Seed Transformation Program (STP) FAQ

ABOUT THE STP: NUTS AND BOLTS

What is the commitment level required for the program?

We estimate that the program requires roughly six to eight hours a week for the business leader (CEO/founder) and a bit less than that for your team members. The program is stretched over about 11 months - starting in mid-January through the end of November. The program has different learning modalities, so there will be some periods when you're working with your team at your own schedule and pace, and there will be other periods with live “classroom” sessions, dedicated workshops with your leadership team, and peer learning events. The sessions will be 50% in-person and 50% online, including 2 in-person classroom weeks for CEOs and 2 workshops at each company’s premises with the CEO and management team.

This is not a program that you wade in and out of as you see fit and as your timing allows; you cannot multitask when you're in live sessions. When you're in class and when you're working with your Seed Business Transformation Advisor (“BTA”), it requires 100% of your attention. Having said that, we recognize that everyone in this program is extremely busy, so we believe the balance is doable and that the benefit justifies the level of effort.

Can you explain how the program elements involve both CEO/founders and management team members?

The program has a number of elements, some for CEOs only and other for CEOs and their management team. Live sessions and classroom weeks with Stanford faculty are limited to the CEOs (admits) in the program. Leadership Labs are also only for CEOs; these are meetings of 4-6 CEOs with their BTA that allow the leaders to discuss and think through their leadership challenges. There are also sessions that are designed for both the CEO and their management team members, so there's a lot of content that's designed specifically to include teams. These workshops will take place 4 times during the STP, with 2 at the company and 2 online. During the in-company workshops, Business Transformation Advisors spend time with you and your team to answer questions and to help apply the tools to your business. The STP culminates with each company submitting and presenting their “Transformation Plans” to Seed - a customized plan for growth and scale. The STP is unique in that it is a leadership, team and company-level program!

How many people can participate as CEOs/founders from one company? How many management team members can participate?
Right now, our target this year is to admit between 110-120 companies from Africa and 80-90 from South Asia, and we would generally allow five to 10 of those companies to have co-CEOs/founders. In the case that there are co-CEOs/founders, each CEO is expected to attend the sessions for leaders - classroom weeks, online sessions with faculty, leadership labs. In the case that there are 2 co-CEOs/founders participating, a second fee will be charged to the company as it constrains the total number of companies considered for admission.

In terms of management team members, to be considered for admission, we require a minimum of 2 management team members per firm in addition to the CEO(s). As the STP seeks companies that can grow and scale, having a management team in place is considered a foundational aspect of our evaluation of applicants. We do not place a cap on the number of management team members who can take part in the in-company workshops, though most management teams we expect to number between 3-8.

What learning materials are provided and do we need to get any ourselves?

There are no extra fees or costs for any of the learning materials; everything will be made available to you. You will, however, need a good internet connection to participate in this program because there are many live webinars. They will be recorded, and you can watch them later, but there is a lot of interactivity that you won’t want to miss. You will also need to be able to download case studies and other reading materials, and watch asynchronous video content.

Although it may be tempting to participate in this program by phone, this will not serve you well. When you participate in this program, you will want to use a desktop or laptop computer.

Are there set times and time zones when the program takes place? Does it take place during the day or the evening?

To the extent that our faculty are located in California, they lead their sessions at around 6 am California time. For the most part, that will be in the afternoon or early evening in your time zone. For sessions led by regionally-based Business Transformation Advisors, the time zones could be different. You will also be personally scheduling blocks of time with your Business Transformation Advisor, which will afford more flexibility.

In the aforementioned six to eight hours per week time commitment, is this taken as one block or is there some flexibility?

We would like you to participate in live sessions when they are being held. That said, they will all be recorded and we recognize that sometimes it's simply not possible to be there for a live session. Watching a live session later, however, will mean that you miss an opportunity to interact with the faculty and lecturers.
Can you explain the selection process?

We use Salesforce to process our applications. The first thing we do is screen for our core criteria (i.e. Are you in fact the key decision maker of the business? Is your business activity in a country that qualifies for the Seed program? Do you meet the minimum revenue requirements? Are there at least 3 members of the management team?). Once we screen applications, we create a shortlist of companies who will move forward. We then ask those on this shortlist to submit a recorded video interview through a platform called SparkHire. During this process, we learn more about a few dimensions of your business: who you are as a leader, what motivates you about your business, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of your management team. Other questions we consider: What is your company’s core value proposition, its market potential, and potential to scale? All of these dimensions inform the impact that you and your company might have on the world - in alignment with Seed’s mission. We aim to select the highest potential business leaders and firms from the different markets in which we work.

Is the $6,000 the application fee or the total cost of the program?

$6,000 is the total program fee. There is no application fee. As referred to above, in the unusual case that an admitted company has co-CEOs/founders, a second fee will be invoiced to the company.

In addition to the program fee, health conditions permitting, there will be 2 weeklong in-person learning and networking sessions for CEOs/founders. For both Africa and South Asia, these weeks will take place in January and June - for Africa, the first in Nairobi, Kenya and second in Accra, Ghana; and for South Asia, both in Chennai, India. CEOs/founders will be responsible for covering their travel costs to attend these 2 weeks (visas, flights, hotels, Covid testing, etc.). For the 2 in-company workshops taking place on the company’s premises, Seed will cover all costs associated with the BTA traveling to the company. Companies will also be responsible for covering all internet costs associated with online portions of the STP.

The application process requires financials for a period of years; what if our controls and financial systems are not up to standards?

Each year we admit companies whose financial controls are not fully up to standard. We would encourage you, if you meet the minimum criteria (CEO/founder, locally-registered/owned, 3 management team members, $300k-$15m revenue), to do your best with the data you have. We understand that not all companies actually have perfect balance sheets and income statements and part of our purpose is to help you get better at those things. As part of the interview process (for those who are selected to move beyond the initial application phase), we will request each company submit its most recent financial statements - audited, reviewed, management, internal all being acceptable forms. This information will be used to confirm information submitted by the company on its
application, and to evaluate the company’s financial position as part of our selection criteria and process.

Is it possible to pay in monthly installments over the duration of the program?

At the time of admission, there will be a few payment installment options to select from. In terms of payment options, these vary slightly from our South Asia program to our Africa programs, but generally we offer two or three different installment options - with a portion required to be paid before the program starts. Generally, we ask everyone to have paid in full by the first quarter of the program.

Does the $6,000 fee cover the complete team, or is it per individual?

The fee covers all the CEO and all of his/her management team members - thus one fee per company. In the exceptional case where two co-owners/CEOs are admitted from the same company, both will need to pay the $6,000 fee - or $12,000 for the company.

Do you review past applications?

We do not. If you were not successful with a previous application, but you believe your company circumstances have improved, we encourage you to reapply. We’ve had a number of applicants who successfully matriculated on their second or even third try.

Does Seed increase its intake for the program in line with the ever-increasing number of qualified applications?

For the Class of 20223, we are increasing our cohort size in South Asia from 50-60 companies to 80-90. This is part of our strategic expansion efforts in South Asia, as we have added Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, the Maldives and Sri Lanka to our India-based cohorts from previous year. In Africa, we intend to admit 110-120 companies into the Class of 2023.

What if a forex devaluation has affected our revenue?

We understand that can happen so we are quite careful in the application to ask you to identify the currency that you’re reporting in. And we do recognize that a number of countries have experienced currency fluctuations in the past few years that can affect your bottom line. If you believe that you have a strong revenue picture that's been undermined by devaluation, do not let that discourage you from applying. The application form includes some free response questions where you can further explain your company’s financial circumstances.

How do I apply for a scholarship?

If you are selected to move beyond the initial application phase, you will be able to apply for a scholarship at the time of submitting your video interviews and financial statements. For those who apply, are admitted into the program, and are awarded a scholarship, it will result in a reduction in the company’s program fee - in order to offset other costs.
associated with participating in the program (primarily travel). Scholarships are limited in number, and awards are based on the financial position of the company, projected travel costs to participate in the STP, and whether the applicant is from an underrepresented group (post-conflict countries, smaller markets, women, social enterprises).

When will we be notified of acceptance?

We will announce admission decisions in the first week of October.

APPLYING TO THE STP: WHO AND WHAT IS SEED LOOKING FOR?

Is the Seed Transformation Program only for CEOs? What if I work in a mid-level position?

The most important distinction here is whether you are the company’s key strategic decision-maker. We recognize that not everyone is a founder or a CEO but unless you’re at that table, making the key strategic and financial decisions for the company, this program is not the right fit for you. The STP is unique in that it seeks to deliver value across multiple dimensions - leaders, management teams, firms, society. To deliver upon this value across all dimensions, it is imperative that the primary participant(s) be the strategic decision-maker(s) for the company.

Should I apply if I am a senior executive, but not the CEO or founder?

The key criteria is not your title, but rather your role. The program focuses on all of the strategic and operational decisions that will determine the future success of your enterprise, and thus is designed for people who have the responsibility to make these decisions with their leadership team.

What if I am a co-founder?

We know companies sometimes have co-founders or co-owners; in the past, we have had two senior executives from the same company participate in the program. If you do have 2 co-strategic decision-makers, both leaders will be required to participate in all aspects of the program.

Can I apply if I just quit my CEO position in order to set up my own venture?

The STP is designed for those working on an existing venture. There are many other programs out there for people who are starting new ventures that would be a better fit.

If my company gets acquired during the program will I be able to participate in assignments and projects during the program?

Yes, if you are still in a key leadership role in your company as part of its acquisition.

I’m launching a business. Can I apply with that business in mind, or just an existing business?
The STP is not designed for startups. We are looking for people who are trying to grow an existing business.

Do you select growing non-profit organizations that are likely to pivot at some point to create for-profit ventures?

Yes, we are willing to look at market-driven social enterprises that get the majority of their funding through trading. If you get the majority of your funding through institutional grants, then a lot of the frameworks and tools that we use (which are focused on product innovation, marketing and sales), will not be applicable. If you already have some revenue stream that you’re using to expand your impact, then there is no harm in applying.

Please elaborate on what a market-driven social enterprise means.

A market-driven social enterprise earns revenue by providing goods and services, often in addition to some grant funding. Typically these revenues are invested in expanding impact, rather than taken as profits or distributed to shareholders.

This is a program for organizations with annual revenues above $300,000. Can I apply if my annual revenue is less than that, or if I will reach that threshold in the upcoming year?

Every year, we get a number of applicants that are below the $300,000 threshold; if you're far below, your chances of getting into the program are quite slim. If your company's revenues are right on the margin, and you have a powerful growth story, we encourage you to apply. By “powerful growth story,” we ask in the application for your own assessment of your business’ prospects: e.g. what you think the growth trajectory will be. We also ask you to provide revenue projections supported by your growth story.

If you are pre-revenue or in the tens of thousands of dollars, the program is not right for you at this stage. We work with many other organizations, including programs that are designed for smaller businesses. With your permission, we can either share your contact information with these programs, or write to you directly to steer you toward programs that might be more appropriate for you.

Is this program a good fit for someone who is already funded by a leading accelerator?

Many companies that go through the program have already secured one or more rounds of funding, including seed capital, series A, series B, private equity, venture debt, capex loans, etc. What matters is whether you believe you and your team have more work to do together to strategize and design your scaling plan and have the autonomy to do that.

Will fundraising by the company be a deciding factor?
We do ask for information about prior fundraising as part of the application process, but prior fundraising success is not a requirement to participate in the program.

I have an MBA from a top business school. What would this program give me that's above or different from an MBA?

Many of our participants have MBAs, including from schools in Europe and the United States. You will likely be familiar with many of the tools and concepts that we use, such as the Business Model Canvas. What will differ is that you will spend all of your time applying these tools to your business, with your management team, and supported by Seed Business Transformation Advisors. In a typical MBA program, much of the learning is theoretical with various case studies and homework assignments, and the stakes are not as high.

In the Seed program, you will apply what you learn toward strategic decisions about your business and your team. Another important difference is that you will work in an environment of peers across a number of countries and sectors who are facing similar real-world challenges. Lastly, the methods, tools, and frameworks that Seed uses have been “road-tested” with enormous success in Silicon Valley and elsewhere, so you will benefit from world class content, faculty, and lectures.

Do you prefer companies that are product-oriented? Are you comfortable with service companies?

We are interested in companies that have great leaders and growth potential, without a preference for manufacturing or services. In addition to the minimum admissions requirements, such as revenue, we are looking for business leaders who are hungry for growth, who have a vision for what they want to do with their company and are trying to figure it out. We look for people who are ambitious, who have a solid value proposition, have a good business model, and want to take their business to the next level.

My business has been impacted by the COVID pandemic. Will you be taking that into account?

Yes. We acknowledge that the past couple years with COVID has been hard on businesses in all markets - and particularly smaller businesses. For some, the pandemic has created enormous opportunity, so you may still be in the process of figuring out how to best seize these new opportunities. For others, the pandemic has forced you to pivot your strategy to capture a new market segment, a new customer segment, a different product, or to reassess your supply chains. The disruption of the pandemic has forced many businesses to adapt and pivot. The Seed Transformation Program served the needs of companies facing both situations throughout 2020 and 2021.

To qualify for the program, does my management team need to include specific roles, such as COO, CTO, CMO?

We do not have specific roles that you must have filled. We do, however, want to see that your company is run by more than one person, that you are working with a
leadership team. The minimum requirement is, including the CEO, that the “senior management” team have 3 members.

**APPLYING TO THE STP: DOES MY LOCATION MATTER?**

**Do you have to be a local national of the country to apply (e.g. born in Africa)?**

No, but your business activities should be primarily located in Africa or South Asia - and need to be registered there. We have had expatriates in the program before and businesses in multiple countries. In addition to the registration question, your business activities need to be taking place and impacting one of the countries in which we work. We seek to have an impact in these regions, so having owners and businesses that invest in the communities in which we work is imperative.

**Is the program only for the founder space in Africa and India or can founders from the ASEAN region apply as well?**

Unfortunately, we are not accepting applications from the ASEAN region at this time.

**How many participants will be selected this year?**

We intend to admit 110-120 companies from Africa and 80-90 from South Asia.

**What countries are you targeting, if any? Which countries tend to dominate in terms of number of applications?**

Historically, a majority of our applications received are from Ghana, India, Kenya and Nigeria; increasingly, we have a large contingent from other countries, such as Bangladesh, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Nepal, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. As part of our collaboration with De Beers, we also admit companies each year from Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, and are also actively recruiting in many other Southern African countries - such as Madagascar, Mozambique and Zambia. We added Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka to our Indian cohorts across the last 2 years, and will seek to continue to increase the number of applications from these countries. We think that the geographic diversity of our cohorts is a strength of the STP, as it permits business leaders to establish professional contacts in and access new markets.

**I am an Indian citizen but my company is incorporated in the U.S. I meet the other criteria; can I apply for the program?**

We have had a number of business leaders in the India cohort who have multinational operations with offices in other countries. What matters is whether you’re actually having an impact in India. And to do so, as referred to above, we do require local registration (in South Asia or Africa) and, in most cases, majority local ownership.

**How are we able to recruit from Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa?**
This is enabled by a partnership with the De Beers Group. De Beers wanted to make this program available to entrepreneurs in Southern Africa, but the cost for Seed to establish another regional office was prohibitive. As a result of our partnership, every year we admit 20 successful applicants from Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. As referred to above, we are also actively recruiting from other Southern African countries - Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, et cetera.

COMPLETING THE SEED TRANSFORMATION PROGRAM: CERTIFICATE AND NETWORKING

What is the certificate that participants receive at the end of the Seed program?

Upon meeting the requirements of the program, participants will receive a Certificate of Completion and gain access to Network benefits such as coaching, consulting, interns, and peer networking.

We want to stress that this certificate is not an MBA from the Stanford Graduate School of Business; you will not get a Stanford MBA diploma.

Does completion of this program give you a higher chance of getting accepted into the Stanford MBA program?

The Stanford MBA program is the most competitive program in the United States; unfortunately, participation in the Seed program would not count toward your application success. The admissions process for the MBA program is separate from Seed and our Transformation Program.

Do participants interact across the regional cohorts? Would Indian participants also engage with African participants?

You will have opportunities to interact across the two regional cohorts; some of the work will be just at your company level, some of the activities will be held at the regional level and some will be with this global cohort. This type of interaction even increases after the program, as you join a well-organized network of nearly 1,000 peers from 30 countries. In 2018, Seed hosted a global summit of past participants in Nairobi. At the time, we had a brand new cohort from India and the vast majority of them traveled to Kenya to meet their African counterparts. We hope post-COVID to do this again face to face. We have also created a private instance of Workplace (‘Facebook for work’) for all participants to connect online.

Does Seed have an online MBA for CEOs?

We do not; this is not an MBA program. There are plenty of MBA programs online, but Stanford Graduate School of Business does not currently offer one.

Do you become a Stanford alumnus in this program? Can you post on LinkedIn that you are part of Stanford?
You can put on LinkedIn that you were part of Stanford Seed and a Seed Transformation Network member - which is different from the Stanford Graduate School of Business. We strongly discourage people from changing their profile to state that they have a Stanford degree, since this is not a degree granting program.

**Could there be funding through the program if a participant has identified capital as a constraint?**

Seed is part of Stanford University, so we are not investing directly in companies in the program. However, we are focused on helping companies become investor ready or debt ready. We aim to better expose business leaders to the fundraising environment and ecosystem and we do that through our networking process. We help you become a more attractive target for investors, but we ourselves do not directly invest in participating companies. According to our survey data, companies have raised more than $400 million in debt, equity and grants since completing the Seed Transformation Program.

**How is the Seed Transformation Program different from the Stanford LEAD Program?**

The LEAD program is divided into eight modules, a number of which are elective so you choose what you want to focus on as you work in cohorts with peers. The LEAD program is not as practically focused on giving you tools as a business leader; the target LEAD participant is somebody in a larger corporate environment. So typically, it's not the CEO or the founder or the managing director or the key decision maker; it is usually a middle to senior manager in a larger company. And it's about driving innovation from that position. In the Seed program you will be part of a cohort of company leaders.

**Can you describe typical alumni network activities?**

Our alumni network is extremely active. There are regional chapters across the African continent and in India that are constantly organizing events, guest lectures, and expert panels. Sometimes they do events with potential funders. Stanford Seed also curates continuous learning content for the network, including guest lecturers by Stanford faculty and practitioners. Members of the network also have access to Seed coaches, pro bono consultants, and Stanford student interns. We had a Global Summit of past participants in Nairobi and were set to have one in March of 2020 in Mumbai but had to cancel due to the global pandemic. We are looking forward to holding a large global summit of past participants in 2023 and beyond.