Core Elements of a Theory of Change

There are many different approaches to the Theory of Change, this is a short guide with links to resources to create your own.

# 5 Core Elements of a Theory of Change

It’s recommended you tackle them in the following order:

### **Your Final Goal (Impact)**

* + This is the broader social change a project is trying to achieve
    - The change you want to see for everyone that takes part in your project
  + This is your anchor, all activities in your project must work towards this final goal
  + You should think about it when you're doing an activity, planning the next, applying for funding or taking on a new element to your project
    - i.e., You might not be able to achieve this as an organisation but your project contributes towards it
  + You need to capture your final goal/s in a short and clear sentence.

### **The Problem**

* + What is the ‘problem’ you’re trying to solve?
    - This might be one problem for all elements of your organisation or do different parts of your organisation tackle different issues?
    - At the end of this you want an elevator pitch, a sentence that describes why your organisation is needed and what it's there to solve.

### **The People**

* + Who are the specific group of people you are working with (these need to be a tightly defined group of people with similar characteristics), what are the barriers to engagement with your project, and/or mainstream services? You might end up with different groups of people you work with and it’s important to highlight them as you might need different referral pathways for them.

### **The Outcomes**

* + What ‘change’ do you want to see for participants as a direct outcome of your work with them? If you don’t already capture evidence for this, you need to start thinking about what you can capture.

### **The Activities**

* + It is tempting to start with listing your activities but it’s important that you tackle the bigger issues first. Then when you have the above sections outlined you can review your activities in a new light and look at them more objectively.
  + Looking at each activity you do (or plan to do) and assessing how each activity achieves the outcomes for the people you're working with.

# Additional Elements

# **Evidence**

To be credible, a theory of change should be rooted in a clear understanding of the issue you want to address and the difference your project makes. There are different types of evidence you need to collect;

#### **Evidence of need**

This helps you to understand why your organisation or projects are needed and the specific requirements of your participants. This information is best sourced from academic studies, research papers by activist groups related to your social issue, as well as national and local strategic government and NHS frameworks available online.

#### **Evidence of context**

This might include an analysis of other service providers and support available to your beneficiaries, or of other internal and external factors that could affect your work.

#### **Evidence of the organisation's effectiveness**

This might be evidence you already collect about the direct outcomes of participants working with you.

It’s best practice to collect evidence on the direct outcomes your organisation claims to achieve, if you do not already have this evidence this needs to be a priority area of work, creating monitoring and evaluation frameworks and collection of case studies of previous participants. There are a host of tools to collect evidence from participants, click link to view: [Evaluation Methods and Tools.](https://evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/resources/ess-resources/ess-evaluation-methods-and-tools/)

A further body of evidence needs to be created on how your interventions play a part in achieving your long-term goal, wider impacts and how they fit within the local landscape of services, the local and national strategic plan for your geographical area, and the social issues they are addressing.

Evidence may be found in academic literature, reports from your own or other organisations, and the expertise and experience of key stakeholders.

### **Assumptions**

‘Assumptions’ are often talked about as an important part of the theory of change process. Broadly they refer to ‘the thinking that underlies your plans’ and its best done when you identify where your theory of change is weak, untested or uncertain. This is worthwhile because it helps you clarify what the biggest concerns are. To identify assumptions, put yourself in the position of your fiercest critic.

* How would they pick holes in your project?
* What would they question, doubt, or challenge?

See the resources on the next page for further details on this.

Other Resources

This guide is meant to be the first step in you creating a strong foundation. Hopefully, you can make a start on creating your first Theory of Change and if you want to go into more detail, speak to us or NPC and have a range of resources to help you facilitate your own Theory of Change.

[Ten Steps to Creating a Theory of Change](https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/ten-steps/)

[Practical Guide to Creating your Theory of Change](https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/creating-your-theory-of-change-npcs-practical-guide/)

