

THEORY OF CHANGE: FAQⁱ ⁱⁱ ⁱⁱⁱ

Q: What is a Theory of Change?

A: A Theory of Change is a conceptual linkage among an identified issue/problem, desired change and potential strategies. The relationship between these elements is dynamic and once an organization's strategies are implemented and mature, the theory will be tested and is likely to change over time. However, a completed (as much as it can be) Theory of Change should be:

- **Plausible.** Do evidence and common sense suggest that the strategies and related activities, if implemented, will lead to desired outcomes?
- **Doable.** Will the economic, technical, political, institutional, and human resources be available to carry out the initiative?
- **Testable.** Is the theory of change specific and complete enough for an evaluator to track its progress in credible and useful ways?

Q: Who develops and uses (or should) a Theory of Change?

A: Essentially, anyone who is trying to address and/or understand a problem including grant makers and other organizations with a social change mission, program designers, program implementers and program evaluators.

Q: When is a Theory of Change developed?

A: In a perfect world, a theory of change would be developed prior to program design and implementation. However, it is never too late to develop, clarify and modify a theory of change. Depending on when the process is undertaken, the questions may be prospective or retrospective. And, to remain relevant and useful, a theory of change should continue to evolve to reflect ongoing organizational learning.

Q: How is a Theory of Change developed?

A: Ideally, a theory of change is developed through a process which engages multiple stakeholders whose knowledge, perspectives, and experiences can inform various aspects of the theory of change. A series of questions are posed to help guide the development (depending on the point in time) of a Theory of Change and might include:

1. What is the problem/issue being addressed?
2. What are the assumptions were made about this problem and the solutions to address?
3. What community needs/assets identified this issue as important?
4. What change is anticipated (and in what time frame)?
5. What contextual factors are likely to impact change?
6. What are the strategies selected to address the problem/issue?
7. What values guide and influence organizational decisions?

Q: Why develop/use a Theory of Change?

A: It can:

Clarify organizational purpose by:

1. Clarifying the relationship between key organizational/programmatic elements (problem/issue, strategies and expected change); and
2. Providing a common framework and shared vocabulary for stakeholders to understand and communicate the rationale and intended impact of strategies.

Provide a foundation for analysis and organizational learning through:

1. Engaging development process that promotes inquiry and learning which continues to be held by many within an organization;
2. A thought process and framework that links program design to program implementation; and
3. A framework that serves as the basis for ongoing evaluation and internal assessment activities.

ⁱ Connell, J.P., & Kubisch, A.C. (1998). Applying a theories of change approach to the design and evaluation of comprehensive community initiatives: Progress, prospects, and problems. In K. Fulbright-Anderson, A.C. Kubisch, J.P. Connell (Eds.) *New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives: Theory, Measurement, and Analysis* (Volume II). Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute

ⁱⁱ Using Logic Models to Bring Together Planning, Evaluation and Action, WK Kellogg Foundation, October 2000

ⁱⁱⁱ Mapping Change: Using a Theory of Change to Guide Planning and Evaluation, GrantCraft, 2006