

Inner Development Skills In Action: A Case Study of SEI

By Cyane Dandridge

As the world faces increasingly catastrophic and complex climate events, our ability to address these challenges and opportunities to accelerate climate solutions depends not just on scientific advances or policy changes but also on building the capabilities, confidence and fortitude needed to bring about societal transformation.

SEI: Building Leaders for a Resilient World

[SEI \(Strategic Energy Innovations\)](#), an environmental nonprofit consultancy, is a leader and strategic partner in creating climate career pathways in education and workforce development. When launching SEI 27 years ago, I envisioned a more sustainable world, led by climate leaders of all ages and in all stages of life.

From the beginning, I realized that tackling a problem as large as climate change needed an incredible team — and that the biggest resource of any organization is its people. By engaging, equipping, and empowering individuals with professional and personal development training, they could take action to create thriving, resilient communities.

Over the last three decades, I have activated SEI's Executive Team, Leadership Team, Board of Directors, advisory committees, and staff on building these climate leaders to accelerate climate solutions. The path hasn't been smooth. From global pandemics and global economic collapse, SEI has faced many challenges, needing to pivot by learning quickly through reflection and constantly questioning our approaches. I have tried to emulate leadership without ego, with perseverance and commitment to our mission, and with an openness to learning from new perspectives.

The Inner Development Goals (IDG) Framework

[Inner Development Goals](#), a not-for-profit and open-source initiative, created the [IDG Framework](#) to showcase the power of human development while aiming to achieve sustainable development goals. The framework consists of 5 dimensions — Being, Thinking, Relating, Collaborating, and Acting — and 23 skills¹ of inner growth and development needed to tackle climate change and other complex global challenges. The purpose of this framework is to support educators and users in developing these foundational inner skills, which will help them to find their place in implementing climate solutions.

¹ The IDG Skills: Inner compass; Integrity and Authenticity; Openness and Learning Mindset; Self Awareness; Presence; Critical Thinking; Complexity Awareness; Perspective Skills; Sense-Making; Long-term Orientation and Visioning; Appreciation; Connectedness; Humility; Empathy and Compassion; Communication Skills; Co-creation Skills; Inclusive Mindset and Intercultural Competence; Trust; Mobilization Skills; Courage; Creativity; Optimism; Perseverance.

IDG Framework Within SEI

My collaboration on the creation of the Framework and Transformational Skills, which are based on the IDGs, has offered a new structure from which to illustrate the decades of experience SEI's team have in developing a comprehensive approach to nurturing climate leadership. I have always believed that investing in employee development will generate the greatest value in the work.

SEI is always evolving. For example, a few years ago, we underwent a dramatic reorganization to affirm our vision, mission, and values, while intentionally listening to and learning from staff, and from the communities we partner with and serve. SEI partnered with a DEI consulting agency to identify top priorities such as transparency, inclusivity, and a culture of listening. The Executive and Leadership Teams at SEI recently completed a leadership academy course, and we are continually finding like-minded people and organizations to learn from at conferences, forums, and changemaker groups such as IDG.

SEI's core values² are actively integrated into the organization's day-to-day operations and decision-making processes and reflect many IDG skills. Monthly staff meetings include time for team and individual acknowledgments. We cover the cost of staff participation in professional development opportunities and working groups to promote a learning mindset, collaboration, and mobilization skills within the organization and within our external work. To ensure that staff development is not only tied to individual growth but also to our long-term vision, we created a robust performance matrix and review rubric to evaluate staff on criteria that are aligned with SEI's core values.

By weaving together leadership development, performance evaluation, collaborative initiatives, and a strong focus on core values, we have created a comprehensive approach to nurturing climate leaders. This holistic strategy ensures that we create a workforce that embodies the principles of equity, innovation, and environmental stewardship.

IDG Framework Within SEI Programs

Our flagship programs [[Energize Schools](#), [The School of Environmental Leadership](#), [Energize Colleges](#), [Climate Corps](#), [Climate Corps Education Outside](#), and [Energize Careers](#)] have collectively partnered with schools, communities, and businesses to form a comprehensive approach to climate education and leadership development, a pathway spanning from elementary school to career professionals.

Our programs empower individuals to develop crucial capacities that align with and integrate many of the IDG dimensions of Being, Thinking, Relating, Collaborating, and Acting. Often, the work doesn't neatly fall into one dimension or another. For example, the School of Environmental Leadership believes a balanced emphasis on rigorous academics, environmental stewardship, creative arts and service to community creates a vibrant learning environment and prepares our youth for engaging as passionate and respectful participants in our ever-changing

² We are committed to impact. We are networkers and collaborators. We are inclusive and just. We are always learning. We are one team.

global community. This holistic approach to high school allows for the development of skills across the IDG framework, from self-awareness to collaboration and action.

Much like SEI itself, these programs are continually evolving and have grown and changed much over the years. The following examples don't fully encompass the inner development work or ongoing learning of each our programs but instead offer replicable cases of IDG skills in action.

Being and Self-Awareness

SEI's programs encourage participants to develop a strong inner compass and self-awareness. For example, faculty within the Communities of Practice, hosted by SEI's Energize Colleges program, contend with how to teach sustainability in a way that respects students' values while inviting them to discover their own path through navigating complex ethical terrain. These conversations were born from listening to faculty needs from early Communities of Practice and adjusting our approach based on their feedback. As another example, before becoming a Climate Corps Fellow, participants are asked why they chose this fellowship and why this matters to them – bringing authentic introspection to the forefront of their experience. Climate Corps Fellow trainings used to focus primarily on climate science skill development. Even soft skill workshops were concentrated on how Fellows could better manage up the work they were doing and with the people they worked. Based on Fellow, partner, and staff feedback, the program created trainings with trauma-aware and trauma-informed approaches to the impacts of climate change, which reflected the Fellows' lived experience of climate effects and created deeper self-awareness.

Thinking and Complexity Awareness

Curricula across SEI's programs foster critical thinking and complexity awareness. For example, students using Energize Schools' curricula engage with geospatial data, conduct infrastructure audits, and analyze data patterns, developing their ability to make sense of the world around them. Creating these curricula took years of trial and error. The Energize Schools team used to spend a lot of time going into classrooms to work with individual teachers. Listening to educator and student feedback in order to expand our impact, Energize Schools shifted into curricula development and faculty learning communities, especially for creating increasingly important career technical education (CTE) training. How can we affect the greatest number of teachers while supporting what they need? We are still learning. As another example, SEI's Climate Corps Fellows take the [UC Climate Stewards](#) program which teaches intersectional environmentalism and advances their ability to communicate and effect solutions to advance community and ecosystem resilience. This hands-on approach mirrors the IDG's emphasis on cognitive skills such as critical thinking and sense-making.

Relating and Empathy

SEI's programs recognize the need for deep connection to each other and this planet. Within the garden education classes of the Climate Corps Education Outside (CCEO) program, Fellows teach hands-on ecoliteracy to elementary school students. These students get their hands in the dirt, planting and tending gardens and learning the life cycles of plants. By engaging in inquiry-based, collaborative lessons, students are invited to empathize, build relationships, set and

achieve goals, and make informed choices. Ninety-nine percent of teachers polled agree that their students have grown a deeper connection to nature, and 90% agree that their students have grown in social-emotional learning, echoing the IDG's dimension of caring for others and the world. As another example, many participants in the Energize Careers program are from communities hit first and worst by climate change. Often, access to climate education is rare and the connections between plumbing, HVAC, or construction jobs and advancing climate solutions aren't often enumerated. Before the Energize Careers team supports workers from diverse backgrounds transition into and maintain climate-related careers, the Energize Careers team learn to confront their own conscious and unconscious biases, tap into empathy, and be open to new perspectives to best serve participants and meet them where they are.

Collaborating and Social Skills

Students crave being leaders within their community but often don't know how. The School of Environmental Leadership (SEL), which I launched in 2011, is a project-based, four-year program that emphasizes leadership development and 21st-century skills. The SEL was launched to provide access for students to that leadership pathway. At first, the SEL was very STEM-focused, but quickly educators saw that students needed to learn leadership skills just as much as the hard sciences. Now, the SEL is designed to give students increasing ownership and independence over their educational experience by developing their collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity skills³. Students have been able to enact incredible change in their community, working in teams to write grants for climate equity projects and technology advancement, proposing new policies that were accepted by the county and city governments, decreasing climate impacts within their school district through education and policy change, and organizing massive creek and beach cleanup efforts.

Acting for Change

Learning and growing is incredibly important, but unprecedented global challenges require transformative leadership and urgent collective action. The project-based programs at SEI encourage taking direct action. From high school students [launching green businesses](#) in the Sustainable Enterprise Curriculum to college interns helping to develop innovative [agricultural robots](#), and from Climate Corps Fellows implementing real-world [clean energy](#) and sustainability projects to Energize Careers participants training in new skills for [high-growth green careers](#), the participants of these programs are developing the courage and creativity necessary for enabling change. These are just some examples of SEI's climate leaders taking meaningful action toward a resilient future for all communities.

Next Steps: How to Embrace Inner Development Skills for Sustainable Change

1. **Assess Current Practices:** Evaluate how your organization fosters personal growth and sustainability and identify gaps where IDG skills can be integrated.

³ These skills define foundational areas of student development which also drive academic success and career readiness and are known within the SEL program as The Four C's.

2. Explore the [Transformative Skills Guide](#) and [IDG Toolkit](#): This open-source resource is adaptable to various organizational contexts and offers practical ways to develop these inner development skills.
3. Foster a Collaborative Culture of Reflection: Encourage introspection among team members by integrating regular reflection. Ask questions that promote self-awareness and a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives in sustainability efforts, ensuring all voices are heard and listening is emphasized. Carry this culture of reflection into the communities you serve, making sure to localize your efforts as you learn from community feedback.
4. Lead by Example: Empower leaders within your organization to model IDG principles. Their commitment to inner development can create a ripple effect.
5. Measure Impact: Establish metrics to assess the effectiveness of integrating IDG skills into your operations. Regularly review these metrics to adapt and refine your approach.
6. Join the Global Movement: Connect with other organizations committed to climate solutions. Share experiences, learn from each other, and collaborate on innovative solutions that advance personal growth and worldwide change.

We would love to work together to cultivate the inner resources necessary for creating a more equitable and sustainable world. Can our expertise help you unlock the powerful climate leaders within your community? Do you know of other organizations working in the education and workforce development space that would be served by integrating these IDG Skills? Please reach out so that we can have a conversation to discuss more.

For other inquiries, please email us at sei@seiinc.org, call us at (415) 507-2181, or visit our website seiinc.org to explore how we can work together. Learn more about our programs by signing up for our [newsletter](#), networking with us on [LinkedIn](#), or following us on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).