Developing a Theory of Change
for your Structural Change Grantmaking

In doing all the disciplined thinking required to complete the previous steps, you will have formulated and articulated all the components of a theory of change. In this section, we will guide you in pulling all those elements together in a way that expresses your structural change approach to addressing an issue in a single model that makes it easy to communicate about your approach to others and guide further thinking about strategies, funding initiatives, and portfolio planning.

What is a Theory of Change?

A theory of change is a systematic assessment, typically presented in a graphic format, of what needs to happen in order for a desired impact to occur. ¹ Theories of change should be designed to explain how and why change happens, with an emphasis on the role of an organization's work in contributing to its vision for impact.

Theories of change usually depict the work of several programs, broad initiatives and other interconnected efforts, or an organization as a whole (this is in contrast to a logic model which usually depicts the work of an individual program – see below for more information about the differences between these two frameworks). The framework communicates what needs/issues are being addressed; what context, assumptions and values are important to consider, particularly as they might affect the outcome; the intended change; what strategies will achieve that change; and the relationships among these elements.

Components of theories of change can include:
- Statement of Need/Issues to Address
- Assumptions, Values, Beliefs, Principles
- Contextual Factors
- Preconditions
- Strategic Partners
- Evidence/Research
- Strategies
- Expected Change and Impact
- Mission and Vision Statements

1 G.E.O.’s Evaluation as a Pathway to Learning

How is a theory of change different from a logic model?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory of Change</th>
<th>Logic Model</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>❖ Most useful for organizations or initiatives</td>
<td>❖ Most useful for individual programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ Includes contextual factors that might affect success</td>
<td>❖ Generally does not include contextual factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❖ High level overview of strategies and outcomes</td>
<td>❖ Specific detail on activities and outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>❖ High communication value</td>
<td>❖ High implementation value</td>
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common vision
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A Theory of Change should be:

- **Plausible.** Do evidence and common sense suggest that the strategies, if implemented, will lead to the desired change/impact?

- **Doable.** Will the economic, technical, political, institutional, and human resources be available to carry out your efforts? Also, consider time frame. Is there enough time?

- **Testable.** Is the theory of change specific and complete enough for an evaluator to track its progress in credible and useful ways? This does not mean that all components must be measurable, but it should be clear how to measure progress towards success in achieving core impacts.

**Who develops and uses (or should use) a Theory of Change?**

Anyone who is trying to address and/or understand a problem including program/project designers, program/project implementers and program/project evaluators can find benefit in developing a Theory of Change. In addition, other partners who may not be specifically involved in the mechanics of implementation may benefit from understanding the Theory of Change as it can clarify roles and understanding of the larger field. This includes members of boards or advisory committees, etc. In essence, anyone who is interested in understanding and contributing to change may find the framing and focus a Theory of Change can prove helpful.

**What are the benefits of a Theory of Change?**

When you have a complete Theory of Change, you will have:

- A visual representation of the change you want to see and how you expect it to come about;
- An understanding of the context and the factors that might affect the intended change;
- An agreement among stakeholders about what defines success and what it takes to get there;
- A clear and testable hypothesis about how change will occur;
- A big-picture blueprint for evaluation that can be specified into an evaluation plan with indicators of success and measurement methods; and
- A powerful communication tool to capture the complexity of your efforts and facilitate decision-making and action.

Often, the process of developing a Theory of Change is as valuable, if not more so, than the actual product. Often through the series of reflections and discussions needed to address the core questions, stakeholders gain a deeper understanding of the implicit and explicit beliefs, assumptions, hypotheses, and values that inform their work. Bear in mind that in developing your Theory of Change, form should follow function. In other words, other than strategies and intended outcomes, which are core to the framework and thus not optional, any other component included should be selected because of its relevance to the given effort and its importance to the key stakeholders involved and intended audiences.
Getting Started

Following are six questions to guide the development of your Theory of Change. Many of these will already have been developed by previous tools in this toolkit. Following these questions are a basic theory of change template you can use to compile the component of your own model, along with two examples of different theory of change examples to provide ideas about different ways to structure your model and represent your ideas.

1) What is (are) the issue(s)/problem(s) being addressed or to be addressed by your organization? What is the scope and scale of the need/issue, and what evidence is there to support your claims? Consider: What is the organization’s/efforts mission or purpose? What void does it aim to fill? Be explicit and concise.

2) What is the desired change or impact intended as result of successful implementation of your efforts? Consider: How would participants, communities, and/or the world be different as a result of your work? What is the organization’s/efforts vision? What changes do you hope to see in the short-, medium-, and long-term?

3) What values and assumptions do you and your partners hold about the problem(s)/issues(s) and the solutions to address? Consider: What values guide the work of your organization/effort? What assumptions underlie the work and the approach?

4) What are the contextual factors that might affect your ability to achieve the desired change, either positively or negatively? Consider: What might affect your success that is not within your control, such as political, economic and social factors? What external factors represent opportunities or momentum that you can take advantage of?

5) What strategies are planned and/or already in place to address the problem/issue? Have the issue(s)/problem(s) and/or strategies been validated? Consider: What are the specific programs and/or strategies that your organization/effort is using to achieve its goals? How do you know that what you are doing is needed? How do you know that your approach/strategies are valid and effective?

6) Now that all of the spaces have been filled in, review the completed Theory of Change with key stakeholders to assess whether it provides a complete picture of why these strategies should lead to this impact, and in what context. What questions arise? How can you revise your Theory of Change to clarify?
Theory of Change Worksheet

CHANGE STATEMENT
One or two sentences, often stated using “if/then” construction, to articulate your theory about what needs to occur in order to achieve the overarching goal or purpose of your efforts.

EVIDENCE AND ASSUMPTIONS
What evidence or data exist to support your theory? What assumptions and values are embedded in your theory?

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT and ASSETS
How does the current political context facilitate your efforts or make them challenging? What assets support your efforts (i.e. partnerships, community support, funding, etc)?

STRATEGIES
What approaches will be employed in your efforts?

DESORED RESULTS (Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts)
What do you expect to change as a result of your effort?