Consider what data will provide the best information to take action

Getting the right skill set and perspectives

- **Does your immediate team feature diverse perspectives and expertise?** Engaging staff from a variety of fields and sectors (for example, early childhood specialists together with urban planners and government staff) can streamline the implementation process. Consider how the very make-up of your team (and their respective influence and decision-making power) can support the integration of early childhood principles at all levels and across civic agencies. If this is not possible, consider ways to expose your team to different perspectives and to learn together.

  🔧 **An Urban95 Study Tour can be a useful teambuilding exercise, in addition to strengthening capacity and providing inspiration on what's possible. Read here about an example of a team from Tel Aviv's municipal government who travelled to Copenhagen.**

- **Who is leading on implementation?** Which organisation, and who within this organisation, is responsible for which tasks – are they aware of their roles, and do they or their team have what they need to get the job done? Do they have the necessary skills and competencies? In some cases, it could be city government or a national ministry and in other cases an NGO.

- **Which community organisations and/or frontline workers within your areas of focus are important to engage and why?** It is important that some people in your team not only have an understanding of the focus area or population but are connected with relevant local networks. If possible, directly including representatives from families with young children in interventions will help with scanning, designing and implementing. Working with local representatives multiplies impact, as people often trust their peers more than government experts. When communities and families actively ask for better-quality social services, they also feel more engaged and committed to the process.

  ✅ **Bogotá, Colombia**

Engage across sectors

- **Do cooperation mechanisms exist between the different stakeholders?** Our partners have benefited from regular meetings between high-level stakeholders and/or the establishment of a municipal government position dedicated to cross-sectoral early childhood action. We have found that the project benefits greatly when government is accountable for cross-sectoral cooperation, with common goals, shared budgets, or written agreements with clear milestones that need to be reached in a cross-sectoral manner.

  ✅ **Tel Aviv Zoom-in**

  ✅ **Recife, Brazil - Case Study or ECM Article**

- **What high-level allies and supporters, across sectors, can you inform early on so that they feel engaged throughout the process?** The support of high-level leaders is almost always a crucial element of success, and getting them involved early is important. Consider sharing monthly updates that link them to impact on young children and creating opportunities for them to share their achievements. Also consider what are common interests and how you can connect your work with their vision and goals. What are the different communication modes in engaging high-level allies?

- **How can you assemble and engage with campaigns and coalitions to take action for the youngest children?** There are potential champions for young children in many parts of civil society, including parents, physicians, nurses, teachers and childcare professionals, researchers, cultural figures, businesspeople and other professionals from a wide range of disciplines and sectors. Bringing their voices together towards a common policy or behaviour change goal in a campaign or coalition can be an important mechanism for change.

  ✅ **Israel Early Childhood Law**

Access and prioritise

What does impact look like for your project and city?

Defining goals and measuring impact

- **Can you refine your vision and definition of success?** Clarifying the narrative around what you want to achieve can not only help your team stay aligned as implementation progresses, it can also serve as a backbone for public communications and for gathering buy-in.

- **Where in your city can you have the greatest impact on the well-being of families with young children?** The data you gathered while scanning and researching the context can help you prioritise locations to focus on. How can existing infrastructure, resources and investment already allocated to the neighbourhood be leveraged? Also consider opportunities for quick-win interventions. Quick wins are small interventions that require few resources but have visible positive impact in the short term. They help show what's possible and gather support for deeper, more resource-intensive interventions.

  ✅ **Zoom-in on Istanbul, Turkey**

  ✅ **Tirana, Albania**

- **What objectives and impact indicators are appropriate?** The very process of developing project objectives and indicators can provide a useful way to substantively engage stakeholders and the community at the start of the process. For example, objectives might mirror clear needs for different services and activities that the community has already identified. Consider which impact indicators – qualitative and quantitative – could be used in the short term (for monitoring) and over the long term to demonstrate overall impact.

  🔧 **BvLF Indicator Framework**

  ℹ️ **Born Thriving Framework – Tirana, Albania**

  ✅ **Tirana, Albania**

  ℹ️ **Infant, Toddler and Caregiver Neighbourhood (ITCN) Framework and Design Guidelines, India**

  ✅ **Zoom-in on India**

  🔧 **Toolkit for measuring young children's urban experiences (for public spaces)**

- **Consider both progress and impact.** We have defined impact indicators to focus on changes in caregiver well-being and caregiving behaviours resulting from Parents+ and Urban95 interventions. But tracking implementation's progress can require a different set of metrics. For example, our partners have found it useful to track progress by measuring outputs such as the number of changes completed in the built environment, the number of caregivers reached, or investment spent.

  🔧 **BvLF Indicator Framework**

  🔧 **Toolkit for measuring young children's urban experiences** (for public spaces)

  ℹ️ **Born Thriving Framework – Tirana, Albania**

- **Is it possible to link data systems from various government departments to track progress across sectors?** Visualising diverse data in one place can help with prioritising interventions and tracking progress. It also allows for different agencies to better coordinate their activity in favour of babies, toddlers and their caregivers for better results. It can also help communicate progress externally and internally, giving feedback to frontline workers and reinforcing their sense of project ownership.

  ✅ **Zoom-in on Boa Vista, Brazil**

Systems-level support

Leverage overlapping agendas

- **Where and how do your priorities overlap with those of local communities?** Consider integrating those areas of overlap into your choice of indicators, so that your data and results strengthen local ownership of the intervention. Ownership increases the sustainability of the intervention by maintaining demand from communities over time. Community ownership can also help anchor new behaviours within the beneficiary group.

- **Where and how do your priorities overlap with those of other organisations and leaders?** To sensitise leaders with overlapping agendas, think of stories and data that could contribute to those too. For example, some early childhood intervention can help reducing gender inequality or increasing climate resilience. Joining forces may even increase the amount of funding available for the project.

🟧 Design your intervention

How can you achieve your objectives?

On the Ground

What are the nuts and bolts of your plan?

- **What interventions will help you meet your objectives?**

  ✅ **Urban95 and Parents+ Ideas for Action**

- **Design for behaviour change and think through maintenance and upkeep of the programme or intervention. How will your intervention contribute to a change in behaviour?** We found that if they are to stick, new behaviours need to be repeated regularly over time. This is why the key to success lies in thinking through ongoing professional development for the frontline workforce, designing maintenance plans and budgeting for the upkeep of infrastructure.

- **Budget considerations.** Costs of early years interventions vary widely, often need to be paid by more than one sector, and often include a high proportion of people-related costs, which can make them challenging to cost and finance. What are your fixed costs versus variable costs? What elements of your project plan carry risks for cost overrun, and what would be the consequences of that overrun? Are there alternative design solutions that could be introduced if needed? Consider which activities could need a one-time budget and which others would need to look for a more sustainable source of funding. Look at your current budget and try to identify where you could improve the use of resources, to allow you to reallocate funds into interventions and programmes that reach young children. Invite other stakeholders to do the same.

- **How will you monitor and evaluate progress, impact, and project sustainability?**

  🔧 **BvLF Indicator Framework**

Systems-level support

Proactive professional development

- **How can you build the early years knowledge and capacity of your designers and technical and management staff?** Consider formal training programmes, encouraging your team members to participate in conferences and events, and convening cross-sector – and cross-border – conversations to encourage the cross-pollination of ideas. For example, technical staff are more likely to adopt new practices when they've identified their own contribution to child development outcomes. You can also leverage the expertise available within the stakeholders of the project.

- ✅ **Urban Playspaces Conference, Istanbul, Turkey**

- ✅ **Prioritising professional development in Odisha, India (link / blog)**

How can you secure sustainable financing at city level?

- **Can the city government identify appropriate financing instruments for delivering sustainable urban infrastructure and programmes?** We've learned that it is important to be mindful of sustainable and accessible funding and financing mechanisms and identify opportunities to be more effective. This should involve a detailed analysis of the funding and financing required to implement a plan, program or pilot. Integrated planning and implementation of urban early years interventions require good understanding of the city's fiscal powers. Those powers include the authority to level far-reaching taxes, beyond typical city-levied property taxes, and provide cities with the unique opportunity to rely on their own resources and revenues for ambitious projects. Improving property valuations, tax-forecasting, administration and collection could provide significant additional city revenues. Addressing such challenges can also provide additional land value capture financing opportunities. Learn more about unlocking the potential of city revenues **here**.

🔴 Test and refine

Continue to hone your design and processes, keeping scale in mind

On the Ground

Embrace iteration; refine as you go

- **What are you learning as you go?** Building flexibility into the implementation plan can play an important role. For example, creating checkpoints along the way, at which to re-evaluate specific interventions before breaking ground, can save time and budget while reorienting the project along a more successful route towards impact.

  - ✅ **Zoom-in on Lima**

- **Can you engage the community and stakeholders in an ongoing evaluation and adaptation process?** They can play an important role in gathering data on what is working and where refinement may be needed, and in doing so increase ownership of the project. Some approaches include short, qualitative surveys or user interviews. This means including the population at the heart of the initiative as well as other users of the space. For example, in a public space intervention, 'other users' might be law enforcement officers or street vendors, whose support may be important to the project's implementation and success.

  - ✅ **Zoom-in on Bogotá**

  - 🔧 **Toolkit for measuring young children's urban experiences (for public spaces)**

- **Failure is a key step on the path towards success.** Consider documenting the testing process, for example by archiving meeting notes, recording community meetings and events, interviewing key implementers, and especially by tracking failures and subsequent changes.

Systems-level support

Document and tell your story

- **What is the story of your journey?** Documenting the process – and progress – of implementation from the very first day supports communication and advocacy efforts over the long term, helping to maintain momentum and buy-in from stakeholders and decision makers. For example, consider gathering and sharing simple and illustrative data points such as recording the number of children participating, taking before-after photos for a public space redesign, or gathering stories from participants or users after

a pilot. We have found that sharing the stories of protagonists and implementers can help their peers learn, get inspired and replicate.

- **Has your project been newsworthy?** In some cases, engaging members of the media early on can help communicate the objectives of your project and draw public engagement. In cases where opposition may exist, proactive engagement with the media, sharing project results and motivations, can help balance the public debate.

- **Can you use data and stories to balance the voice of the opposition?** Listen to the arguments and bring up data that addresses them in a compelling way. Or go for temporary interventions first, show their impact and share stories of challengers who turned champion.
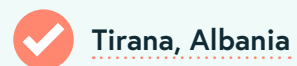
✅ **Tirana, Albania**

🔶 Scale

Plan and design for scale from the start

Scaling success and making it sustainable

- **Do you have a scale-up strategy?** Considerations about how to scale and sustain impact over the long term can be transformative for programmatic success. But we recognise that bringing success to scale is not easy, and depends a great deal on the communities, personalities, political will and resources involved. This is an area where we, together with our partners, continue to explore and test. Nevertheless, a few key considerations are often useful, regardless of intervention and geography.

  🔧 Scale-up strategy guide, including key elements to consider

  🔧 Scale-up considerations at a glance

- **How can you strengthen your scale-up plan?** Building-in strategies for growing the knowledge and capacity both of your technical team members and your political champions can be just as important as a clear timeline, budget, impact indicators, monitoring plan and communications strategy.

- **Can you be even bolder?** Could your project be expanded to incorporate wider community needs or more locations? Is it possible to support the establishment or funding of a technical position in charge of early childhood training for municipal designers? Can your diverse team or your project's results to date support the inclusion of early childhood development considerations in policy recommendations, technical standards and/or design guidelines?

- **How do you keep your team motivated?** As the programme expands and the workforce grows, how can you continue to support both the frontline workforce and your team of designers and technical and management staff, so that they remain purposefully engaged toward the same vision and goals. How do you ensure that individual commitment remains strong, and that each individual is recognised for their efforts and work?

- **How can you support peer learning and inform future projects?** Consider convening a workshop or event to share learning and show impact. Additionally, how can you support advocacy and communications about the benefits of the intervention for the city as a whole, and specifically for caregivers and their children? How can you partner with the expert and local communities to document, publish and disseminate findings so that your experience can inform future work?

Scale-up strategy considerations

How to create a scale-up strategy

- Together with your team, **create your own definition of scale**. Consider what reaching scale would look like in your own city context and in relation to the overall scale of the problem you are addressing. Here is a definition of scale and scalability:

Scale or scalability is moving a program, practice, or methodology use and application from a small scale—that is, a few regions, a few villages, or several districts, reaching a small portion of the population/potential target audience, to large scale—that is, national coverage, the majority of the districts or villages, reaching the majority of the population/ potential target audience. Scaling also requires the ability to tailor approaches to the different needs of different population segments, including the most vulnerable.

- As you think through your scaling strategy, consider its sustainability. This is how we define sustainability:

Sustainability is the ability of a country, city, or administrative unit, with minimal or no outside financial or technical assistance, to continue the work needed to (1) encourage and maintain early childhood development policies, programs and/or services, (2) increase and maintain the number of people being covered by the policy and accessing/ using the program or service in place or practicing promoted caregiving behaviours, and (3) implement program(s) needed to address new emerging factors that could affect children's development.

- Once you have created your definition, our partners have found it instructive to:

01. **Set clear goals (as specific as possible):** What is being scaled, for whom and by whom?

02. **Develop a plan/strategy for reaching those goals:** What is your proposed scaling approach, are there different possible pathways?

03. **Consider what (if any) changes you might need to make to your idea to deliver it at (larger) scale:** What elements are essential and which can be reduced for a more cost-effective approach? Are there economies of scale?

04. **Consider any (new) key partnerships and resources required.**

- In our experience, these considerations can be very helpful in informing and tracking the journey towards scale:

01. Diversity of **leadership:** Who are your key 'allies' from across different departments, sectors, organisations? With whom do you share the scaling-up key performance indicators?

02. Robust **workforce:** Is the workforce well trained in relation to the programme or intervention you are implementing, and ready for a scale-up?

03. Anchoring in **policy:** What legislation, policy frameworks, plans could anchor the various initiatives and ensure their sustainability?

04. Strong diverse **civic engagement:** Is there demand among civil society for the ideas you are scaling? How can you help foster this active engagement?

05. Sustainable, predictable **financing:** Are there dedicated budget lines to fund the intervention at scale, including longer-term maintenance and updates?

06. Effective **governance and management:** Is there a dedicated full-time position in charge of coordinating the scale-up across agencies and organisations? Are there regular, frequent meetings between all the decision makers involved?

07. Actionable **monitoring and evaluation** systems: Is there a shared and clear set of indicators to track the scale-up process, and evaluate impact? Is there a data dashboard on early childhood development available for the decision makers and for the general public?

08. Cost-effective ideas and **costing data**: Is data on costing being gathered and monitored during the scale-up?