

Social ROI: Impact per Dollar

E-book summary

Social ROI: Impact per Dollar is a practical e-book that helps nonprofit organizations calculate, explain, and justify the cost per outcome of their programs to donors.

The e-book does not aim to produce a full academic Social Return on Investment (SROI) study or assign a monetary value to all social value created. Its focus is practical and immediate: putting a minimum viable social ROI system in place in six weeks, using evidence, full costs, documented assumptions, and materials ready to present to donors.

Its central promise is to help answer a question that donors increasingly ask:

What changed, how do you know, and what did it cost to achieve that change?

1. The problem this e-book addresses

Many organizations achieve real results but cannot clearly explain what those results cost.

When a donor asks:

“What did you achieve with the resources invested?”

The answer often focuses on activities:

- We trained 200 people.
- We held 30 workshops.
- We distributed 500 kits.
- We served 1,000 users.

All of this may matter, but it does not answer the central question:

What changed, and what did it cost to produce that change?

The e-book addresses the disconnect between impact, evidence, and cost. It helps readers move from reporting activities to demonstrating outcomes they can support with evidence.

It enables an organization to tell a donor, without overstating results or hiding limitations:

“This program achieves this change. This is how we measure it, approximately what it costs, the evidence behind it, and the limits of what we can claim”.

2. What you will build

By the end of the process, readers will have a social ROI system built to meet donor expectations and ready to present to funders.

The system is more than a spreadsheet. It connects the outcome, indicator, costs, evidence, calculator, dashboard, donor presentation materials, and a plan to keep the system running.

The main deliverables are:

Deliverable	Status
Initial Social ROI assessment	☐ Complete
Selected priority program	☐ Complete
Defined main outcome and indicator that meets donor expectations	☐ Complete
Completed Impact-per-Dollar Canvas v1	☐ Complete

Deliverable	Status
ROI Calculator v1 with cost per outcome and sensitivity range	☐ Complete
Impact Map and program data matrix	☐ Complete
Evidence Tracker and verifiable Evidence Pack	☐ Complete
Operational ROI system: roles, monthly review routine, quality assurance, and dashboard	☐ Complete
Donor presentation materials: one-pager, slide deck, and 60-second script	☐ Complete
Two-page ROI Pre-Proposal	☐ Complete
90-Day ROI Plan to maintain the system	☐ Complete
Social ROI system meeting donor expectations and ready to present to funders	☐ Complete

The outcome is more than an attractive number for a presentation. It is a traceable, verifiable, sustainable system for explaining the social value produced per dollar invested.

3. How IGROW guides the process

IGROW structures the full implementation process. It guides readers through setting up a social ROI system step by step, without getting lost in formulas, scattered data, or weak evidence.

IGROW stage	How it applies in this e-book
I — Issue / Intent	Clarifies why you need to calculate social ROI now and what problem the system should solve. The e-book asks whether ROI is needed for donor conversations, stronger reporting, program prioritization, or the design of a next phase. This stage defines the purpose of the calculation.
G — Goal	Defines what must be built each week. Each stage produces a specific deliverable: a defined outcome, an indicator meeting donor expectations, the Canvas, Calculator, Impact Map, Evidence Pack, donor materials, or pre-proposal. Intentions become practical work.
R — Reality	Examines the available data, costs, and evidence. Readers ask difficult questions: do we have an actual source? Have we included enabling costs? Can we justify the denominator? Are we confusing outputs with outcomes? This stage prevents calculations based on unsupported assumptions.
O — Options	Provides practical options for measuring, costing, documenting, and justifying social ROI with imperfect data. It includes formulas, sensitivity ranges, an evidence maturity matrix, an Evidence Tracker, an Impact Map, quality assurance, and wording for donors. The focus is on sustainable, workable solutions rather than perfection.
W — Way Forward	Ends each stage with a clear next step. The process establishes roles, a monthly review routine, a dashboard, quality assurance, an Evidence Pack, donor materials, and a 90-day plan. It makes social ROI an ongoing system rather than a one-time calculation.

4. What this e-book promises

This e-book does not promise to measure all the social value an organization creates.

It also does not promise to establish strict causality, produce a formal SROI analysis, or turn weak data into strong evidence.

It promises that, by the end of the process, the organization will have an initial practical system for calculating and justifying its cost per outcome with greater clarity, evidence, and honesty.

In summary:

The e-book turns activity reporting into a substantive donor conversation about outcomes, costs, evidence, assumptions, and social value per dollar invested.

This helps readers move from saying:

"We carried out many activities."

To say:

"We achieved this verifiable change, at this cost per outcome, under these assumptions, with this evidence and these limitations."