

CREATING A THEORY OF CHANGE

OVERVIEW

An activity to produce a simplified outline of the work of an organization or group that charts its activities and the outcomes they produce.

OBJECTIVES

- To understand and articulate the purposes and desired outcomes of a group's work.
- To create a lasting tool for evaluating and reflecting on a group's focus and success.

TIME REQUIRED

At least 3 hours for initial draft. This draft then should be expanded, edited, and reworked in various ways. A theory of change is a living document that will not be finalized quickly, if ever.

****Note:** this activity is most effective when conducted with a group of 15 people or fewer**

WHAT	TIME	HOW	MATERIALS
Step 1: Overview	10 min.	Use the previous page to set the context of the activity, describing what the theory of change will help you do. Include a discussion of the purposes of creating a Theory of Change and go over the process that will be followed. Explain that the purpose of this activity is just to create a draft version and that part of the task will be to identify a team to continue to tighten and write parts of the theory of change so that the entire group can then review it again.	
Step 2: Examining assumptions	45 min.	<p>Explain that the first step of creating a theory of change is to identify the underlying assumptions of why the group or organization is working and how it works. Explain that the assumptions should be broad ideas, and give a few sample assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All people have skills that are not being used to the fullest extent. ■ Young people must be engaged in decision making in this community in order to maintain a growing population of youth and young adults here. <p>Ask for a few examples from the group. Then, ask each person to write 3 to 5 assumptions on half sheets of paper. If the group is large, consider asking for fewer cards or having people work in small groups.</p> <p>Collect all the half sheets, and read them out loud. Allow time for the group to ask any clarifying questions.</p>	<p>Half sheets of paper and a sticky wall</p> <p>Markers</p> <p>Flip chart paper</p>

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WHAT	TIME	HOW	MATERIALS
		Work with the group to pair or group any similar ideas. Give each pair or group a short name to describe similar ideas. Ask the group what further work needs to be done to make sense out of the groupings. Note the answer on a piece of flip chart paper.	
Step 3: Listing audiences	20 min.	<p>Set the context; say to the group, “The step after this one is going to be an examination of the outcomes that occur as a result of the work. Before we do that, however, it is useful to think about audiences—who are we working for and with?”</p> <p>With the entire group, generate a list of key audiences. If you are able to group or cluster any similar audiences together, do that. Make a short name tag to describe similar ideas. Ask the group what further work needs to be done to make sense out of the groupings. Note the answer on flip chart paper.</p>	<p>Sticky wall</p> <p>Half sheets</p> <p>Markers</p> <p>Flip chart paper</p>
Step 4: Examining outcomes	1 hour	<p>Explain that this is the most difficult part of creating a theory of change. Review the time periods that are associated with each category of outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Short term—1 to 3 years ■ Intermediate—3 to 5 years ■ Long term—5 years and beyond <p>Briefly discuss what an outcome is. Note that outcomes are the changes you want to see, among individuals, groups, and in the community, and that they are closely linked with the assumptions. “For example, if a key assumption is that young people must have voices in making the decisions that affect them, then the outcomes are probably things like youth having seats on a governing body, or youth are project leaders.”</p> <p>Ask the group to give examples of outcomes in each category. Then break the group into teams of 2 or 3 people. Ask each group to start by writing 3 or 4 short-term outcomes on half sheets of paper. Share and cluster these, as was done in step 2. Repeat this process to develop lists of intermediate and long-term outcomes.</p> <p>A suggestion for facilitating this step: Encourage the group to use the first list of short-term outcomes as a way to generate the list of intermediate outcomes, and to use the intermediate ones to generate the list of long-term outcomes.</p> <p>Ask the group what further work needs to be done to make sense out of these groupings. Note the answer on flip chart paper.</p>	<p>Sticky wall</p> <p>Flip chart paper</p> <p>Half sheets of paper</p> <p>Markers</p>

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WHAT	TIME	HOW	MATERIALS
Step 5: Listing activities	30 min.	<p>Explain the purpose of this step—“to identify our activities and actions that lead to outcomes.”</p> <p>Repeat the process described in Step 3—engaging the entire group in a brainstorming process—to facilitate this step.</p>	<p>Half sheets of paper</p> <p>Sticky wall</p> <p>Flip chart paper</p> <p>Markers</p>
Step 6: Reviewing and checking	25 min.	<p>Review all of the pieces by reading them out loud. Ask the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Is this really what we are all about? ■ Is this accurate? ■ Are there parts that are missing? ■ Can we really do this? <p>Add any additional questions that seem appropriate. This discussion is what makes the Theory of Change a useful tool!</p>	
Step 7: Closing	20 min.	<p>Congratulate the group on the work that it has accomplished, noting that the creation of a theory of change is one of the most difficult and important things that a group can do to explore the real impact of its work.</p> <p>Ask the following discussion questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Looking at our work, what stands out to you? ■ What part of this makes you feel most excited? ■ What part of this worries you? ■ Based on our work today, what new insights do you have about our work? ■ How can we use the theory of change in our project planning and evaluation efforts? ■ What further work do we need to do on our theory of change? (use the flip charts created in steps 2–5 to do this) <p>Log the answers to the final question, and ensure that people have committed to doing each of these tasks by a certain date. Remind the group that what they have created is a living document that they will continue to use and change as the work moves forward.</p>	<p>Flip chart paper</p> <p>Markers</p>