

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)

THE NOURISH PROJECT'S THEORY OF CHANGE

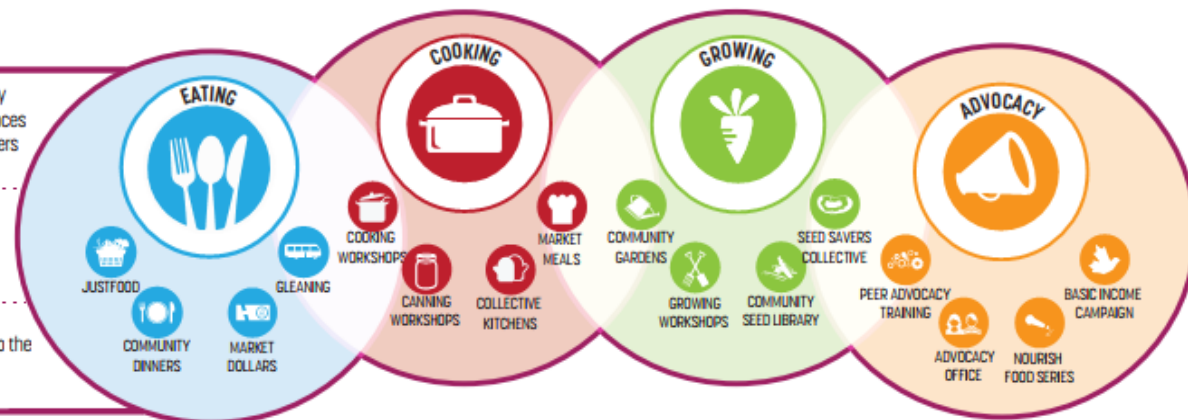
VISION: To develop a dynamic local network of places for food dedicated to community, health and fairness.

WHAT WE DO

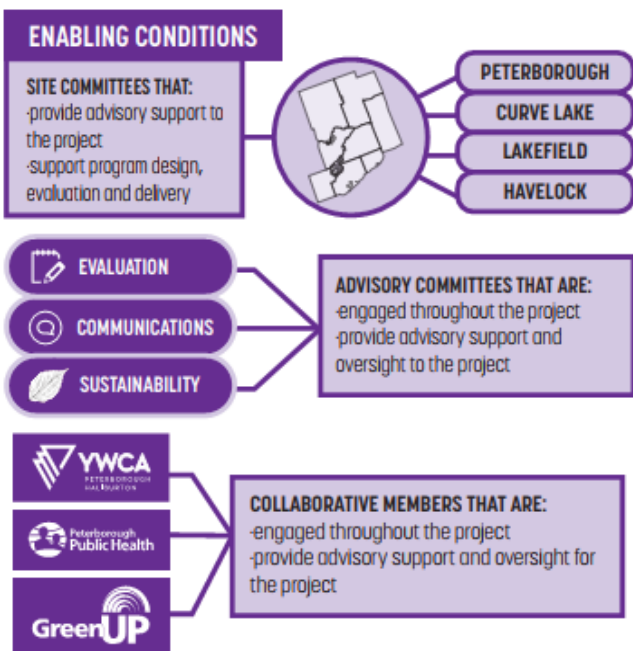
Provide dignified access to healthy food and programming that enhances the capacity of community members to meet their basic needs.

Deliver food skills programming that builds food literacy, promotes health, and enhances social connection.

Promote inclusive and resilient communities that are committed to the eradication of poverty and food insecurity.



Our Television Show Cooking Segment Model



SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

ACCESS & AFFORDABILITY OF HEALTHY FOOD

-Participants have increased access to better quality, healthier, and locally-produced food

HEALTHY FOOD KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS & BEHAVIOURS

-Participants demonstrate increased knowledge, skills, and behaviours related to food, nutrition, food preparation and food production

SOCIAL ISOLATION

-Participants develop new social connections, leading to reduced social isolation

MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

CONSUMPTION OF FRESH FRUITS & VEGETABLES

-More participants regularly eating healthy, locally-produced food

CONFIDENCE & SENSE OF COMMUNITY BELONGING

-Participants feel more connected to the community and to each other

VOLUNTEERISM & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

-Participants become more engaged in the project and the broader community

LONG-TERM IMPACTS

IMPROVED PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH

A SUSTAINABLE & JUST LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

MORE INCLUSIVE & ENGAGED COMMUNITIES

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

THE POWER OF FOOD

Good food has the power to enhance our communities, build our economy, and transform our everyday lives.

EMPOWERMENT

Our programs create meaningful opportunities for participants to gain new skills and develop leadership capacity.

THE POWER OF OUR COLLECTIVE STRENGTHS

By working collaboratively, we increase the quality, sustainability, and overall impact of the programs in the communities we serve.

STRONG COMMUNITIES

Our work is motivated by a desire to build inclusion and enhance social connection.

JUSTICE & FAIRNESS

We believe everyone should be able to enjoy healthy food. We seek an end to food insecurity and poverty by working for systemic change.

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

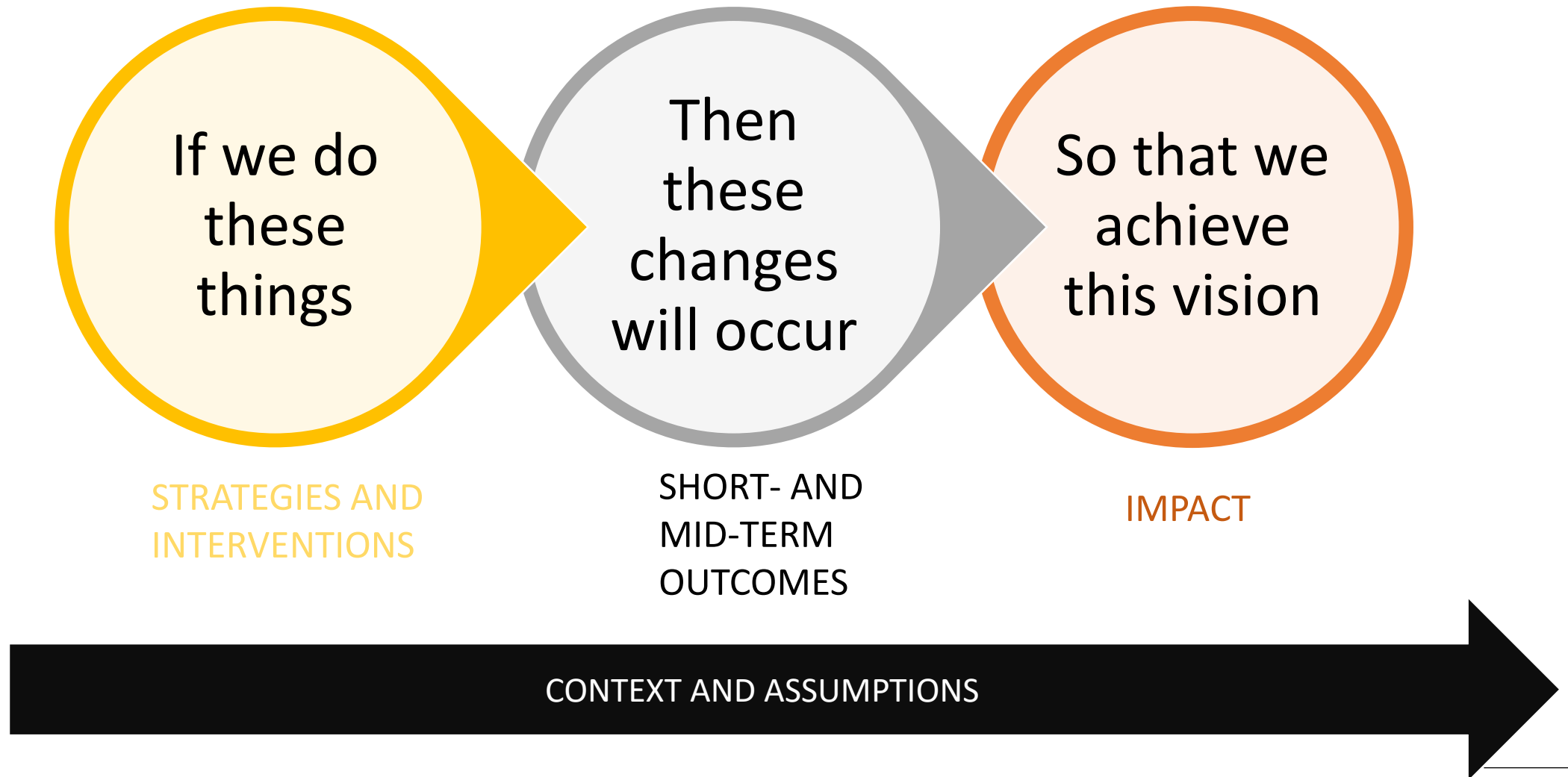


**Strategies, interventions,
and activities**



**Assumptions about
why/how this all happens**

How A Theory of Change Flows



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

	Individual outcomes	Policy and systems change
Short-term	Within one year	Within two years
Intermediate	One to three years	Two to five years
Long-term	More than three years	More than five years

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

Short-term outcomes (within 1 year)

Intermediate outcomes (after 1 year of participation)

Participants express interest in new hobbies

Participants have been placed into higher level academic courses than prior to program participation

New relationships built among participants

Academic tutoring

Participants exhibit interest in becoming mentors

Enrichment activities

Participants increase academic performance in current classes

Participants report strong, personal relationships with others in cohort

Weekly cohort meetings

Participants are active mentors, giving back to others in the program

Participation in teen group

Increased sense of connection among participants

Participants actively participate in new hobbies

1:1 sessions with coach

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)

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Our Television Show Cooking Segment Model

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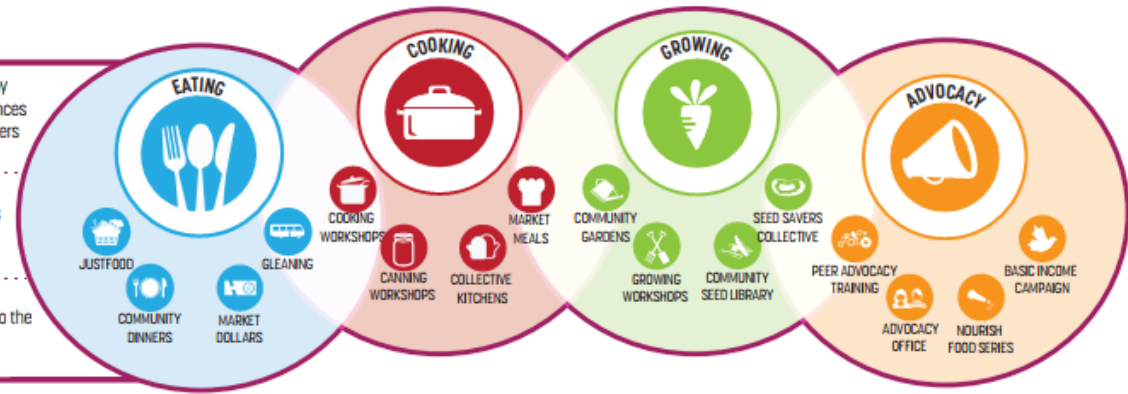
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ENABLING CONDITIONS

SITE COMMITTEES THAT:
-provide advisory support to the project
-support program design, evaluation and delivery



- PETERBOROUGH
- CURVE LAKE
- LAKEFIELD
- HAVELOCK

- EVALUATION
- COMMUNICATIONS
- SUSTAINABILITY

ADVISORY COMMITTEES THAT ARE:
-engaged throughout the project
-provide advisory support and oversight to the project

- YWCA
- Peterborough Public Health
- GreenUP

COLLABORATIVE MEMBERS THAT ARE:
-engaged throughout the project
-provide advisory support and oversight for the project

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

- ↑ **ACCESS & AFFORDABILITY OF HEALTHY FOOD**
- ↑ **HEALTHY FOOD KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS & BEHAVIOURS**
- ↓ **SOCIAL ISOLATION**

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- ↑ **CONFIDENCE & SENSE OF COMMUNITY BELONGING**
- ↑ **VOLUNTEERISM & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

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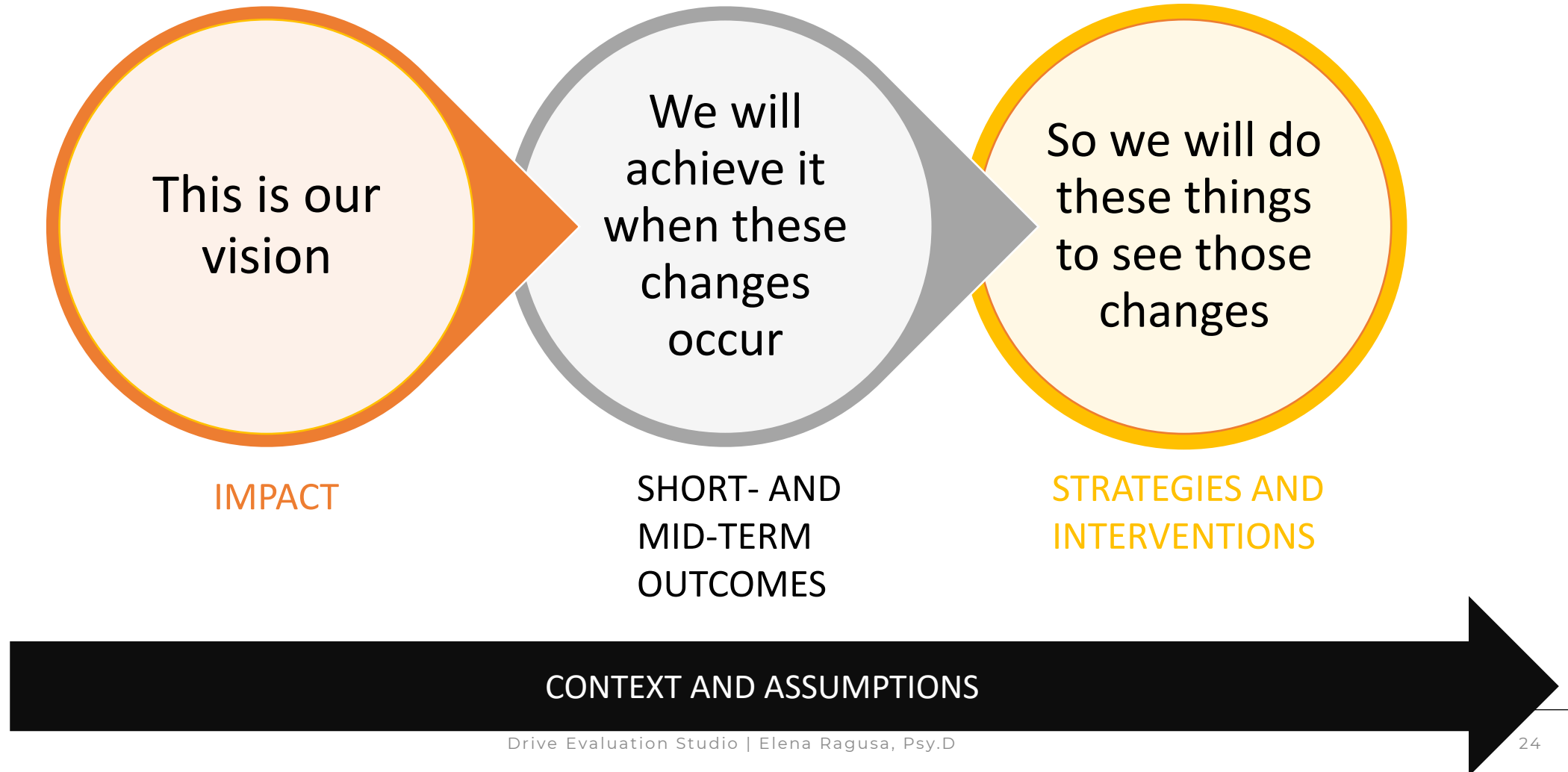
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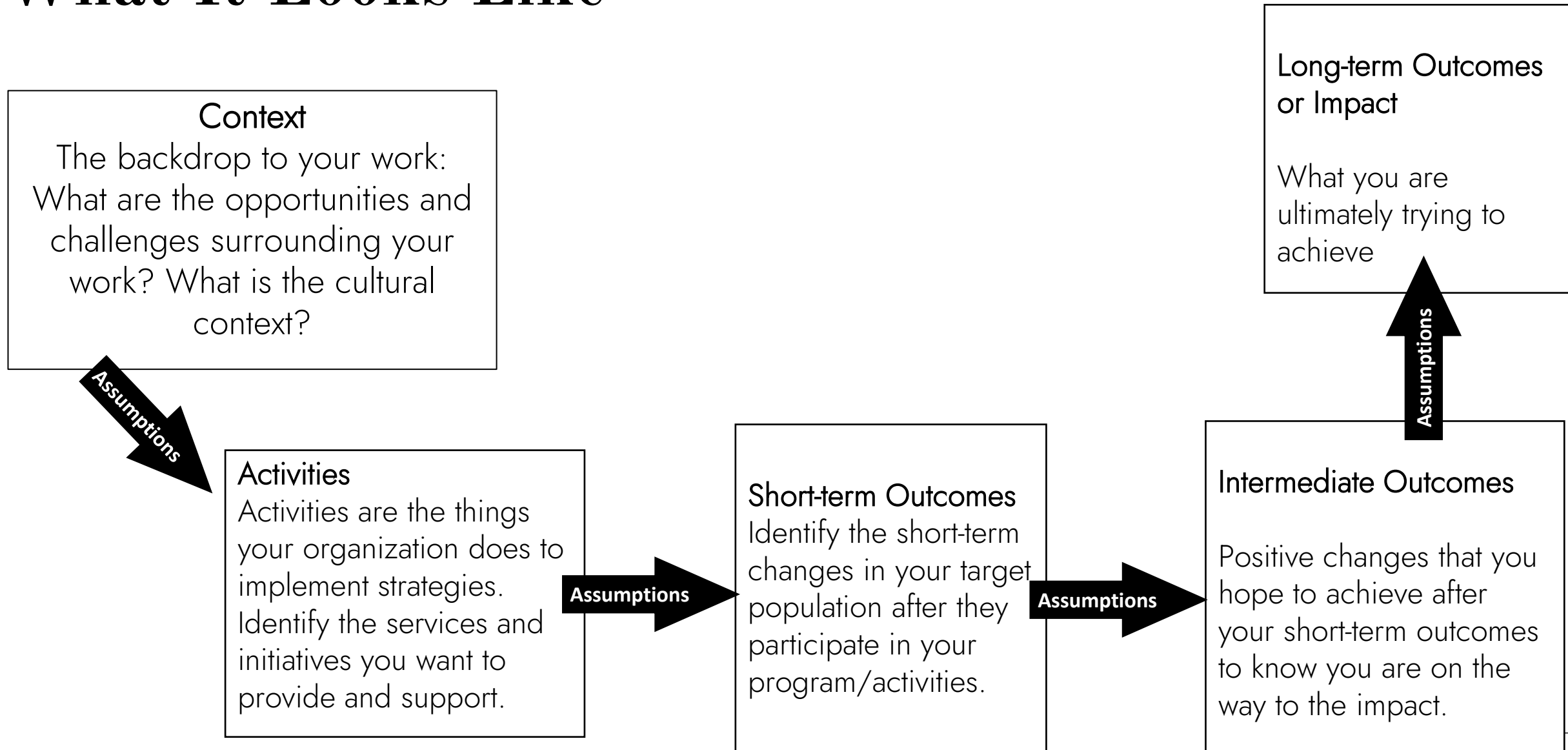
How A Theory of Change Is Built For A New Initiative



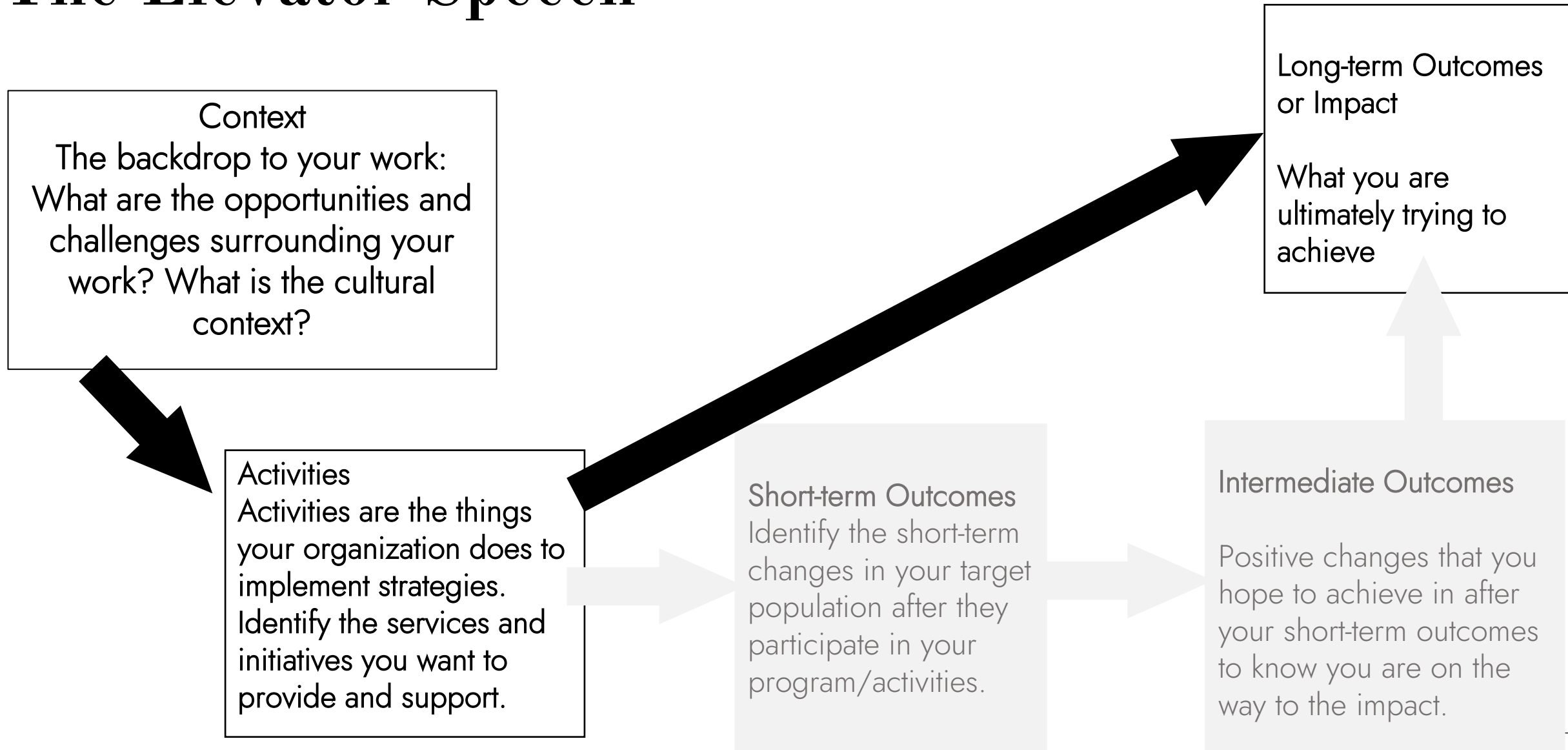
The Steps for Existing Work

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

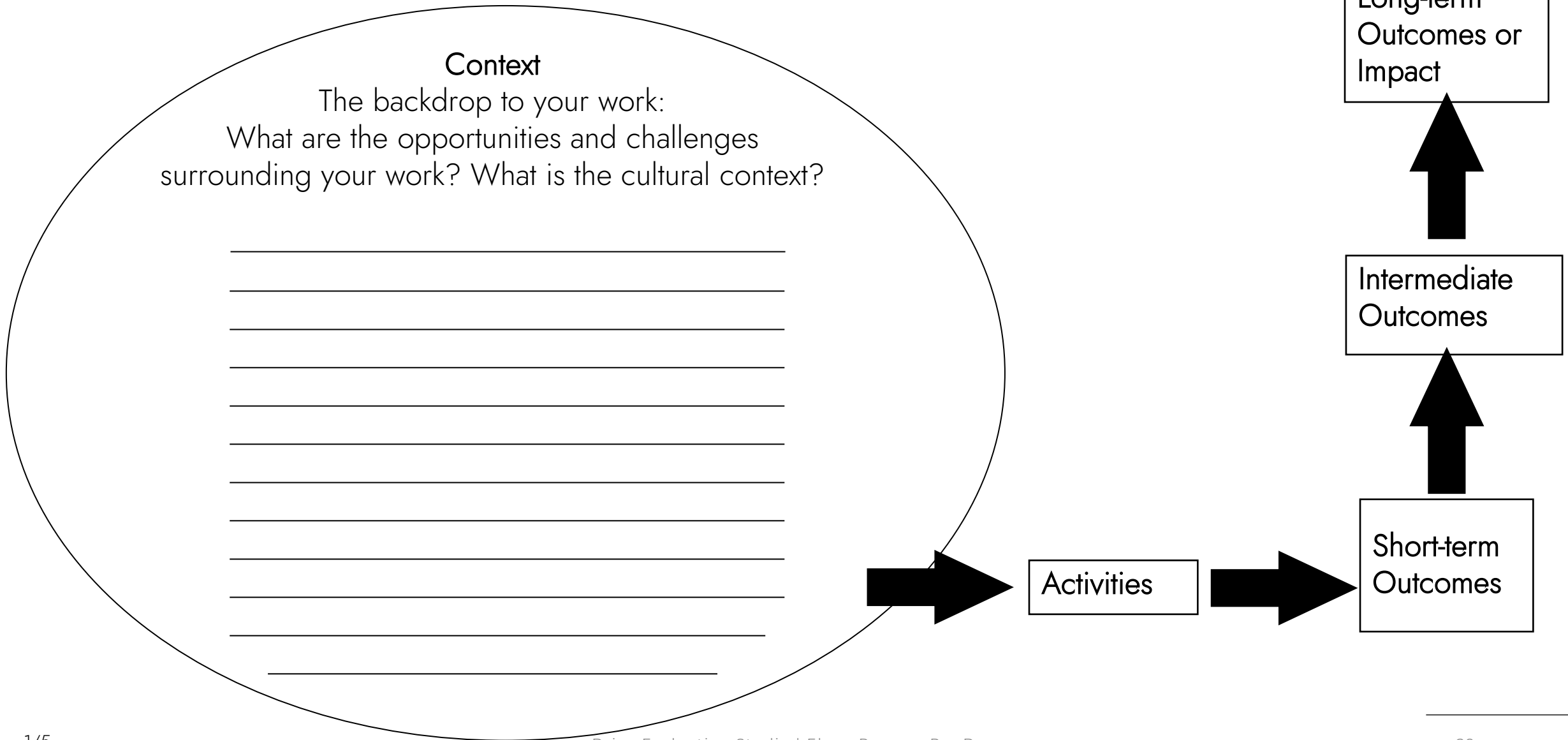


The Elevator Speech



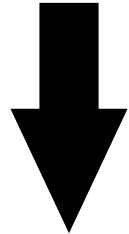
Resources

Building our Theory of Change - Context

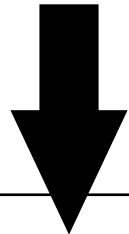


Building our Theory of Change - Impact

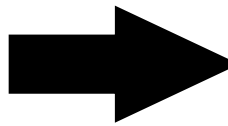
Context



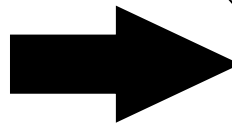
Activities



Short-term Outcomes



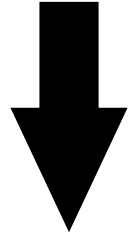
Intermediate Outcomes



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

Building our Theory of Change - Activities

Context



Activities

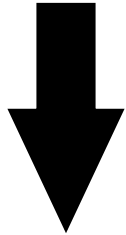
What are the primary activities we will use to reach our outcomes?
Indicate those that are anchors and will not change.

Assumptions

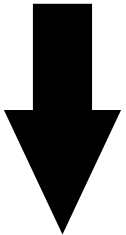
Why do you believe these activities address the conditions or issues underlying your work?

Building our Theory of Change – Short-term Outcomes

Context



Activities



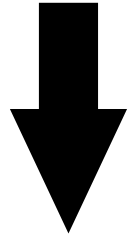
Short-term Outcomes
What changes do we hope to see in the short-term (e.g., within one year) as a result of our activities?
Remember to identify the group *and* the change. Make it SMARTIE.

Assumptions

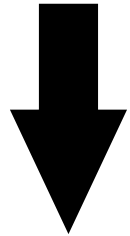
Why do you believe your activities will achieve these short-term outcomes?

Building our Theory of Change – Intermediate Outcomes

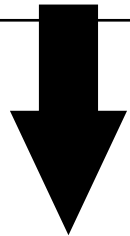
Context



Activities



Short-term
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

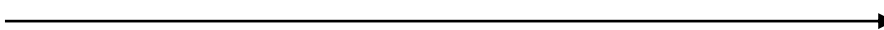
- Why do I think that this will lead to this? If successfully delivered, why do we expect this outcome? Why? Under which conditions would it work?
- What must happen for this activity to have that result?
- Based on what evidence, knowledge, experiences or impressions am I making my assumptions?
- What 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. 

What is the purpose of the ToC?
Who needs to be involved?
Who will facilitate?
2. Convene that group; provide a ToC 101.
3. Frame your context 

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

Put together a visual (if desired), narrative, or any tools you need to make it workable.
10. Sit with it. Revisit it. Edit it. Update it.

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