

Maximizing Social Impact

A List of Power Tools

Impact is the *raison d'être*, moral currency, and most vital performance metric of social good organizations. Yet far too often, the amount, quality and durability of that impact falls far short of the heady visions and missions that undergird their public communications.

Why is this? We have no short answers because there are no short answers. Everything from leadership, to board composition, to influence skills, to program design can be implicated. We are generally interested in the principle of maximizing impact in the areas of influence and program design. There are at least four power tools in these areas that make a big difference in an organization's ability to maximize its impact: creativity and generative thinking, systems design, research, and cross-sector collaboration.

1. Creativity and generative thinking

Our thoughts are often focused on the finiteness of dwindling resources; thankfully, there are some resources which exist in abundance. Human creativity, and the innovation that it can bring about, is one. Within organizations, we have seen that without this scope for creativity, staff are caught up in repetitive cycles of work that fail to achieve impact at the scale needed. Within communities, a focus only on social, economic, and environmental ills can detract from assessing the assets – such as trust, ideas, relationships, knowledge – that communities can bring to their own uplift. Generative thinking – the language of possibility and hope, along with the creativity tools and concepts to put it into practice – is needed more than ever. It leads to new interventions that expand the range of options an organization, or group of actors, can bring towards a challenge.

2. Systems Design

The work of systems design and thinking has created entire systems of its own – of vocabulary, experts, practitioners, and examples. For organizations interested in learning more, a starting place could be understanding and identifying [systems archetypes](#) that might be keeping problems in place, as well as [conditions for systems change](#).

3. Research

Without properly scoping problems and understanding their trajectory, it is hard to get a true sense of whether our efforts are “making a dent” or not. Research, particularly when using large data sets, can help identify the contours and scale of a problem, as well as how it is trending over time. Answering these big-picture questions through primary and secondary

research can go a long way in making sure the team or organization's efforts are directed towards the right level of scale and the right intervention points.

4. Cross-sector Collaboration

If no social issue exists in a silo, why do we keep trying to solve complex problems in isolation? [Cross-sector collaboration](#) allows us to tackle challenges from different angles and ultimately facilitate a systemic solution. Working not only with organizations within the same sector but across sectors, e.g., through public, private, and social sector partnerships, we can exponentially increase impact. By using a [common set of measurable goals](#) that reflect the priorities shared across systems, organizations can better coordinate efforts to achieve results commensurate to the scale of problems they seek to address.

Interested in taking more steps to maximize your organization's impact? Contact us at info@ignitedword.com