
SIX STEPS TO DEVELOPING A THEORY OF CHANGE

A theory of change is a description of a program, intervention, or initiative that shows how interconnected elements lead to the achievement of a long-term goal or objective. A theory of change serves as a basis for planning, decision making, and evaluation. It is important for any organization that is creating a theory of change spend time clarifying what the theory of change will be used for. The following are six basic steps in the Theory of Change process:

1. Identifying long-term goals

In a theory of change process, the first step is to come to agreement on long-term goals. It is very important to set a good, clear outcome from the beginning.

2. Backwards mapping and connecting outcomes

Building upon the initial framework, continue to map backwards until there is a framework that tells the story that is appropriate for the purposes of planning. This process should result in a map of intermediate steps leading to the attainment of the long-term goal (see the “So-That” Chain Exercise on the next page)

3. Completing the outcomes framework

Draw connections between all interconnected elements, resulting in a cohesive whole that clearly shows progress toward the outcome.

4. Identifying assumptions

The assumptions that underlie a theory of change should be clearly documented. Documenting assumptions and justifications is a continuous process. As outcomes are added and moved on the framework, it remains necessary to question and explain how and why they are necessary.

5. Developing indicators

This stage focuses on how to measure the implementation and effectiveness of the initiative. By collecting data on each outcome, the initiative can identify what it is or isn't happening and find out why.

6. Identifying interventions

After laying out the near complete change framework, we now focus on the role of interventions (those things that the program (or initiative) must do to bring about outcomes).

Adapted from: Center for Theory of Change (2012). *What is Theory of Change?* Retrieved from <http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>

“SO THAT” CHAIN TEMPLATE

Complete the worksheet below to see how your Theory of Change elements connect. Work from the bottom up!

STRATEGY OR ACTIVITY:	
	SO THAT
	SO THAT
	SO THAT
GOAL OR OUTCOME STATEMENT:	

Adapted from: Organizational Research Services (2004). *Theory of Change: A Practical Tool for Action, Results, and Learning*. Prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-theoryofchange-2004.pdf>