seam

Module 1:
SEAM Standard framework and design

Key takeaways

SEAM STANDARD FRAMEWORK

Pillars, Concepts, Objectives, and Activities

The SEAM Standard is a structured framework to advance social equity in construction and real estate projects.

It organizes this guidance into four key Pillars: Social Impact, Social Responsibility, Social Justice, and Social Accountability.

Within these Pillars, the standard defines eight distinct Concepts that focus on specific social themes.

Each Concept contains Objectives, which set the specific goals we aim to achieve.

Each Objective has Activities or specific actions to reach these goals. Due to the "roadmap" structure of the framework, Activities are the steps you take to achieve the Objectives.

> **Activity** is the action that drives the social impact. In the SEAM Standard, it is the topic that has requirements that allow Owners to make progress and achieve a score.

Rating systems

Not all Activities are universally applicable to every project as their relevance depends on the type of project and the Owner's role. Project types can be construction/ renovation projects or operating/managing assets. The Owner role is separated into the role of a Developer and the role of an Occupier. Rating systems are combinations of project type and Owner role. They aim to ensure that Owners have a Rating system that includes only the relevant Activities for application of the SEAM Standard to their project.

The Standard includes four *active* Rating Systems:

1. Buildings + Interiors: Developer (B+I:D)
Includes construction projects where a building or interior is undergoing ground-up construction - starting from raw, undeveloped land, tear-down of an existing structure, starting from a previously developed site ground, or major renovations of an existing building as the Developer, where the Owner assumes Developer responsibilities including project ownership, vision establishment, financing procurement, construction supervision, landlord duties, and tenant leasing management.

2. Buildings + Interiors: Occupier (B+I:O)
For construction projects of an existing building or space where the Owner is either a Tenant or Property Owner that has no Landlord duties or control over Tenant leasing.

3. Operations + Maintenance: Developer (O+M:D)
For projects that involve the ongoing operations and maintenance of a building or space that's already constructed, where the Owner is the entity that owns the building or space and oversees its long-term operations, maintenance, and acts as Landlord.

4. Operations + Maintenance: Occupier (O+M:O)
For projects that involve the ongoing operations and maintenance of a building or space that's already constructed, where the Owner is either a Tenant or property owner with no Landlord duties or control over Tenant leasing.

Requirements

To ensure effectiveness, each Activity lists Requirements or specific rules that must be followed to ensure the Activity is completed successfully.

Where applicable, Requirements for each Activity have been separated into Act to Avoid Harm, Benefit Impacted Parties, and Contribute to Solutions sections. Where this subdivision applies, the achievement of Requirements follows a progressive model.

The Owner cannot claim credit for fulfilling any Requirements in the 'Benefit Impacted Parties' or 'Contribute to Solutions' sections until all Requirements under 'Act to Avoid Harm' are satisfied. This structure ensures that progress does not allow the possibility of offsetting negative impacts through positive actions.

Indicators

Owners need to measure progress and impact and understand how to prioritize where action is most needed.

Performance indicators are direct measures of progress toward fulfilling the Requirements of each Activity. They provide the basis for assigning scores in a certification. Where possible, performance indicators are calculated and expressed as percentages.

A **context indicator** is a specific piece of data or information that helps understand the broader circumstances or conditions within which a project, program, or property operates. These indicators include demographic data, economic conditions, cultural aspects, and more.

By adequately utilizing context indicators, impact reports can provide a robust, nuanced, and comprehensive picture of a project's effectiveness. They provide the basis for determining impact and do not factor into scoring in a certification.

Scoring

To assess compliance with the SEAM Standard during a certification implementation, a scoring rubric indicates the score assigned to the performance indicator achieved in each Activity. Scores reflect the progress achieved according to the requirements.

Documentation

SEAM Certification requires Owners to provide documentation as evidence that the project meets SEAM Standard requirements. When reporting performance on a SEAM Certification Application, an Owner or Administrator should proactively ensure and communicate that its data and calculations are correct.

To ensure the integrity of SEAM Certification Applications, the evaluation process by SEAM Reviewers involves thoroughly examining the provided information. They look into the authenticity of the reported activities and outcomes, ensuring that all critical details are included and accurately attributed to the project. The assessment also covers the accuracy of data calculations and the clarity in its presentation, ensuring that the information is transparent and understandable.

When a SEAM Certification Application is being reviewed, the reviewing team's objective is to determine whether documentation provides evidence that SEAM Standard requirements were met.

Administrator is the party responsible for gathering information, evidence, and data for the SEAM Certification activities and correctly reporting them via the SEAM Certification application process. The Administrator aims to obtain sufficient appropriate evidence to express a conclusion designed to enhance the degree of confidence in the measurement or evaluation of the underlying subject matter against requirements.

Sustainability interdependency

The SEAM Standard focuses solely on commercial real estate's direct impacts on people and addresses a system of interdependent social issues that do not necessarily contain goals for environmental impact. While environmental goals are not within the scope of the SEAM Standard, it must be noted that environmental and social goals are often inextricably linked.

Therefore, an overarching theme is that activities to address social issues shall not cause negative environmental impacts to achieve. In turn, any other certifications undertaken in addition to SEAM must also address this interdependency similarly. Activities to address environmental sustainability shall not create nor allow negative social impacts.

The SEAM Standard functions with existing certification systems like green building and health and wellness standards. SEAM introduces a robust set of criteria focused explicitly on social equity within the built environment. Since these other certification standards incorporate social equity concepts, SEAM acknowledges crosswalks, allowing project owners to gain credit in their SEAM pursuit for social equity efforts in other certifications.

SEAM STANDARD DESIGN

Social metrics based on principles

The SEAM Standard for social impact measurement emphasizes understanding and referencing the guiding principles that lead to change. By grounding metrics in the measurement of these principles, we ensure that measures are accurate, ethical, and transformative. Prioritizing principles to measure outputs advances a deeper understanding of the issues. It promotes strategies that lead to lasting positive change.

Framework design

Recognizing the complexity inherent in social sciences, SEAM has developed a framework that integrates social equity principles into the fabric of its rating system design. The SEAM Standard framework embeds social equity into the scorecard design in six ways.

1. Timely Contextual Analysis

The SEAM Standard requires conducting an Impact Assessment for every certification. An Impact Assessment is the process of identifying and managing the social issues of project development. It includes the effective engagement of affected communities in participatory processes of identification, assessment, and management of social impacts.

By thoroughly understanding the context and specificity of the project and engaging with all impacted parties at the time of the project, it increases the chances that actions and interventions will be successful.

Careful design of solutions and interventions can prevent irreversible effects on people, such as displacement, social inequality, and cultural erosion. These consequences can undermine the project's objectives and lead to resistance from local communities, causing delays, cost overruns, and reputational damage.

By integrating SIA into the early stages of project planning, Owners can mitigate risks and design projects to maximize value for local communities and minimize social costs.

> **Impacted parties** are the individuals or groups affected by an organization's business activities and the individuals or groups who affect an organization's value-creation ability.
>
> **Impacted party engagement** involves owners communicating with and seeking feedback from those interested in or impacted by a project's actions. This is the fundamental step of any social impact initiative and improves transparency, builds trust, and strengthens relationships.

2. No offsetting of negative impacts

As noted in the United Nations Guiding Principles (UNGP), a company's commitment to maximize opportunities for positive impact and contribute to advancing human rights does not offset its failure to respect human rights throughout its operations.

Therefore, wherever applicable, the requirements for each Activity have been separated into Act to Avoid Harm, Benefit Impacted Parties, and Contribute to Solutions sections. In all cases where this delineation occurs, the Owner will only be credited for achieving requirements in Benefit Impacted Parties or Contribute to Solutions once all Act to Avoid Harm requirements are met. This design ensures that the SEAM Certification does not allow offsetting of adverse impacts.

3. Social science logic model structure

Social issues can be complex with intertwined challenges that may have multiple possible solutions. A clear plan is necessary to ensure our actions effectively lead to desired outcomes.

The SEAM Standard uses a well-organized process, known as a logic model, to create Activities with the highest chance of creating those desired outcomes.

This logic model, rooted in standardized methods for measuring and managing impact, has five stages: what we need (Inputs), what we do (Activities), what we produce (Outputs), what changes (Outcomes), and the overall effect (Impact).

Inputs are the resources (human, financial, equipment, space) necessary to complete an Activity.

Outputs are the unit counts which give us a way to measure progress. Each Activity produces an Output which is a direct and quantifiable product of the Activity. It is represented in the SEAM scorecard by the performance indicator, or key performance indicator (KPI), and is expressed in numbers, percentages, amounts, or other units. These outputs are necessary to standardize performance measurement for comparison, measuring progress over time, and to base the SEAM points awarded for each Activity.

Outcomes are changes in conditions that stem from the outputs and activities. These changes may occur at the individual, group, community, or organizational level. Outcomes can be immediate, intermediate, or long-term impacts.

Impact is a change in an outcome caused by an activity. This requires subtracting the counterfactual, or the change that would have happened regardless, and subtracting any change that can be attributed to the action of another party. What is left is the impact that is attributable to the project. An impact can be positive or negative during a given timeframe.

4. Score weighting based on salient human rights

UN Guiding Principle 24 states, "Where it is necessary to prioritize actions to address actual and potential adverse human rights impacts, business enterprises should first seek to prevent and mitigate those that are most severe or where the delayed response would make them irremediable."

This principle shapes the scoring system on the SEAM scorecard for each SEAM Activity, whereby points are awarded based on the importance and potential negative impact of the social issue being addressed, referred to as its saliency. The issues that could cause the most

severe harm are identified as the project's salient issues.

For each SEAM Activity, the Severity and Management aspects were evaluated, reflecting a typical commercial real estate project.

Each aspect of Severity was assigned a value for every SEAM Activity; these values were summed up and then doubled, emphasizing the higher importance of Severity compared to Management. Subsequently, the values for the Management aspect were totaled for each SEAM Activity and combined with the Severity total. This combined total was then halved to determine the Available Points.

The design of this scoring system aims to guide the prioritization of activities, aligning with the UN Guiding Principles, by incentivizing Owners to focus on SEAM Activities with higher Available Points. This way, activities of higher significance concerning human rights issues are attended to diligently, promoting responsible and ethical project management.

5. Roadmap design

The SEAM Certification framework has been constructed to navigate the complexity of implementing social initiatives based on international standards, frameworks, and principles. It assigns specific preliminary activities within the Social Responsibility and Social Impact pillars that are essential prerequisites for the more advanced activities within the Social Justice and Social Accountability pillars. This structure addresses a common issue in social initiatives: the failure to achieve meaningful outcomes often stems from the need to complete or adequately execute these foundational activities.

6. Certification levels aligned to impact goals

The SEAM Certification adopts a structured approach to evaluating projects based on the "ABC" Impact Goals outlined by the Impact Management Project (IMP), a globally recognized framework for measuring social impact.

The ABC Impact Goals are defined as:

A. Act to avoid harm: This goal emphasizes identifying and addressing any negative impacts a project may have on people's well-being, intending to improve these outcomes towards a sustainable range defined by a specific benchmark known as the outcome threshold. Under this goal, the focus is on improving the adverse outcomes, even if the project may only partially achieve a sustainable outcome within the set objective period.

B. Benefit impacted parties: This goal extends beyond Acting to Avoid Harm. It requires maintaining or enhancing the well-being of one or more groups of people to fall within a sustainable range established by the societal threshold.

C. Contribute to solutions: This goal takes a step further by not only Benefitting impacted parties but also improving the well-being of a group of people so that the outcome is within the sustainable range for many people and/or has a long-term duration.