

SEED® Network

SEED® Evaluator 3.0 Instructional Overview

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This document is intended to answer basic questions about the SEED Evaluator, a tool offered through the SEED Network for the following application purposes: SEED Awards; LEED Social Equity Pilot Credit; SEED Certification; SEED Evaluation; and, SEED Publications. The passages below provide an overview of the purpose and type of application content requested within the SEED Evaluator. Further discussion of methodology specific to the practice of public interest design can be found in the book, [*Public Interest Design Practice Guidebook: SEED Methodology, Case Studies, and Critical Issues*](#) edited by Lisa M. Abendroth and Bryan Bell (Routledge 2015).

1. WHAT IS THE SEED EVALUATOR?

The SEED Network offers the SEED Evaluator tool as methodology for pursuing a participatory design process that activates a range of voices affected in a project. The SEED Evaluator provides a common standard to guide, measure, evaluate and certify the social, economic and environmental impact of design projects. Acting on its name, the SEED Evaluator promotes the critical evaluation of design that strives for positive impact. Managed through an integrated software platform at www.seednetwork.org, the SEED Evaluator promotes communication between design teams and communities by providing a mechanism to document decision-making, participatory processes, community identified goals, and project results. The benefits of the SEED Evaluator include assessment of project process and results through a third-party review, which may lead to project certification, SEED Certification.

The SEED Evaluator can help project teams and their community's direct like-minded goals. Because the SEED Network promotes defining goals based on triple bottom line considerations of social justice, economic development, and environmental conservation, teams discover they can address multiple issues with a project. Putting emphasis on stakeholder inclusion in the design process can empower communities to develop project-specific leadership, which can impact outcomes.

The SEED Evaluator acknowledges:

- How the project creates positive change in the face of social, economic and environmental challenges;
- How the design product answers the short and long term needs of a community while validating ethical and sustainable approaches to design;
- How the design team engages stakeholders in the total project process so that the outcome is informed from the ground up.

A. How does it work?

The SEED Evaluator offers a guided approach broken down into practical steps in phases—Part 1, 2, and 3—that correlate to project conception, iterative development,

and outcomes. Exemplary evidence within the three parts of the SEED Evaluator can lead to a project being awarded SEED Certification. SEED Certification is the standard teams and communities seek when addressing complex issues and especially those of social equity. A tool easily adaptable to teams across the spectrum of design practice, the SEED Evaluator promotes examination of project viability through each phase of development while keeping an eye to a bottom-up approach that activates community concerns through engagement.

B. Why evaluate?

Evaluation involves the systemic explanation and verification of project success and challenges. Looking back through the lens of a completed project the SEED Evaluator prompts responses to the following:

- Definition of stated goals and how they were accomplished
- Reflection upon what was successful and what was not
- Assessment of the relationship between the project plan and outcome
- Evidence of having accomplished goals as stated in the project plan

Design teams have a need to assess how project results met stated goals. An in depth analysis of strategies that worked well versus those that did not in a specific context can establish transferrable knowledge—useful not only for design teams but for stakeholders. Likewise, communities have a desire to document best practices toward community benchmarks, some of which are useful for purposes such as grant documentation. The SEED Evaluator provides a vital road map that functions as a collaborative space for collective action and assessment.

C. Why an issue-based approach?

In principle and mission, the SEED Network endorses a holistic and sustainable design practice that supports the social, economic, and environmental health through the community or audience the project serves. Because design exists to support the needs of people, an issue-based approach that leverages the triple bottom line can help guide the prioritization of actions stemming from the needs and goals communities face.¹ It can help teams and communities develop a project that meets several integrated demands, for example education and employment, or local sourcing and well-being. With often limited resources, a team or community developing a project can benefit from addressing social, economic or environmental aspects of a project through a strategic and integrated vision. This approach has been proven to create opportunities, thus serving more than one singular need.

2. WHAT IS SEED CERTIFICATION?

SEED Certification is the culmination of a process that provides legitimate evidence of broad inclusivity in project process (stakeholder engagement and participation practices that include marginalized or vulnerable groups); how the design responds to identified social, economic, or environmental priority issues; and how project results measure successes and challenges in meeting goals, especially as identified through identified issues. A project can be awarded SEED Certification when it has thoroughly demonstrated that a community has effectively used design in an inclusive and informed manner to overcome the issues it faces.

The path toward SEED Certification starts with the SEED Evaluator tool. See pages 4 and 5 below for discussion of SEED Evaluator Parts 1-3. Submitted project

documentation (narrative texts and visual evidence) moves through a guided review process conducted by third-party certifiers, trained specialists who understand the challenges of designing in the public's interest.

Being certified means that a project achieved community goals and effectively answers four key questions:

1. What are the critical issues being addressed within the project?
2. What is the intended design result and how will it respond to these issues?
3. How will project results be measured?
4. In what ways will the community participate in the project development?

A. What is the significance of SEED Certification?

Obtaining SEED Certification is the “yardstick” that design teams, communities, and even funders can use to verify achievement: it means that a project is recognized as having realized levels of success within the qualitative and quantitative measures set forth within the SEED Evaluator process. Being certified requires that minimum thresholds of the SEED Mission and Principles be met within project goals.

- *SEED Mission*

Advance the right of every person to live in a socially, economically and environmentally healthy community.

- *SEED Principles*

SEED Principle 1: Advocate with those who have a limited voice in public life.

SEED Principle 2: Build structures for inclusion that engage stakeholders and allow communities to make decisions.

SEED Principle 3: Promote social equality through discourse that reflects a range of values and social identities.

SEED Principle 4: Generate ideas that grow from place and build local capacity.

SEED Principle 5: Design to help conserve resources and minimize waste.

B. How do I apply for SEED Certification and other SEED Network opportunities?

Applicants can “submit a project” using the SEED Evaluator online at <http://www.seednetwork.org/projects/submit.php> after setting up a user account. The username will be the e-mail the applicant entered when creating the account, and the password is of his/her choosing. After creating and logging into the user account, new projects can be created using the Project Manager.

SEED Certification is but one of the several opportunities offered by the SEED Network. The following application options are available.

- *SEED Awards Application*

SEED Awards are presented annually at the Structures for Inclusion conference (designcorps.org/). These multidisciplinary design projects exhibit excellence in public interest design and are reviewed by a jury. SEED Awards are open to academic, commercial, and non-profit project submissions. Applications for a SEED Award require registration at the Design Corps Awards website (www.designcorps.org/awards) along with a fee and completion of Part 1 of the SEED Evaluator.

- *LEED Social Equity Pilot Credit Application*

By completing Parts 1 and 2 of the SEED Evaluator, the SEED Network provides a path toward accomplishing the USGBC LEED Social Equity within the Community credit. The intent of this credit is to “Encourage any and all members of the project team to promote and further social equity by integrating strategies that address identified social and community needs and disparities among those affected by the project by: Creating fairer, healthier, and more supportive environments for those who work/live in the project; Responding to the needs of the surrounding community to promote a fair distribution of benefits and burdens; Promoting fair trade, respect for human rights, and other equity practices among disadvantaged communities.” (<http://www.usgbc.org/credits/se-community>)

- *SEED Certification Application*

Pursuing SEED Certification demonstrates a commitment to documenting the success of an implemented design project through completion of Parts 1-3 of the SEED Evaluator. Created for designers, project developers, community leaders and others, the SEED Evaluator provides a common standard to guide, measure, evaluate and certify the social, economic, and environmental impact of design projects. Evidence of community-centered results supported by comprehensive stakeholder engagement are required. Reviewer feedback is provided in Parts 1, 2, and 3.

- *SEED Evaluation Application*

Some applicants prefer to use the SEED Evaluator as methodology and not seek certification. This mechanism allows designers and others to use the SEED Evaluator Parts 1 and 2 to document and critically understand how their work addresses stakeholder engagement and critical social, economic and environmental justice issues. Reviewer feedback is provided in Parts 1 and 2.

- *SEED Publications Application*

The SEED Network publication editors Lisa M. Abendroth and Bryan Bell regularly seek exemplary projects that present the best practices of community-centered, public interest design. These projects must have completed Part 1 of the SEED Evaluator and have met the minimum threshold of the SEED Mission and Principles. Project teams from across the fields of design in academic, commercial and non-profit sectors are encouraged to submit. Work completed within the past 5 years that engage inclusivity in stakeholder participation while addressing life's critical issues are of interest.

C. What information does the SEED Evaluator request?

The SEED Evaluator is staged in three parts. Descriptions of each are provided below. To best prepare, applicants are encouraged to download a blank application (<https://seednetwork.org/evaluator/instructions.php>) as a working document and in advance of the online submittal.

- *SEED Evaluator Part 1: Project Application*

Part 1: Project Application is a forum for evaluating how the project meets the minimum threshold provided in the SEED Mission and Principles. Submitting Part 1 of the SEED Evaluator allows applicants to gain feedback at an early stage of the project as to the potential for SEED Certification, should certification be desired.

Part 1 asks essential questions about the nature of the project including identification of applicant(s), partners, stakeholders, and community descriptive information detailing geographics, demographics and historical and cultural project implications. This section is an important opportunity to shape the contextual narrative of the project and identify any extenuating circumstances leading to identification of community issues fundamental to the project. An essential feature of Part 1 can be found in questions 7, 8 and 9 where the applicant is prompted to describe in detail how one of three selected primary issues has helped shape the design response and methodology. This section is broken down into subsequent design-response sub-questions that work from an iterative framework and include the following four considerations (as presented through the filter of up to three distinct issues): how the design is a response to the selected issue; what research was conducted and how; what participation tactics were used and to what end (what is the represented diversity of community voice?); and, how will the project's success be defined and results measured relative to the cited issue. Design documentation uploads are provided for up to five files and project status options are provided to verify where the work is in terms of a timeline toward completion or implementation.

- *SEED Evaluator Part 2: Project Details*

Completing and submitting Part 2: Project Details of the SEED Evaluator can signal intent to proceed toward SEED Certification. Part 2 builds upon the content submitted in Part 1 through elaboration and modification. This section hinges on the concept of iteration where amendments and possible reorientation or changes within a project can be document. Recognizing these updates is especially important as it pertains to alterations made through stakeholder feedback or other inclusive processes. The changing properties of a project can tell SEED reviewers much about the endeavor in terms of how research and participatory processes were conducted, the extent of stakeholder engagement, as well as what progress has been made toward previously stated goals. Tabs at the top of the page allow the user to navigate through responses to each of the three priority issues selected in Part 1. Multiple opportunities for uploads are provided (five files for each sub-question) as is the occasion to elaborate on specifics such as specific engagement methods used, when, where, and what input was achieved.

- *SEED Evaluator Part 3: Project Results*

Part 3: Project Results contains questions of substantive depth that are interrelated in nature, reinforcing the requirement for definitive and process-based benchmarks that are phased into a timeline and embrace performance measures. Benchmarks are used in this section as reference points that establish goals for purposes of evaluation. They are typically discipline specific and can be used within a project to define direction and indicate ideals within an established timeline. In the SEED Evaluator performance measures provide evidence of ways in which the design process is supporting project goals that are issue-specific. These measures document and verify accomplishment of incremental goals towards social, economic, and/or environmental results. Evaluation of the results of a project provides an overview of how well the project implementation goals and objectives were met.

Tabs at the top of the SEED Evaluator allow the user to navigate through responses to each of the three priority issues selected in Part 1 and updated in Part 2. Project implementation by nature is descriptive of the application and execution of final designs and the impact of those upon the context and community. Results are documented at

two points of evaluation, pre- and post-implementation (inclusive of final analysis and reflection). Reflection on knowledge gained during the scope of the project and what could have been done differently punctuates the conclusion of the SEED Evaluator. Upon completion of Part 3 the applicant will “Submit” for final reviewer feedback.

3. PLANNING YOUR PROJECT FOR SUBMISSION

Planning is an essential aspect of any project. Starting a project that anticipates use of the SEED Evaluator necessitates that the application process be coordinated with the project timeline. This simply means that applicants are highly encouraged to begin and conclude projects using the SEED Evaluator so that the entire scope of project may be assessed relying upon SEED Mission and Principles. This is especially critical when applicants are seeking SEED Certification: certification applicants have ideally begun to use the SEED Evaluator at project initiation and use it through the entire process. Determining and stating project goals, the process to achieve goals and results in advance can help guide your application. Setting benchmarks that reinforce the SEED Principles can help reinforce project methodology. Developing a defined timeline and underscoring it with benchmarks, performance measures, and research and data collection activities can support the SEED Evaluator application with needed vital facts that are both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Ultimately, reporting, documenting and reflecting on how the project met defined goals and to what extent the project succeeded or was challenged in its resolve will prepare your project for submission.

The following points are presented as a basis for project planning, reinforcing the SEED Evaluator methodology:

A. Engage Community Participation

An inclusive and transparent path towards project goals and verifiable results that come from the diversity of a community is something the SEED Network encourages through use of the SEED Evaluator tool. The SEED Evaluator Part 1 provides examples of engagement strategies however these should not be considered the only mechanisms for eliciting input that can shape the requirements of a project. Determining the most contextually appropriate ways to engage a broad range of stakeholders and community participants can only come from on-the-ground experiences designing with and for the people the project serves. Community participation should be used to build consensus, establish priorities, and define goals.

B. Identify Critical Issues

Critical issues are those defining and often life-altering problems that happen both in crisis and in the everyday. Identifying critical issues can help clarify the unique priorities embedded within every community. The SEED Network endorses an issue-based approach to problem-solving: critical issues provide the link between design and communities as one of the first steps in defining needs that direct the purpose of the design project. The SEED Evaluator provides a comprehensive list of critical issues from which to select in three categories: social, economic and environmental. Applicants should identify up to three stakeholder-defined priority issues that embody the scope of the project and can enter their own project-specific issues, should appropriate options not be available.

C. Define Goals

Goals can define the purpose of a project and what the project must achieve. Through a process that includes stakeholder engagement and an issue-based approach, goal definition should evolve through a collaborative framework that allows feedback and communication from the variety of project participants. Timeline, tasks, methods, and activities all contribute to articulating a process balanced by meaningful project goals. Preparation for the SEED Evaluator application requires that goals and process be stated and defined in advance of initiating a project so as to be incorporated through the life of the project.

D. Research and Data Collection

The requirement to demonstrate and measure performance is inherent to the SEED Evaluator process. Documentation gathered through a defined research process inclusive of both qualitative and quantitative methods is encouraged. Qualitative research encompasses analyses of life activities and can include such forms as observations or visual documentation among others. Quantitative research is based on empirical evidence often in the form of data where evaluation can establish patterns and thus broader connections to meaning. The SEED Evaluator requires evidence of detailed research methodology and data collection plan and outcomes in order to demonstrate informed decision-making that is research-reinforced within the project.

E. Set Benchmarks

Supporting a culture for community-determined benchmarks is a vital aspect of a public interest design practice. As such, incremental steps or benchmarks toward goals should be determined early through collaborations that are set during project planning and are further elaborated upon in Part 2 of the SEED Evaluator.

F. Performance Measurement

Determining how to measure project results and quantifying how benchmarks are performing toward social, economic, and environmental issue-based goals are integrated aspects of the SEED Evaluator, Part 2. Performance measurement is one way to evaluate how goals are being realized and can be done so through detailed assessment of the way in which benchmarks were met.

G. Develop a timeline

A timeline that coordinates project-planning goals is essential to any project: it should function as a communication tool that unifies phases of the project along with operations. Plan the timeline early and be sure it includes all anticipated aspects of project development inclusive of research, engagement activities, setting benchmarks, measurement, documentation, and reporting.

H. Document and Report Results

The SEED Evaluator supports a culture of documenting and reporting in order to isolate best practices and build a body of knowledge that grows the practice of public interest design. In Part 3, this is achieved in the conclusive reporting provided in response to each of three priority issues identified in Part 1. Critical measures of success or failure along with qualitative responses of the community to project goals and outcomes are prompted. Providing evidence of how results reinforce identified measures for success can establish best practices that are potentially replicable.

I. Evaluation and Reflection

Part 3 of the SEED Evaluator embraces reflection as a means for identifying what was learned about the project, what was done well, and what can have changed. This final section leverages both quantitative and qualitative documentation for purposes of self/project-assessment and accountability of project results that meet or exceed stated goals and benchmarks. Positive and negative impacts of the work are addressed in narrative format.

Credits

The SEED Network was initiated through a forum sponsored at the Harvard GSD by the Loeb Fellowship, the Rudy Bruner Foundation and the Richard Driehaus Foundation on October 28 and 29, 2005, organized by Maurice Cox, Stephen Goldsmith, Kathy Dorgan, Bryan Bell, Jim Stockard, Sally Young and JoEllen Wang. The goal was “to define the social, economic, and environmental roles of architecture and design, and to strengthen those roles in communities where they’re needed most.” The term “SEED” was first suggested by Kim Dowdell at Harvard in 2005.

SEED is a demonstration of the ability of creative people to collaborate and create effective solutions. The SEED Evaluator represents the ideas of many through a collaborative process over five years of meetings and conference calls. The idea of a summary table was created at a dinner after the Dallas forum. Other formative ideas were given by those listed here who reviewed the first group of projects submitted for certification: Lisa M. Abendroth, Virginia Alexander, Emily Axtman, Vincent Baudoin , Bryan Bell, Jamie Blosser , Brent Brown, Monica Chadha , Megan Clark, Kathy Dorgan, Kim Dowdell, Dan Etheridge, Doug Harmon, Spencer Haynsworth , Mary Haywood, Kelly Heyer, Katherine Hogan, Luke Perry, Meredith Pittman , Patrick Rhodes, Laura Shipman , Raphael Sperry, Andy Sturm, Emilie Taylor, Katie Wakeford, JoEllen Wang, James Wheeler, and Barbara Brown Wilson.

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Note

¹ The triple bottom line asserts a concept formulated by The European Union in 1997. Referred to as the “three-pillar model of sustainability” it brings into relationship the considerations of society, economy, and ecology as fundamental to a framework for sustainable development. The term “triple bottom line” was coined by author John Elkington, in his book *Cannibals with Forks: the Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business* (New Society Publishers 1998).