

# THE SEED SCORE

## Rationale and Benefits



### THE CHALLENGE

Our challenge is three-fold:

1. To quantify the individual and aggregate impacts of community-based organizations and coalitions, including their impacts on individuals; achievements through partnerships, and influence on systemic transformation;
2. To provide immediately useful guidance to increase social impact, and
3. To provide thought-provoking feedback for investors, foundations and government sponsors to maximize performance and to utilize compelling reports of individual and aggregate achievements.

### THE METHODOLOGICAL QUAGMIRE

Community-based organizations and coalitions rarely have the monetary and staff resources to conduct “serious” evaluations, unless funded under a grant that makes provisions for such evaluations. Instead, they rely on anecdotal accounts alongside a tally of numbers reached. This rarely communicates the richness of social impacts achieved. It does not provide a clear basis for justifying investment to sustain the work. It offers little in the way of pinpointed feedback for raising the level of performance to new heights.

Typically, with a large cluster of community-based organizations, one might find ten percent with excellent data, maybe as many as forty percent with acceptable data, and the remainder with marginal data at best. The aggregate quality of such mixed quality data—when combined for analytical or reflective processes—is not much better than the quality of the weakest subset.

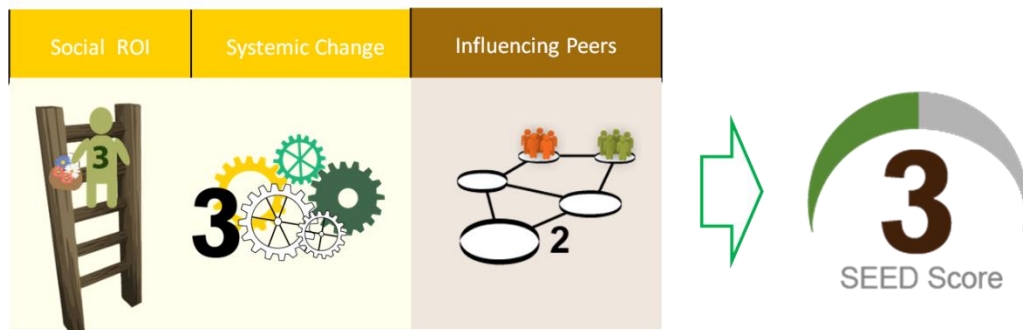
Even when evaluation data are uniformly acceptable across multiple organizations, we are still not home free. Traditional approaches to outcome measurement do not allow ready comparisons or aggregation across different types of social investments. For example, the grantees of a single investor might include community-based organizations contributing to social change in public school education, operating food banks, clearing wilderness trails, supporting military families, or helping immigrants master ESL. How are we to understand the value of investments across such different outcomes?

To add one more degree of complexity: Deep social transformation demands far more than services delivered in response to those in need. At the individual level, there must be opportunities for growth, for giving back, and for stepping up as mentors and leaders. At the organizational level, there must be peer-to-peer learning, creative partnering, fostering new delivery models, and changing mindsets regarding what is possible. And, at the systems level, there must be sustained efforts on multiple fronts to clarify needs, shared values and interests, build the committed networks, and make convincing cases to alter positions and catalyze new policies and resource allocations. How are we to measure all this?

### THE SEED SCORE AS A RESPONSE

The SEED SCORE is a composite rating that allows community-based organizations and coalitions to quantify their influence on (1) individual lives, (2) the practices of peer organizations, and (3) systemic change.

Three cloud-based survey tools are used to capture the raw data. These data are converted to three performance ratings, which are averaged to produce the SEED SCORE.



Each tool offers a 5-point max rating.

**Social ROI** calculates the impact on individual lives across various degrees of depth, taking into account the operating budget of the organization. A rating of 5 indicates that the organization is achieving leadership and mutual growth with large numbers. The 20-minute exercise used to determine this rating also computes the dollar value of impact on lives touched and the cost-benefit ratio.

**Systemic Change** quantifies the extent of organizational engagement and success-to-date in systems-level activity, in concert with strategic partners. This rating reflects the scale of the challenge, the role played by the organization, and the degree of movement toward resolution. The operating budget is also a factor. A rating of 5 indicates that the organization is catalyzing profound and far-reaching systems-level transformative changes with its strategic partners.

**Influencing Peers** considers the number of peer organizations impacted across five levels of new practice, relative to operating budget. A rating of 5 indicates that the organization is inspiring far-reaching innovation in the practices of other organizations.

#### VALUE ADDED OF THE SEED SCORE APPROACH

The use of this framework helps address the methodological quandary introduced earlier:

- All community-based initiatives are viewed through the same three lenses
- Standardization and the low cost allow organizations of all sizes and staff capacity to benefit from the same quality of evaluation
- Use of generic data fields affords ease of aggregation and consistent interpretation of results across organizations
- The algorithms employed to generate the ratings are tied to theory-based, developmental results ladders that are content-neutral and translatable across specific types of service delivered, peer organizations, and issues addressed.

### **Benefits for community-based organizations:**

- Each tool takes no more than 20 minutes for one person to complete;
- Organizations and coalitions appreciate ease and efficiency in impact measurement, made possible by clear standards against which to self-assess performance and set goals;
- Pivotal moments for shared reflection take place during reviews of the ratings and findings;
- Meaningful baseline indicators are established that can be updated at regular intervals;
- Impact data (for individuals, peers, and systems) are gathered and synthesized in one place—likely the first time this has happened for most community-based organizations;
- Greater resource optimization, intentionality and accountability are achieved using developmental results ladders that point to specific strategies for achieving the next level of performance;
- Attractive reports are provided by SEED for sharing with key stakeholders.

### **Extra benefits for cohorts of organizations** using this framework in concert:

- Incentives to partner and share learning across those using the rating system builds capacity for greater outcomes;
- Peer story-sharing can be a powerful way to extend good practice from those achieving positive upward movement in the three developmental ladders to those who appear stuck;
- Coalitions advance their goals more efficiently with the benefit of a common language and framework for understanding where we are, where we want to be, and what is needed to advance to the next level;
- Discovering overlapping work, particularly at the systems-level, leads to new strategic partnering.

### **Benefits for investors** sponsoring cohorts of organizations to use these tools:

- Investors appreciate the ability to understand and report social return on investment (SROI) for each grantee partner, and aggregate SROI for clusters of grantee partners;
- It is easier to attract resources behind initiatives shown to effectively move multiple organizations in concert to advance important social causes;
- Grant-making and capacity-building are better leveraged to hasten the emergence of latent potential revealed through use of this technology;
- Reduced fragmentation and enhanced connectivity are achieved across strategic initiatives sharing this framework to understand, track and increase social impact,
- Due diligence, intentionality and accountability become obvious and apparent.

## **VALIDITY OF THE APPROACH**

We submit that the framework has strong face validity. Contact [possibilities@seedimpact.org](mailto:possibilities@seedimpact.org) for further information on how the SEED SCORE is computed.

## THEORY OF CHANGE

SEED's approach to impact measurement is integrated with our application of tailored capacity-building practices and tied to this simple, yet potent, theory of change:

*Organizational change is best achieved through equal attention to people, process, product and possibility.*

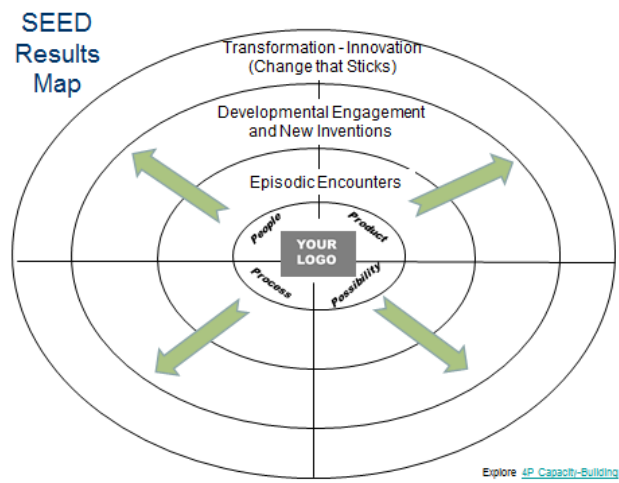
The SEED assessment tools are used annually by organizations to clarify strengths and growth opportunities in each of these "4P" domains.

The rating system pinpoints where capacity-building can be targeted for maximum value-add.

With baseline data in-hand, as organizations then learn to use and integrate SEED capacity-building practices, greater shared leadership is developed, resources are unleashed where they were lacking across the 4P domains, and social impact increases.

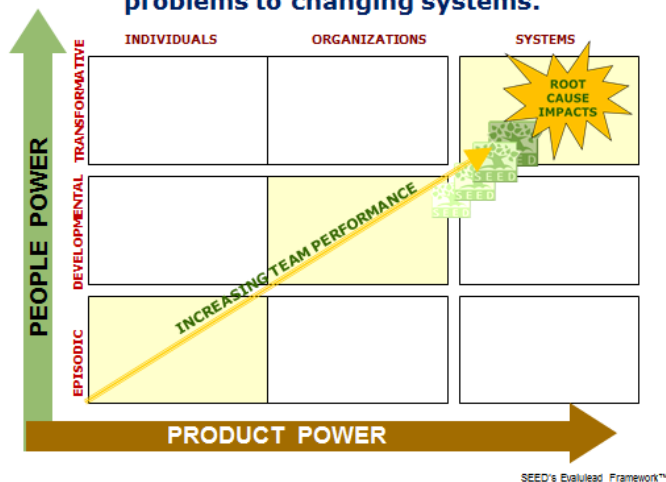
We know of no more efficient means to guide, achieve and quantify increased performance.

As shown in the images at right and below, SEED's underlying assumption is that transformative



systemic change is the ultimate destination.

**Root cause change demands a shift from solving problems to changing systems.**



For organizations that carry this aim central to their mission, the SEED Score technology affords strategic guidance to streamline the work and move individual, organizational and systemic strategies up the three results ladders (such that clients and partners advance from episodic, to developmental to transformational engagement).

SEED guides alignment of short term goals with long term vision, such that the vision and passion that brought people together in the first place – to influence systems – is sooner realized.

Certainly there are many service providers and investors that may not yet prioritize building people power through relationships with peer organizations, nor engaging in systemic change. In these situations, use of the SEED Score tools readily makes visible untapped potential to extend service delivery, peer partnering, and systems-level activities in ways that will impact exponentially more lives.

Built into all SEED practices is guidance to regularize shared reflection and strategic learning as part of ongoing work flow.