

Coaching at Scale: Practical Guidance for Implementers of the Graduation Approach

Introduction

The Graduation approach is one of the most effective poverty alleviation approaches in the world. As governments scale the approach, coaching—one of Graduation’s [essential elements for achieving lasting impact](#)—has often presented itself as the most challenging component to design and implement well due to its relative complexity. Programme designers must consider programme objectives, participant needs, available budget, workforce capacity, and existing infrastructure. However, a growing global evidence base shows that quality coaching can be provided with limited resources. To guide decisionmakers on

the advantages and trade-offs of different ways of delivering coaching, and support them in determining the best approach based on their circumstances and resources, BRAC has collated evidence of what works, when, and why into a framework called “[Practical Pathways to Coaching in Graduation Programmes](#).”

This policy brief serves as an entry point for policymakers and technical staff to engage with the framework and utilise it to design and implement quality coaching within their government-led Graduation programmes.

Seven Variables To Consider for Quality Coaching

The framework draws on rigorous evidence and decades of practice to offer guidance for programme designers with a range of budgets, human resources, and other practical considerations. It organises coaching design around seven key variables that shape any coaching strategy. For each variable, the framework presents the different options available and the evidence and implications behind them, so implementers can choose the alternatives that fit their contexts, whilst retaining quality:

1. Session size: Options range from a large group session of 11-30 people in low-resource settings to one-on-one sessions in high-resource settings. Recent evidence points to group coaching as a more cost-effective alternative to one-on-one coaching.

2. Contact frequency: The frequency of in-person contact can range from weekly to monthly and can change throughout the programme, i.e., more intensive at the beginning and less intensive towards the end, as long as coaching remains regular and reliable (ideally not less than once a month).

3. Caseload: Coach caseloads can range from less than 40 participants in high-resource settings to more than 100 in low-resource settings, but higher caseloads bring risks of staff burnout and diminished quality if not managed properly.

4. Staffing: The framework outlines four different staffing options: volunteers, paid community coaches, government coaches, and external coaches (NGO, private)—each with pros and cons and suitability for different resource levels.

5. Contact type: Delivering some content digitally (such as through WhatsApp) may enhance the coaching component but should not replace in-person contact, especially at the beginning. The framework outlines four options for different resource levels and contexts.

6. Support tools: All programmes need support tools such as training manuals, whether they be paper-based or digital. Large-scale implementation can especially benefit from digital tools. The framework outlines implications and recommendations for using three different forms of support tools: paper-based, digital tools for training coaches, and digital tools for coaching participants.

7. Tasks: The framework offers guidance on aligning tasks to capacity. For example, in resource-constrained settings, coaches with limited qualifications should focus on basic

activities and link participants to other partners and services. Better-resourced programmes can employ qualified, paid coaches who provide comprehensive support.

Key Takeaways & Practical Guidance for Designing Quality Coaching Strategies

The framework highlights key takeaways and makes practical and actionable suggestions across three dimensions.

Core design principles:

- **Quality over quantity:** Regular and reliable coaching matters more than frequency or intensity. Poor structure with frequent contact doesn't generate significant impacts.
- **Resource-informed design:** The framework prioritises achieving the highest quality coaching possible within available resources rather than prescribing ideal approaches.
- **Standardised guidance is critical:** Once programmes have been adapted and designed for the local context, all programmes should have manuals and coaching guidelines to increase the chances of uniform delivery and higher quality services.

Delivery approaches and scalability:

- **Group coaching is cost-effective:** Recent evidence shows group coaching can be 15-20% cheaper than individual coaching whilst achieving similar impacts. The coaching strategy can combine different modalities to balance trade-offs and adapt to local

context. Some level of regular face-to-face interaction, particularly at programme start, matters for building trust and engagement.

- **Technology enhances delivery:** Digital tools can reduce costs, increase reach, and standardise training whilst complementing (not replacing) in-person contact.
- **Modality can be adjusted over time:** Programmes might start with higher-frequency, individualised sessions to build trust, then shift to mostly group sessions. This flexibility can be applied differently for "fast climbers" and "slow climbers".

Resource management and implementation:

- **Match tasks to capacity:** When coaches have lower capacity, they can serve more as facilitators, connecting participants to specialised support from other organisations and individuals. In higher capacity environments, coaches may take on more complex activities themselves.
- **Government integration matters:** Using government coaches can strengthen programme ownership and sustainability, though they need adequate support tools and training.

Conclusion

The overarching message of the framework is that governments can deliver effective coaching at scale even with limited resources, as supported by the evidence. Implementers can choose from different design options, each with its own pros, cons and

implications. Success depends on selecting the approaches that best fit available resources, local context, and programme objectives, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all model.