

COSTING NORMS-SHIFTING INTERVENTIONS: FIVE INSIGHTS FOR PROGRAM IMPLEMENTERS

Social norms are gaining increasing attention in international development and social and behavior change (SBC) programming. Our goal is to design programs that are *effective* and *feasible* for replication and adaptation. In doing so, we are often asked of our programs: “But what does it cost?”

Costing capacity is important to build within organizations. In times of shrinking resource bases, the ability to respond to requests for budget justification or continued investments can be crucial, and an innovation that’s proven effective and seen as a best practice may have a competitive advantage. By paying attention to the cost of an intervention during implementation, organizations can assess if available resources are being used as intended and are sufficient to proceed with implementation, or whether adjustments are required. In doing so, we can answer questions about cost and provide real-time information on resource requirements to strengthen a program’s position in charting a path for scale up.

Two Passages Project implementing partners, Save the Children and Tearfund, undertook costing studies of their norms-shifting interventions (NSI) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Learnings were generated from these costing studies on actual costs of implementation as well as the experience of costing in real-time. Below are five insights highlighting key benefits they derived from costing their programs, which may serve as recommendations in implementing and funding other NSI and SBC programs.



WHAT IS PASSAGES?

[Passages](#) is an implementation research project that aims to address a broad range of social norms, at scale, to achieve sustained improvements in violence prevention, gender equality and voluntary family planning use. The project uses norms-shifting approaches to build the evidence base and contribute to the capacity of the global community to strengthen normative environments for the health and wellbeing of adolescents and youth. Passages capitalizes on formative life course transitions to test and scale up interventions that promote collective change and foster an enabling environment for family planning and reproductive health.

This brief features two norms shifting interventions implemented through Passages from 2015-2018. **Growing Up Great!** works with very young adolescents and the important adults in their lives — caregivers, teachers and community members — to improve knowledge about puberty and reproductive health, and gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors for improved adolescent health and well-being. **Masculinite, Famille et Foi**, works with faith communities to transform harmful gender norms to support young couples to reduce intimate partner violence and improve reproductive health outcomes.

5 COSTING INSIGHTS FOR PROGRAM IMPLEMENTERS

1

ALIGN COSTS WITH PROGRAM ACTIVITIES TO IMPLEMENT PROGRAMS MORE EFFICIENTLY

The ability to cost specific norms-shifting activities within the larger program model, such as diffusion activities like public sermons by faith leaders or testimonies from participants, helped projects understand which resources are needed for different activities within the program model. In addition, when cost savings were identified from improving the efficiency of one activity then these funds could be reallocated or used to reinforce more time and resource intensive activities. In the **Growing Up Great!** program, implementers were able use costing insights to shift money from the parent and community-based sessions, which were less expensive than budgeted, to lengthen and improve the quality of teacher training activities.

2

QUANTIFY AND DOCUMENT THE VALUE OF RESOURCES CONTRIBUTED FROM COMMUNITIES OR PARTICIPANTS

Often, a community-based NSI will be hosted by a community-based organization (CBO) or local entity like a mosque or church, and program implementers may not pay for use of these spaces or may make a token contribution which does not reflect the value of that resource. In costing, the quantity of these resources is documented and a 'shadow-price' or value assigned to reflect the value of that contribution to the overall program. Similarly, volunteers can play an important role towards program success; so costing exercises should document the time contributed, any honoraria or allowances paid, and any difference between payments made and the value of contributions. For the **Masculinite, Famille et Foi** program, the team assigned costs for provision of spaces from CBO partners, time spent by community facilitators, and in-kind contributions for community-wide events core the intervention model. Documenting the magnitude of these in-kind contributions gives visibility to the extent of support of the program (by those making the contributions), and recognizing their value can help cement a vision of shared ownership of the program and shift the focus beyond just those resources that are externally or internally funded.

3

USE COST DATA TO PLAN FOR PROGRAM TRANSITION TO NEW PARTNERS

Detailed costing data facilitates conversations with local entities about their ability to plan for and include specific program components into future work plans and budget cycles. For example, within the **Growing Up GREAT!** program, as the Ministry of Education integrated teacher training activities within their future training plans, use of cost data proved critical for new partners. In the process, the implementer of the program, who shifted to a more technical assistance and support role, no longer needed to budget for those activities.

¹ Marginal cost refers to the additional cost required to support a change in total output. Typically reported on a per unit basis. Example would be adding an attendee to a workshop where 1 more travel allowance, 1 more per diem, 1 more refreshment package, and 1 more set of materials would be required. Cost of venue, equipment rentals, facilitator costs, (fixed costs) would not change.

² Economies of scale refers to the concept that fixed costs can be spread over many units of output so that the average total cost per unit falls over a large range. In our training example, as we add participants to a workshop, the fixed costs of facilitator honorariums, venue fees, equipment rental, do not change so as we add participants, these costs per participant will decrease until we need to change the venue or add a facilitator to accommodate a larger attendee group.

4

USE COST DATA TO PLAN FOR POTENTIAL EXPANSION

Costing data can be useful for estimating the cost per intervention location (community, school or congregation) and produce estimates for the magnitude of expansion the program can afford to support in future budget periods as scale up activities are planned. In addition, estimating the marginal cost of adding more intervention features highlights potential economies of scale associated with larger programs compared to smaller programs with limited reach (for example, cost per trainee can reduce with larger training sessions as the program expands). These detailed cost estimates (which document the types and magnitude of resources required) can also help inform budgeting for similar programs in different contexts. Programs can adjust the unit value (such as monthly stipends) assigned to resources (according to context), as well as the intensity (frequency of contact, length of contacts, number of total contacts) of specific activities to reflect their context and generate an estimated budget. For the **Masculinite, Famille et Foi** program, costing data was collected on community-based activities as well as service-level health linkages. In planning for expansion, the team was able to silo costs at the various levels, and by intervention component to inform new partners seeking to scale the program. This data also helped new partners to estimate the incremental cost and resources needed by individual activities when embedding the approach into existing programs considering existing resources which could be leveraged.

5

ENGAGE DONORS ON EXPECTATIONS FOR COSTING

By their very nature, NSIs often require interventions at the community, group, and individual level. It is often assumed that these multi-level interventions will be expensive to implement. However, costing data can be used to highlight where there are important potential future cost savings, costs that will not need to be repeated if replicating a proven package of interventions (e.g., material development, training curricula, etc.), or changes to the timing or sequencing of the program components to spread costs across budget years. Often it is helpful to highlight if there are costs that will only be required initially (introduction costs) and that costs will reduce in subsequent budget cycles (costs to sustain an intervention).

These insights emerged during our costing studies and proved helpful during our scale up efforts in advocating for sustainable scale up of these NSIs. Passages has a variety of resources available to assist organizations engaged in shifting social norms to assess the cost of their programs and package the information in a format that supports the uses we've outlined above. A good starting point would be the [“Costing of Social Norms Intervention Primer”](#). This primer is designed to guide the reader step-by-step through the four-step activity-based costing approach, along with suggestions on how best to summarize results by activity and program phase. The primer also discusses how to capture and display cost information to inform decisions related to planning, budgeting, and advocacy. Detailed case studies of the two programs highlighted in this document are also provided within.

For more resources and tools on social norms and NSIs, the [Learning Collaborative to Advance Normative Change](#), hosted by Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms ([ALiGN](#)), has produced resources across the program cycle — from design to scale. The Learning Collaborative, a network of over 400 members from more than 100 organizations as well as four regional communities, provides a mechanism to engage with others interested in advancing social norms research and practice, including the use of cost data to assist in programming decisions.

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www.passagesproject.org



info@passagesproject.org



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