Are We There Yet?
A Guide to Developing a Theory of Change to Help Evaluate Your Programs

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
October 13, 2021
POLL QUESTION 1:

What role do you play in your organization?

A. Senior leadership 
B. Management 
C. Program staff 
D. Fundraising, marketing, IT 
E. Research and evaluation 
F. Other
**POLL QUESTION 2:**

When I hear logic model or theories of change (ToC):

A. I have no idea what we’re talking about.
B. I have a general idea of what these are, but I don’t know a lot of detail.
C. I can typically understand a logic model or ToC but am not comfortable creating one.
D. I have been a partner in developing a logic model or ToC.
E. If Elena’s power goes out, I could facilitate this webinar.
POLL QUESTION 3:

At least one of the programs with which I work has an articulated logic model or theory of change.

A. Completely true.
B. Sort of true. Let me explain.
C. Not true at all.
POLL QUESTION 4:

What are you hoping to get out of this session? (Check all that apply)

A. What a theory of change is, including specific components
B. How and why you would use a Theory of Change
C. How to build a ToC for existing programming
D. How to build a ToC for new initiatives
E. Other (please describe in chat)
Our Time Together

Agenda

Expectations
Our Television Show Cooking Segment Model
What is a Theory of Change?

A conceptual roadmap for how and why an intervention is expected to achieve its intended impact

“If you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there.”
— Lewis Carroll
Using a Theory of Change

As a planning tool:
• Maps out a strategy
• Provides opportunity to consider why and how
• Provides opportunity to modify strategies and interventions
• Informs decisions as the work evolves

As a communication tool:
• Builds consensus among stakeholders around activities and outcomes
• Provides common language for external explanation of efforts (“We do X in order to change Y and Z”)

As an evaluation tool:
• Identifies outcomes to be measured and timeframe for measuring them
• Maps how programs will lead to outcomes by linking activities to outcomes and outcomes to assumptions
Theory of Change vs Logic Model

Key context

Outcomes and impact

Strategies, interventions, and activities

Assumptions about why/how this all happens
How A Theory of Change Flows

If we do these things

Then these changes will occur

So that we achieve this vision

STRATEGIES AND INTERVENTIONS

SHORT- AND MID-TERM OUTCOMES

IMPACT

CONTEXT AND ASSUMPTIONS
Working in Context

• Opportunities, challenges, and elements outside of our control.
• As context shifts, activities could shift. Short-term outcomes may also shift.

• 1 in 5 Black and Latinx children in the Hartford region live in poverty, compared to 1 in 100 white children, according to 2019 data.
• Only 46% of Hartford residents say they feel safe walking around their neighborhood at night. In the inner ring suburbs, that number is 69%, and in the outer ring suburbs, it’s 81%.
What are strategies or activities?

• The things you do
• Typically expressed as an action
What are outcomes?

The things we expect to happen as a result of our activities. The things for which we are held accountable.

Outcomes should be SMARTIE

When writing outcomes:

Specify the group, condition, or process targeted for change and what we hope to change about it:

• My dog (group targeted for change) stops eating the trash (desired change).
• Residents in Greater Hartford (group targeted for change) have consistent access to food (desired change).
When should we expect outcomes?

• Can be accomplished within some expected timeframe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Individual outcomes</th>
<th>Policy and systems change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short-term</td>
<td>Within one year</td>
<td>Within two years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>One to three years</td>
<td>Two to five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term</td>
<td>More than three years</td>
<td>More than five years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Short-term vs Intermediate vs Long-term outcomes

- Short term come (nearly) directly from your activities.
- Intermediate come from short-term and some additional assumptions.
- Long-term come from intermediate and even more assumptions.
- Short and intermediate outcomes are logical precursors of longer-term outcomes
Activities and Outcomes: Identifying the Link

Providing high-quality arts instruction will lead to:

- **Increased knowledge of critical arts concepts among students**, in the short term.

- **Increased number of students in advanced level arts programming**, in the long term.

[Your organization’s activities] will lead to:

- [Something that results almost directly from that activity], in the short term.

- [Something that could happen further down the road], in the long term.
POLL QUESTION 5:

Which of the following is a reasonable outcome for this activity? (Check all that apply)

Providing legal aid for immigration cases will result in:
A. Families remaining together
B. Families remaining in their home
C. Individuals remaining employed
D. Individuals remaining in school
E. All of these are reasonable outcomes for this activity
F. None of these is a reasonable outcome for this activity
Examining Our Assumptions

• Why do we assume a particular intervention might work?

Assumptions are based on:
• Theory
• Applied research
• Previous experiences
• Professional hunches

Sample Assumptions

• If we build it, they will come.
• Program participation leads to behavior change.

If we expect that participating in our program will lead to an increase in participants earning a living wage, we assume a) jobs are available for participants, and b) the jobs that are available provide a living wage.
Assumptions, continued

[Your organization’s activities] will lead to:

• [Something that results almost directly from that activity], in the short term.

• [Something that could happen further down the road], in the long term.

What must happen or what must be true for that activity to have that result or that short-term outcome to lead to that long-term outcome?
The Fun Stuff
## Activity: Building a ToC

### Activities
- Building a ToC
- Weekly cohort meetings
- 1:1 sessions with coach
- Participation in teen group
- Enrichment activities
- Academic tutoring
- Participation increase academic performance in current classes

### Short-term outcomes (within 1 year)
- Participants express interest in new hobbies
- Participants exhibit interest in becoming mentors
- Participants report strong, personal relationships with others in cohort
- Weekly cohort meetings
- Participants are active mentors, giving back to others in the program
- Participants report strong, personal relationships with others in cohort

### Intermediate outcomes (after 1 year of participation)
- Participation in teen group
- Enrichment activities
- New relationships built among participants
- Academic tutoring
- Participation increase academic performance in current classes
- Increased sense of connection among participants
- Participants actively participate in new hobbies
- 1:1 sessions with coach

Participants actively participate in new hobbies
Activity: Building a ToC - RESULTS

Activities
- Weekly cohort meetings
- 1:1 sessions with coach
- Participation in teen group
- Enrichment activities
- Academic tutoring

Short-term outcomes (within 1 year)
- Participants express interest in new hobbies
- Increased sense of connection among participants
- New relationships built among participants
- Participants exhibit interest in becoming mentors
- Participants increase academic performance in current classes

Intermediate outcomes (after 1 year of participation)
- Participants actively participate in new hobbies
- Participants report strong, personal relationships with others in cohort
- Participants are active mentors, giving back to others in the program
- Participants have been placed into higher level academic courses than prior to program participation

Drive Evaluation Studio | Elena Ragusa, Psy.D
Our Television Show Cooking Segment Model
So we will do these things to see those changes. We will achieve it when these changes occur. This is our vision.
The Steps for Existing Work

1. Plan the work.
2. Convene that group; provide a ToC 101.
3. Frame your context
4. Define your long-term outcome or impact statement
5. List existing activity anchors
6. Identify short-term and intermediate outcomes
7. Articulate assumptions
8. Check, recheck, edit, and wordsmith
9. Bubble it up!
10. Sit with it. Revisit it. Edit it. Update it.
What It Looks Like

Context
The backdrop to your work: What are the opportunities and challenges surrounding your work? What is the cultural context?

Activities
Activities are the things your organization does to implement strategies. Identify the services and initiatives you want to provide and support.

Short-term Outcomes
Identify the short-term changes in your target population after they participate in your program/activities.

Intermediate Outcomes
Positive changes that you hope to achieve after your short-term outcomes to know you are on the way to the impact.

Long-term Outcomes or Impact
What you are ultimately trying to achieve.
**The Elevator Speech**

**Context**
The backdrop to your work: What are the opportunities and challenges surrounding your work? What is the cultural context?

**Activities**
Activities are the things your organization does to implement strategies. Identify the services and initiatives you want to provide and support.

**Short-term Outcomes**
Identify the short-term changes in your target population after they participate in your program/activities.

**Intermediate Outcomes**
Positive changes that you hope to achieve in after your short-term outcomes to know you are on the way to the impact.

**Long-term Outcomes or Impact**
What you are ultimately trying to achieve.
Resources
Building our Theory of Change - Context

Context
The backdrop to your work:
What are the opportunities and challenges surrounding your work? What is the cultural context?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Long-term Outcomes or Impact

Intermediate Outcomes

Activities

Short-term Outcomes
Building our Theory of Change - Impact

Context

Activities

Short-term Outcomes

Intermediate Outcomes

Long-term Outcomes or Impact
What are you ultimately trying to achieve with your work? Think long term and big picture.

______________________________
______________________________
______________________________
______________________________
______________________________
______________________________
______________________________
______________________________

2/5
Building our Theory of Change - Activities

Activities
What are the primary activities we will use to reach our outcomes?
Indicate those that are anchors and will not change.

Assumptions
Why do you believe these activities address the conditions or issues underlying your work?

____________________
____________________
____________________
____________________
____________________
____________________
____________________
____________________

Context
Building our Theory of Change – Short-term Outcomes

**Context**

**Activities**

**Short-term Outcomes**
What changes do we hope to see in the short-term (e.g., within one year) as a result of our activities?
Remember to identify the group and the change. Make it SMARTIE.

**Assumptions**
Why do you believe your activities will achieve these short-term outcomes?

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
-
Building our Theory of Change – Intermediate Outcomes

**Intermediate Outcomes**
What intermediate changes do we hope to see in the midterm (e.g., after two years)? Remember to identify the group and the change. Make it SMARTIE.

**Assumptions**
Why do you believe your short-term outcomes will lead to these intermediate outcomes?

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
-
Considerations for Establishing Outcomes

Consider how and where change could occur.

In participants:
- Behavior and actions
- Beliefs, feelings, and attitudes
- Situation and conditions
- Health and wellbeing
- Skills
- Knowledge
- Abilities
- Relationships

In systems:
- Groups and networks
- Policies
- Service provision
- Culture
- Norms
- Social conditions
- Environment
Questions for Establishing Outcome Timeframes

• How long will it take to see results?
• What type of capacity are we starting with?
• What contextual factors may influence our ability to reach these outcomes in the timeframe?
• Do these depend just on my organization? Does it rely on others doing their part?
Questions for Examining Assumptions

• Why do I think that this will lead to this? If successfully delivered, why do we expect this outcome? Why? Under which conditions would it work?

• What must happen for this activity to have that result?

• Based on what evidence, knowledge, experiences or impressions am I making my assumptions?

• What assumptions are we making about the cultural, political, and economic context?

• Why do we think people will respond in this way? What am I assuming about program participants - their strengths, needs, motivation, and behaviors?

• What am I assuming about staff and programming? Do we have the capacity to implement this activity? What could negatively affect this capacity?

• How do my beliefs and preferences shape my thinking about the ToC?

• What perspective is missing from the team putting together this ToC?

If this results in a long list, prioritize the assumptions that are most critical for success/could lead to failure if faulty.
The Steps for A New Initiative

1. Plan the work.
2. Convene that group; provide a ToC 101.
3. Frame your context
4. Define the impact statement or long-term outcomes
5. Identify short-term and intermediate outcomes
6. Determine the appropriate activities
7. Articulate assumptions
8. Check, recheck, edit, and wordsmith
9. Bubble it up!
10. Sit with it. Revisit it. Edit it. Update it.

What is the purpose of the ToC?
Who needs to be involved?
Who will facilitate?

What is the evidence of need?
What is the effectiveness of other interventions that tried to achieve the same outcomes?

Put together a visual (if desired), narrative, or any tools you need to make it workable.
Wrap Up

What we covered:
• Theory of Change 101
• Steps for undertaking a ToC process at your own organization

What comes next:
• Use the resources provided to walk through this exercise with your team
• Reach out with any questions

For More Discussion:
Stick around
Email me: Elena Ragusa, elena@driveevaluation.com