

SROI Analysis for Wicked Problems

A cselet on analyzing the impact of the video documentary, *System Failure*

This discussion of an approach to SROI Analysis for “wicked problems” is excerpted with minor edits from ‘WITNESS SROI Analysis, v.1.2005,’ a report developed for WITNESS and the Ella Baker Center by Social Venture Technology Group (SVT) as part of the SROI Workshop Project commissioned by the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs in 2005.

Human rights abuse issues are **complex**, nonlinear and ever-changing problems; the problem definition **derives from solution** strategy; the key stakeholder groups have **radically different** world views and frames of the problem, and often the problem can only be “solved” by **group effort**. All of these characteristics describe what sociologist H. Rittel (1973) called “wicked problems.” Typical wicked problems include terrorism, poverty, and many of the human rights issues Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (EBC) and WITNESS work to change.

As with all wicked problems, at the outset of WITNESS and EBC’s *System Failure*¹ campaign to catalyze reform of the juvenile justice system, the stakeholders had different concerns, a lack of understanding/empathy, no consensus on solution. Through the film *System Failure*, EBC and WITNESS define a unifying frame of the problem, focus stakeholders’ attention, clarify the logic of the solution, facilitate understanding and build consensus for change.

Analysis of the social returns attributable specifically to *System Failure* is a wicked problem challenge. We must therefore use a wicked problem solution strategy to obtain the information required: in other words, we must obtain the different stakeholders observations about what change has taken place and what caused it. The key impact question is, “What impacts are because of the specific event, organization, or specific aspect of the campaign?” To determine this we need three pieces of information from the stakeholders.

1. Information about Magnitude

- How big was the change?
- How difficult was it to effect?

¹ *System Failure* is a documentary about the California juvenile justice system produced by the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights and WITNESS. It can be viewed at <http://www.ellabakercenter.org/page.php?pageid=44&video=157>.

2. Information about Linkage

- How did *System Failure* play a role?
- How much did *System Failure* have to do with causing it?

3. Information about Confidence

- How sure are we that our rating of the linkage between *System Failure* and the change is accurate?

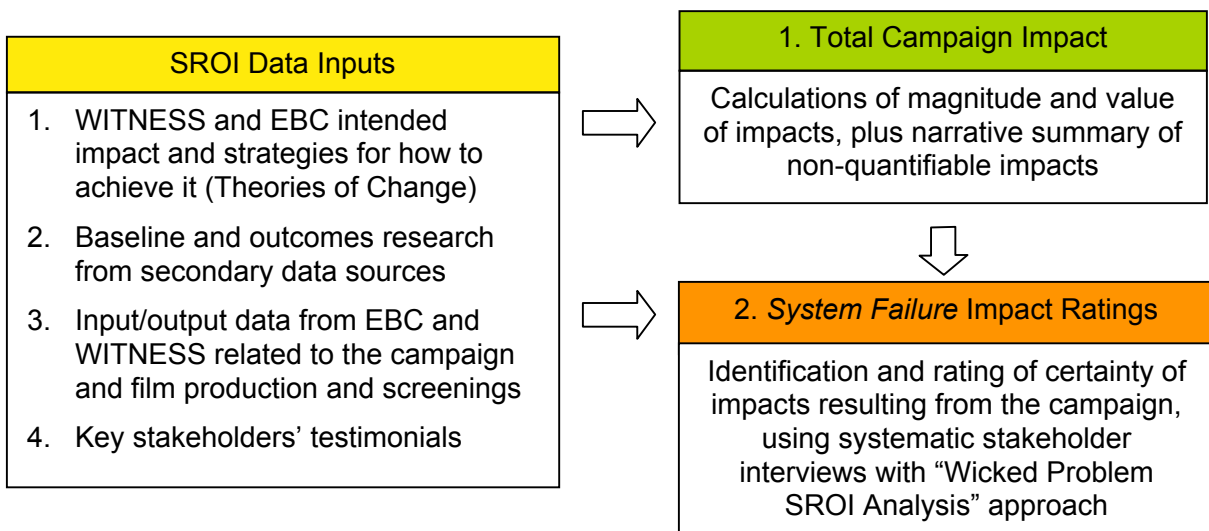
To analyze the impact of the film *System Failure* on the issue of juvenile justice reform, BNB staff helped us obtain the following information.

- **Key individuals.** These are the specific people with the power to act to that achieve the goals of the campaign, namely: 1) closing of all juvenile prison facilities in California, beginning with N.A. Chaderjian; and 2) work with regional officials to open a model rehabilitation center to serve Bay Area youth. There are various combinations of people who could achieve the goals.
- **Stakeholder groups.** These are key parties who will be affect by and may play a role in achieving the desired change.
- **List of screenings and their observed impact on stakeholders.** This is a listing of all instances when *System Failure* has been shown and specifically to whom, with a note of which stakeholder groups and key individuals were in the audience. Ideally the next step would be to for staff and other observers of the CYA reform campaign to systematically note their observation of what impact the film has had on the campaign's Key Individuals, either directly because they saw the film themselves, or indirectly because others saw it and then persuaded/pressured the key individuals to do something. In this analysis version 1.2005, Ella Baker Center provided a summary of the shift in attitudes of juvenile justice experts and judges that they have observed firsthand as a direct result of *System Failure* screenings. In future it would be possible for EBC and/or WITNESS to log observed shifts in specific individuals as a periodic practice to improve the credibility of the analysis.
- **Certainty ratings.** Parties who provide observations of changes and cause and effect relationships also provide their assessment of how certain they are that the change was due to *System Failure*. These are called "certainty ratings."

Alignment with WITNESS’s Existing Performance Tracking System

This graphic illustrates what data would be collected (Data Inputs) to calculate the magnitude and value of WITNESS/EBC’s various impacts, and to assess how certain we are that the measured impacts are due to this WITNESS/EBC campaign.

Data Flows for Wicked Problem SROI Analysis



A template for collecting this data was developed for WITNESS and Ella Baker Center in a spreadsheet, "SROI_Stakeholder_Tracking.xls." For the first version (labeled 1.2005 because it was the first template and created in 2005), EBC’s Books Not Bars campaign staff provided information on the screenings of *System Failure*, audiences and the observed impact of the film. SVT’s analysis of this information is summarized in "EBC_System_Failure_Report.doc."

Going forward, as WITNESS implements its own process using the tools it has recently developed (Video Action Plans (VAPs) and Core Partner Evaluations), some of the output data needed to calculate its SROI, and data on stakeholders and key individuals (points 1. Information about Magnitude, and 2. Information about Linkage, above), will be collected. The questions that speak to point 3, Information about Confidence, could easily be added into WITNESS’ Core Partner Annual Evaluation tool. A strategy for obtaining confidence ratings from other key stakeholders besides WITNESS and its partners would need to be developed to round out all data needed to perform a complete Wicked Problem SROI Analysis.