

# Part 2: Are We There Yet?

A Guide to Developing a Theory of Change to Help Plan and Evaluate Your Programs

Drive Evaluation Studio, Inc.  
November 2025

# Agenda



**1** | Check in and homework share

**2** | Quick review

**3** | Understanding and building indicators

**4** | Setting projections and creating measurement plans

**5** | Wrap up and next steps

# Time For A Poll

How far did you get with your TOC homework?

- Completed full TOC
- Completed most of it (~75%)
- Made good progress (~50%)
- Started but still have a lot to do
- Didn't start but plan to
- Didn't start and don't plan to



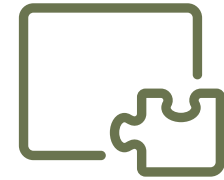
# Group Discussion



What went well when developing your theory of change?

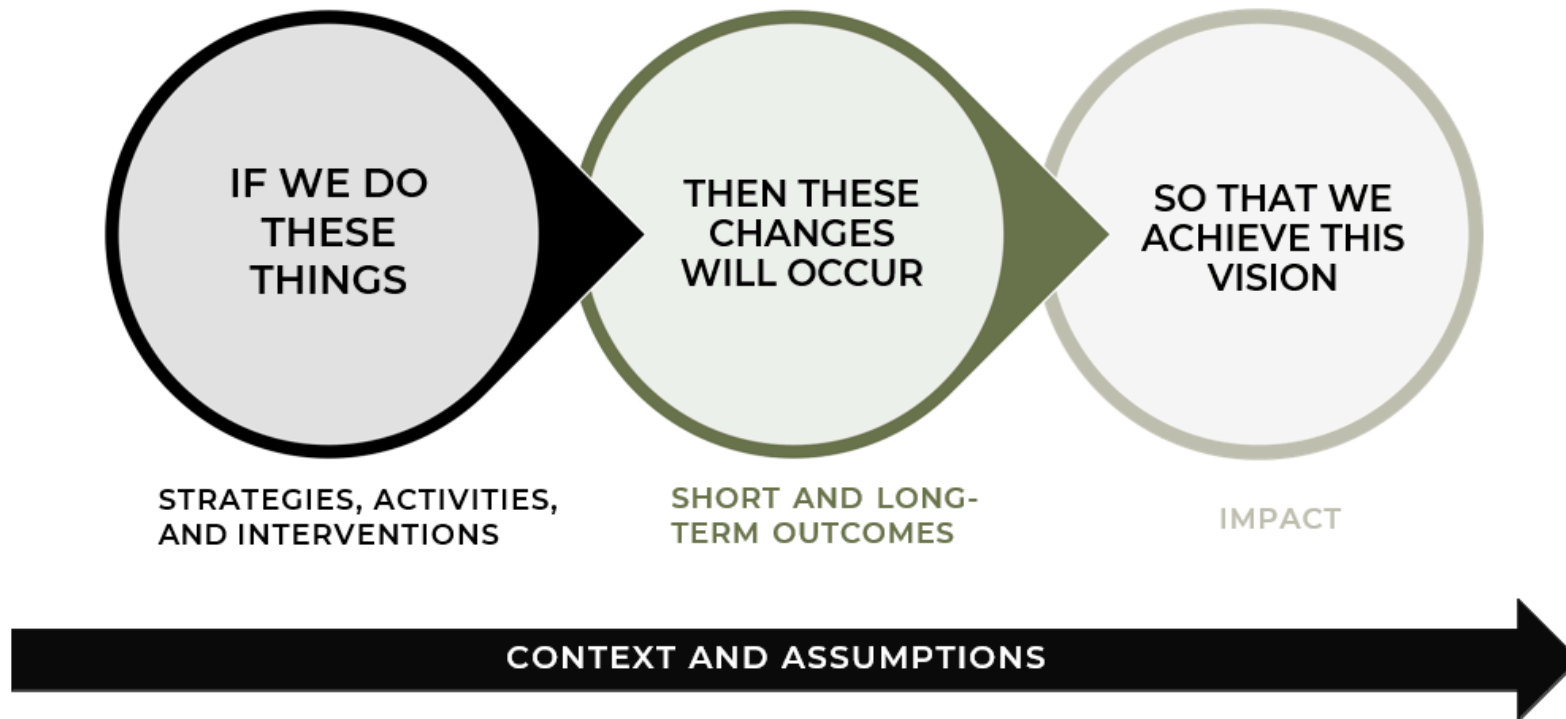


What was challenging about developing your theory of change?



Share ONE outcome you identified (short, mid, or long-term)

# How Program Logic Flows



## Key reminders:

Outcomes describe **CHANGE** (not activities)

Short-term outcomes happen relatively quickly (within 1-2 years for individuals, 1-2 years for systems)

Long-term outcomes take longer and require more assumptions

Outcomes can be changes in participants **OR** changes in systems



# Common Outcome Pitfalls



## Watch out for:

Describing activities instead of changes

Being too vague

Confusing outputs and outcomes

Setting unrealistic timeframes



**Today, we'll focus on how we know if outcomes are happening**

# Understanding Indicators

# Indicators - The "How"

Indicators tell us how we will know we have achieved an outcome



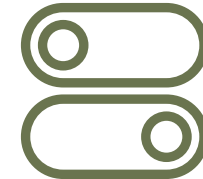
## They are observable

Indicators can be seen, heard, or read



## They are measurable

There is a way to assess whether they have happened (this can be qualitative!)



## They reflect change

With an indicator, there is the presence of something that wasn't there before or the absence of something that was



# Identifying Indicators

The "I'll Know It When I See It" Rule is a principle used for establishing indicators

## Example 1: Increased knowledge

**I'll know** participants have increased financial literacy

**when I see** they have created, submitted, and are following personal budgets

## Example 2: Increased skills

**I'll know** youth are developing leadership skills

**when I see** them taking initiative in group activities  
OR peers seeking their guidance

## Example 3: Reduced need

**I'll know** that families are more food secure

**when I see** reduced emergency food requests OR  
parents reporting that they can afford nutritious meals

## Example 4: Your own!

**I'll know** that this outcome has been achieved

**when I see** .....

# Types of Indicators



## **Quantitative Indicators** (Numbers & counting)

- How many, how much, how often
- Examples: Number of participants, percentage increase, frequency of behaviors
- *Pros: Easy to track and compare*
- *Cons: Don't capture the full story*



## **Qualitative Indicators** (Descriptions & observations)

- Stories, observations, descriptions of change
- Examples: Participant testimonials, case studies, documented behavior changes
- *Pros: Rich detail, captures nuance*
- *Cons: Harder to summarize across many people*

**Best practice: Use both!**

# Good Indicators Are SMARTIE-ish



## Specific

Clear about what you're measuring



## Time-bound

Connected to your outcome timeframe



## Measurable

You can actually track it



## Inclusive

Framed in a way that doesn't exclude anyone in your population



## Attainable

Within your capacity to collect



## Equitable

Considers systemic and cultural context



## Relevant?

Directly relates to the outcome

"SMARTIE-ish"  
because  
perfect is the  
enemy of  
good

# ACTIVITY: Outcomes and Indicators

- 1 | Residents have increased participation in civic engagement activities
- 2 | Increased high school graduation rate among local public school students
- 3 | Improved environmental sustainability in greater Hartford

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES (1-2 YEARS)	INDICATOR(S)
1. Residents have increased participation in civic engagement activities	More residents vote in local elections
2. Increased high school graduation rate among local public school students	More students retained from grade to grade More students taking required courses needed to graduate Increased attendance rates
3. Improved environmental sustainability in greater Hartford	More initiatives designed to improve air and water quality

# Common Indicator Mistakes

## Too vague

---

- ✗ "Improvement in wellbeing"
- ✓ "Reduction in reported stress levels (measured by specific scale)"

## Hard to measure

---

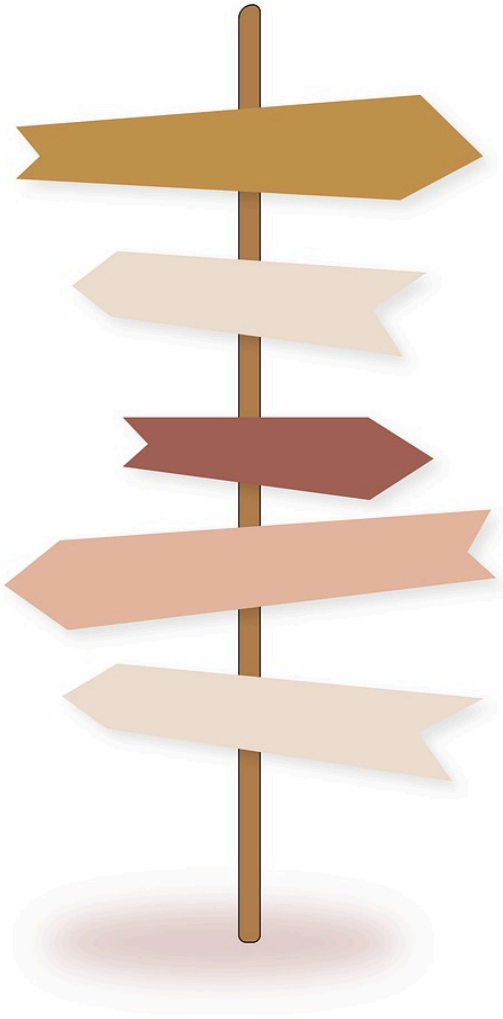
- ✗ "Participants feel happier"
- ✓ "Participants report increased life satisfaction (using standardized survey)"

## Not linked to outcome

---

- ✗ Outcome: "Improved literacy"  
Indicator: "Attendance rates"
- ✓ Outcome: "Improved literacy"  
Indicator: "Reading level improves"

# ACTIVITY: Establishing Your Indicators



Choose ONE outcome from your theory of change (start with a short-term outcome)

Write your outcome at the top of your page

Complete this sentence 3-5 times: "I'll know this is happening when I see..."

For each indicator, identify if it's quantitative or qualitative

Circle the 2-3 indicators that seem most feasible to track



Outcome: [FILL IN]

I'LL KNOW THIS IS HAPPENING WHEN I SEE....

...\_\_\_\_\_  
(Quantitative or qualitative)

...\_\_\_\_\_  
(Quantitative or qualitative)

...\_\_\_\_\_  
(Quantitative or qualitative)

...\_\_\_\_\_  
(Quantitative or qualitative)

CIRCLE THE 2 MOST FEASIBLE TO TRACK

# Share Out

- What outcome did you choose?
  - What indicators did you identify?
  - Which ones feel most feasible?
- 
- How did it feel working on this activity?

# Refining Your Indicators: Key Questions

- Is it specific enough to be valuable?
- Can we actually observe or measure this?
- Will it realistically show us if the outcome is happening?
- Can we collect this data with our current resources?
- Will we be able to act on what we learn?

**If you answered NO to any of these, revise the indicator or choose a different one.**

# Projections and Measurement Planning

# What Are Projections?

**Specify — in advance — the amount of an indicator (or target) expected in a given timeframe**

**Make sure the projections make sense**

Example

**60%**

of single parents who participate in our comprehensive services will earn post-secondary diplomas within three years of starting services at our organization.

# Setting Realistic Projections

Base your projections on:



## Historical data

- What happened before?
- What trends do you see?



## Research & benchmarks

- What do similar programs achieve?
- What does research suggest is possible?



## Professional judgment

- What does your experience tell you?
- What do your frontline staff think?



# Projections Can Be:



## Percentages

- "70% of participants will demonstrate improved..."
- *Good for: Outcome achievement across a group*



## Numbers

- "50 youth will complete the program"
- *Good for: Reach and scale*



## Changes

- "15% increase from baseline"
- *Good for: Showing improvement over time*



## Thresholds

- "At least 3 on a 5-point scale"
- *Good for: Minimum acceptable performance*



# ACTIVITY: Setting Projections

Look at your indicators from earlier. For your top two, determine :

**What would be a realistic projection based on what you know, and in what timeframe?**

**Format:**

[X]% of [population] will [indicator] by [timeframe]

**Example:**

75% of program participants will report increased confidence in their job search skills by the end of the 12-week program

# From Indicators to Data Collection

## How will we collect the data?

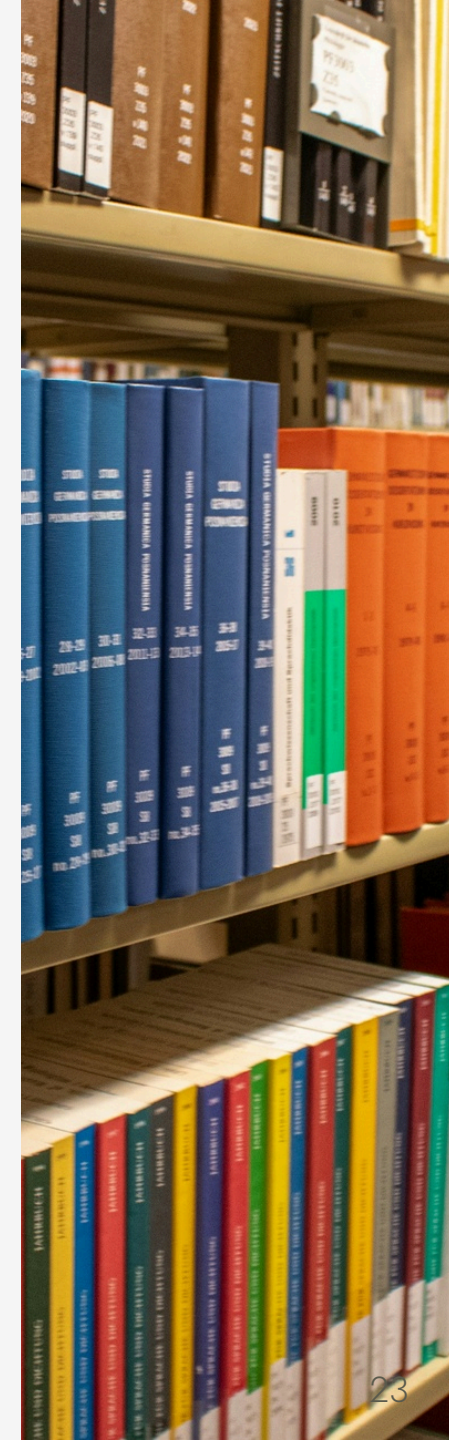
- Surveys?
- Interviews?
- Observations?
- Administrative records?
- External data sources?

## When will we collect the data?

- Intake?
- End of program?
- Quarterly?
- Annually?
- Continuous tracking?

## Who will collect the data?

- Program staff?
- External evaluator?
- Participants (self-report)?



# Data Collection Methods Quick Guide

Method	Best for	Pros	Cons
Surveys	Attitudes, knowledge, satisfaction	Standardized, can reach many	May not capture depth
Interviews	In-depth understanding	Rich detail, flexibility	Time-intensive
Focus groups	Group perspectives, brainstorming	Multiple voices at once	Group dynamics can influence
Observations	Behaviors, skills	See what actually happens	Observer bias, time-intensive
Document review	Existing records, outputs	Use what you have	May not capture outcomes

# Creating a Simple Measurement Plan

Outcome	Indicator	Projection	Data Source	Collection Method	Timing	Responsible
<i>Example: Youth develop leadership skills</i>	<i>% of youth taking initiative in group activities</i>	<i>70%</i>	<i>Direct observation</i>	<i>Observation rubric</i>	<i>Monthly</i>	<i>Program Coordinator</i>

# Making It Manageable

## Start Small:

- Pick 2-3 priority outcomes to measure first
- Choose 1-2 indicators per outcome
- Build from there as you get comfortable

## Integrate into Existing Processes:

- Add questions to intake forms
- Build check-ins into regular meetings
- Use moments you're already connecting with participants

## Use What You Have:

- Look at data you're already collecting
- Repurpose existing tools
- Don't reinvent the wheel



**Wrap Up & Next Steps**

# What You've Accomplished

- ✓ Learned what a theory of change is and why it matters
- ✓ Identified your organization's key TOC components
- ✓ Clarified outcomes at different time horizons
- ✓ Developed indicators to track progress
- ✓ Practiced setting projections
- ✓ Started thinking about measurement planning



# Feeling Ambitious? Your Strategic Next Steps

In the next month	Finish your TOC homework if not complete	Develop indicators for all your key outcomes	Identify your top 3 priority outcomes to measure first	Draft a simple measurement plan for those 3
In the next two months	Share your TOC with your team/board	Identify what data you're already collecting that connects	Decide what new data collection you need to implement	
In the next four months	Set up systems for tracking your indicators	Begin collecting data on your priority indicators	Set up a regular review process (monthly, quarterly, etc.)	
In the next six months	Refine your indicators based on what you learn	Celebrate early wins!		

**"What if our outcomes aren't happening?"**

That's valuable information! It means you need to adjust your activities or assumptions.

**"What if we can't measure everything?"**

You don't need to!  
Measure what matters most and what's feasible.

**"What if our projections turn out to be unrealistic?"**

Adjust them! These are living documents.

**"What if our funder asks for different outcomes?"**

Your TOC is your north star. Have a conversation about alignment.

**"How often should we revisit our TOC?"**

Annually at minimum, plus whenever major changes happen.



# Consulting Time

**You have up to 2 hours of one-on-one consulting time. This is great for:**

- Reviewing your complete TOC
- Troubleshooting specific indicators
- Designing data collection tools
- Setting up your measurement plan
- Working through challenges



# Thank you!

**Elena Tamanas Ragusa, Psy.D.**  
**Drive Evaluation Studio**

@ elena@driveevaluation.com

☎ 856.869.3382

🌐 [www.driveevaluation.com](http://www.driveevaluation.com)