Social Economic Environmental Design SEED Evaluator Methodology and Project Certification

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SEED's mission is to ensure that every person should be able to live in a socially economically and environmentally healthy community. To ensure this mission means that everyone be able to participate in the important decisions that shape their lives—whether through the built environment, designed products, or systems. SEED approaches this vision of health in the broader context of the triple bottom line. Many SEED projects address health in the traditional medical sense, as well as in a broader holistic health of a community, such as in job creation. Health or environment issues are not single challenges in communities; every community has a unique set of priorities. The SEED process helps the communities identify their own concerns and determine how design might address their needs. For example, the diabetes epidemic among southern African Americans is related to diet. Since diabetes often leads to leg amputations, the issue also relates to the need for accessible affordable rural housing (Just addressing this diabetes as a medical issue without considering other related issues and their solutions -- such as sources for healthy food -- does not address the extent of the challenge. Other local populations have other issues, and it is the local and holistic approach of the SEED **process** that can be a valuable part of the **process**.

As important as the design process is accountability. In the SEED process, accountability—whether goals were met or not met—is provided by documenting and clearly showing how the design result leads to success, and how that success can be measured. Through transparency and accountability, the SEED process promotes democratic decision-making that validates the community member's participation in design and planning. Communities can define their own visions of success.

For example is the Bancroft School Apartments in Kansas City. With a small health clinic in the building, the community assesses local health risks and trains neighbors how to address these.The project also addresses other issues identified by the community: community revitalization, housing, unemployment, energy efficiency, crime, and historic preservation. Measurements are collected for each of these issues. This quantified evidence is documented and reviewed through the SEED third-party evaluation process. These measurements are evidence that shows the resulting positive changes of the project. This is an exemplar SEED project – it almost transcends a building to that of social-impact machine. SEED assures that community members and stakeholders are involved in the design and planning processes.

SEED VALUE PROPOSITIONS

- SEED assures that the design project effectively address the community's critical needs and challenges.
- SEED assures that a project promotes social equity as well as reflects a diversity of social identities and values of the community it serves.
- SEED assures that the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the project are clear and the results will be measured.

Learning from Best Practices

From our research including the 2011 Latrobe Prize research, we have learned that current Public Interest Design practitioners operate at a range of scales and broad spectrum of design and planning from the unmet needs of longstanding underserved communities to humanitarian crisis, addressing a range of issues from those of individual clients to that of large geographic regions—in the United States and internationally. These reflect a growing trend of architectural practice in general in the United States as we adapt to a shifting concept of the client and changing economic conditions, and as we adapt the profession to meet the new standards and practices required.

Practices in the public interest are broader and more interdisciplinary than the current prescribed model of practice. They have had to be more innovative in their protocols, procedures, economic models, and relationships to make their practices possible. Most of the skills necessary to be successful in this new work were not learned in the academy, or in on-the-job training. New methods, new educational models, new curriculum, and new professional training course are needed to provide these needed skills.

The following methodology is derived from the "best practices" of these current successful models, with the guidance and input of SEED Network members.

HOW TO UNDERTAKE A SEED PROJECT STEP-BY-STEP

The SEED Methodology converts the SEED Mission and Principles into clear actions. Through 9 steps, the SEED process guides a locally based collaboration of professionals and stakeholders working with locals who know best their community and its needs.

Step 1: Engaging Community Participation

An inclusive and transparent process is a critical element of public interest design. Communities can engage in a design process of participatory decision making to build consensus, establish their priorities, and define their goals.

How have the community and relevant stakeholders been involved in defining the challenges and setting specific goals? Examples of participatory input or field research verified by the community may include the following: community charrettes; interviews; discussion groups; photo or video ethnographies; asset-based development; asset-based design; public forums; local, regional, state or national government support; stakeholder advisory group; coordination with local comprehensive plan; priority set by local government.

Step 2: Identifying Critical Issues

Critical issues are the challenges that define life struggles, both day-to-day, and during crises. These categories help clarify the unique priorities of every community and audience. They can be generally categorized and defined by societal, economic, and environmental considerations. 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. Issues can also be the "call-to-action" that prompt the project and bring vested parties together for collaboration. Design teams and stakeholders should define their own distinct project issues in an effort to solve problems across social, economic, and environmental divisions.

Step 3: Defining goals

Goals define the broad purpose toward which a project is directed. Goals and look at the big picture address what the project should achieve over the life of the project in relation to community needs. The process defines how the goal or goals will be accomplished. Timeline, tasks, methods, and activities all

contribute to defining the process and ultimately reaching identified project goals. Project planning and preparation requires that goals and process be stated and defined in advance of initiating a project. It is recommended that project goals be identified and defined through collaborative brainstoriming that allows feedback and communication from all of the project participants.

Step 4: Research and Data Collection

Documentation gathered through a defined research process is highly recommended. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods are encouraged. Qualitative research encompasses the realm of asking the question why — "why do we do what we do?" Qualitative processes tend to include in-depth analysis of life through a variety of means including observations, interviews, photography, video, and written or oral documentation. Quantitative research on the other hand, is based on empirical data, quantities, numeric references and evaluation or measurement of this data to establish broad connections.

The SEED process requires information about research and data collection in order to demonstrate the specific qualitative and quantitative methods used in the project. The method and the data gathered as well as any participants involved should be clearly described. SEED recognizes that data collection can be (but often do not need to be) a time consuming and costly process. Results must be documented if success is going to be claimed. (Examples of achievable data are given in the case studies on the website.) The reflections of a stakeholder, a casual observation, phone conversation or discussion may qualify as a form of research so consider the scope of relevance before responding.

Step 5: Setting benchmarks

Benchmarks are reference points or standards that establish performance goals for purposes of evaluation, measurement, or comparison. Benchmarks can be used within a project to define direction and indicate ideals. Design benchmarks are set during project planning where inclusion of community input can prove significant to project development and in meeting goals.

Step 6: Defining performance measurement

Performance measurement involves the regular quantifying of outputs. These measures document and verify accomplishment of incremental goals toward social, economic, and environmental results (not just what it took to accomplish them), while providing a common language for communication of

strategy. The SEED process asks for the identification of benchmarks and the regular documentation of accomplished goals. These verifications supports the requirement for evaluating the success of met goals relative to designated project benchmarks.

Outputs are the direct products or program activities and may include types, levels and targets of services to be delivered by the program. Examples:

- Activities (the actual tasks to occur)
- Products (the built objects)
- Participation (stakeholders who serve and are served)
- Engagement: how those who are served participate in the process

Step 7: Developing a timeline

A timeline is a tool that can communicate progress throughout the various phases of the project. It provides evidence of the anticipated schedule and criteria for project planning, development, and implementation. A timeline that references specific dates and aligns with goals and benchmarks can aide in accomplishing project intent. It is recommended that the timeline and benchmarks be considered together and be established early in the life of the project.

Step 8: Documenting and Reporting Results

The act of documenting results is essential to any project: using the SEED process can help achieve desired results while ensuring a more seamless and thorough process that supports a public interest design practice. Results should document both outputs and outcomes. Outcomes are the change that a project creates, either positive or negative. Examples are :

- Learning: participants' awareness, knowledge, skills, motivations, levels of functioning
- Actions: participants' behavior, practices, decisions, policies, status
- Consequences: change to a community's health, and well-being through addressing social, economic, environmental issues.

Because documentation is an important step toward project assessment (Step 9), it is critical that documented data be accurate and supportive of project goals and process.

Reporting results bring us closer to understanding how goals were accomplished or why they were not. When reporting results, accurate details, such as time, place, participants, context, methods used, and

numeric documentation (as appropriate), are critical. Broad generalizations are of little help; instead, be prepare to verify the results of research or design processes. Inclusion of images, which document results, can often provide necessary evidence.

Step 9: Accountability through Evaluation

Accountability is what we strive for in our work. This is achieved through evaluation and also reflection. Evaluation measures successes, challenges, and failures. These can be used strategically in a variety of contexts including funding applications or in attracting new projects or partners.

Step 10: Assessment through Reflection

Reflection allows us to critique and assess what could have been done differently in order to improve a given result. This practice helps ensure best practices are embraced over the life of a public interest design practice.

In order to demonstrate accountability in the work we produce we must critically assess and evaluate what was accomplished and how it was accomplished. Our process embraces evaluation so that it is integrated into our working methodology. The ten steps of SEED promote this framework that ultimately lead to a point of assessment and reflection. Understanding what we did well and what challenges remain in the work produced – and how it met defined goals and benchmarks – is vital not only for the practice of Public Interest Design but for those we work with and public we serve.

The SEED® Evaluator and SEED Certification

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The SEED Evaluator

The SEED Evaluator is a communication tool that supports the SEED process and allows communities to define goals for design projects and then measure the success in achieving these through a third-party review. Using the SEED Evaluator allows communities to develop their leadership and decision-making from within while using a proven method and recognized standard of success, leading to SEED Certification, discussed in detail below (pages xx–xx).

The SEED Evaluator can assist individuals, groups, designers, communities, project planners, and participants achieve like-minded goals that are focused on the triple-bottom line of social justice, economic development, and environmental conservation. SEED responds to the questions many designers face today:

• How does this project create positive change in the face of social, economic, and environmental challenges?

• How does the design answer the short and long term needs of a community that validates ethical and sustainable approaches to design through a triple-bottom line approach?

• How can the design team directly engage the client and other vested parties in the total project process so that the outcome is informed from the ground up?

The SEED Evaluator provides guidelines for a design process that directs participatory research practices and tools to document the goals, process and results of a project. Using a guided approach broken down into understandable and manageable steps, the SEED Evaluator creates a platform for collaboration and consensus building. Completion of specific phases of the SEED Evaluator can lead to SEED Certification, which can add validity and needed "proof" of a project's successes, from design concept through to implementation. Progress and challenges can be documented with evidence through each project phase. As a tool developed for architects, industrial designers, landscape architects, communication designers and urban designers, the SEED Evaluator provides guidance through a strategic matrix of questions that critique the social, environmental and economic viability of each phase of development.

Because SEED believes in a bottom-up approach to problem solving that truly activates community concerns, this process entails, and in effect requires, an inclusive and participatory process.

Evaluation

Why evaluate? Evaluation involves "the process of determining whether a program and policy goals have been achieved. This often entails a systematic search for explanation of program success or failure."

• How were goals defined and accomplished?

• What was done well, and what was less successful?

• Did appropriate project-planning cause the intended effects?

• What proof of accomplishment demonstrates that goals were met as anticipated in the project?

Designers and others have a need to assess the outcome of their work just as clients and communities have a need to assess how goals were achieved for purposes of grants, defining community benchmarks, and plotting progress toward common goals. SEED Evaluation provides a road map, a directional pointer that can indicate vital strengths and weaknesses. The SEED Evaluator builds in an evaluative component to its process because it is something we need—designers and communities need to understand the impact of the work and we need to be able learn from and leverage results in any given project.

The Triple Bottom Line Approach

SEED encourages a holistic approach when considering the triple bottom line of community needs, looking comprehensively at the social, economic, and environmental health of a community project. The triple bottom line guides communities in the prioritization of actions stemming from the needs and goals they face. It can also allow communities to seek out or develop a project that can meet several needs at once, for example education and job creation, or hunger and affordable housing. When these needs are addressed separately, a community fails to use often-limited resources most effectively for the greatest impact. An integrated approach however can create opportunities to multi-leveled outcomes that serve a variety of strategic needs.

SEED Certification

The SEED Certification is completed by trained reviewers with experience in practice and in evaluation and awarded to projects that have demonstrated the effectively use of design to overcome social, economic, and environmental issues in a community. The project process must have been transparent and included broad stakeholders from the community in decision-making. Being certified means that a project did what it was meant to do in achieving community goals, and can effectively answer four key questions:

1. What are the critical issues (social, economic, environmental) being addressed with the project?
2. What will be the design results, and how will they address these issues?
3. How will these results be measured?
4. How has the community participated in the project?

SEED Certification results from successful completion of the SEED Evaluator tool Part I (Application) and Part II (Evaluation including benchmarks and measurements). Project documentation and narrative texts submitted to SEED within the context of the Evaluator are reviewed by third-party certifiers, who are trained specialists in the specific design discipline and who understand the challenges of designing in the public's interest.

The Value of SEED Certification

Communities that achieve the recognition of SEED Certification leverage their accomplishment not only for their own goals but also for that of moving forward a process of inclusion and informed decision-making in design. SEED Certification is the standard that community organizers, leaders, designers, and funders can use to document their achievements: It means that a project is recognized as having achieved levels of success within the qualitative and quantitative measures set forth within the SEED Evaluation process. Being certified requires that minimum thresholds of the SEED Mission and Principles be met by the specific goals set within the project and that the project has met benchmarks.

There are many design projects that claim to benefit a community, but a SEED certified project is distinct because it has:

• Significant and documented community participation in project decisions;

- Measured results of the design product.

Applying for certification

Once ready to begin the formal application process, applicants can "start a project" online at www.seednetwork.org once a user account has been set up. (This can be initiated in the menu under LOGIN.) Your username will be the e-mail you entered when you created the account, and the password is of your choosing. After creating and logging into your new user account, new projects can be created using the Project Manager. SEED mentors new project submissions and those pursuing SEED Certification through a guided review process. The SEED Evaluator is staged in two parts. Part One evaluates how the project meets the minimum threshold provided in the SEED Mission and Principles and lays the groundwork for the rest of the certification process. Part One is also used to submit a project for consideration for the Annual SEED Awards and for other opportunities like publication because this part is a brief but thorough overview of the project, the project goals and the methods you plan to use. The first question on the application is "Type of application" where you indicate what your intention is for the application (i.e. to receive SEED Certification, to compete in the SEED Awards, etc.) You may check all that apply. Completion of Part One signals the opportunity for submission and preliminary review.

Once submitted, this completed section of the Evaluator provides an opportunity to receive feedback about the nature of the project and its prospects in moving towards certification in Part Two (Evaluation) while meeting the guidelines set forth in SEED.

You will see that there are symbols reading "? Explain" next to items throughout the SEED Evaluator. Click on these to pull up a more in-depth description of what sort of information is being sought in each question.

1) SEED Evaluator: Part One (Meeting the threshold: SEED mission and principles)
Submitting Part One of the SEED Evaluator allows applicants to gain feedback at an early stage of the project as to the potential for SEED Certification: Project reviewers provide feedback at this point before a full submission process ensues. A featured aspect of the review entails an assessment of how the project (to date) meets the minimum threshold addressing the SEED mission and principles. If the SEED

mission and principles are not fulfilled or are violated, a project will not advance to the next steps in certification. Applicants will be advised how the project has failed to meet these principles and the project may be subsequently revised and re-submitted.

Part I: Application 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/cultural project implications. In this section the applicant also identifies several of the community's most pressing issues that the project will address. It focuses on how the project will take one social, economic, and environmental issues in addition to information about community participation in the project. This section requires a comprehensive knowledge of the project from social, economic and environmental perspectives, and is intended to provide an overview of the project in relationship to the community it affects. Questions address concerns about community participation as well as project goals, challenges, and how success will be measured. Responses to these questions help reveal the depth and breadth of the project, its issues, and will document the inclusion of the community's voice in shaping and accomplishing common goals.

2) SEED Evaluator: Part Two (Benchmarks, Progress towards goals, Measurements)
Submitting Part Two of the SEED Evaluator signals intent to proceed with SEED Certification. Part Two 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. Results are documented at two points of evaluation, pre- and post-implementation.

3) SEED Evaluator: Part Three (Results and Reflection)
Evaluation of the results of a project provides an overview of how well the project implementation goals and objectives were met. Project implementation by nature is descriptive of application and execution of final designs. This section is broken down into two phases for documentation and reflection: (1) early implementation and (2) post-implementation analyses. Social, economic, and environmental results along with community participation assessment are requested.