WHAT IS A THEORY OF CHANGE AND WHAT IS A LOGIC MODEL?

Evaluators often ask groups to create two tools: one is called “a theory of change” and the other is called a “logic model.” The terms are fairly and people sometimes use the terms interchangeably. People also use the terms for different things – there is not just one idea about what a theory of change is, or what a logic model is. The tools and resources in this website that involve theories of change or logic models usually give a definition or illustration.

For purposes of the tip sheets in this website, we are talking about the following:

• A theory of change is usually in the form of a picture. The picture shows the steps the group is thinking about taking to reach its goals, and why they think those steps will lead to the change they want. This is sometimes referred to as the pathway to change or the chain of influence leading to change.
  o A group has to understand its assumptions about how they think change happens in order to create a theory of change picture
  o The process to understand and describe these assumptions is very helpful to a group
  o The process shows where members of the group agree and disagree about what it will take to create the change they want
  o It also helps the group see whether or not they have included all the steps it will take to get to the change they want
  o That’s why it can be important for groups to come up with a theory of change picture as part of their planning work, and to go back and revise it as their work moves along – even if they are not planning a formal evaluation.

• A logic model is usually in the form of a chart. The chart also lists the steps that the group is planning to implement, usually as particular activities or strategies. The chart lists what the group thinks the important results of those steps will be, usually in the form of short-term, intermediate and long-term outcomes.
  o A group has to think about what the success of their work would look like in order to create a logic model
  o The group also has to figure out what it expects each activity to accomplish, and how those results will add up over time to the desired change
  o This can be particularly helpful to groups working on social equity, antiracism and inclusion goals – because it offers a way for the group to discuss different people’s or racial/ethnic identify groups’ assumptions about what constitutes success of their work, and to set reasonable expectations for the timing and depth of results. (See tip sheets for Stage 7)
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- A logic model is also very helpful for evaluation, because once you have identified the results (outcomes) you expect from each activity, and what you expect to accomplish in the short, intermediate and long-run, you will know what to measure to see if you are making progress and if you are on track to the changes you want.

Thus, theories of change and logic models are both tools that help groups get clearer about what they are doing and how they expect what they are doing to make a difference.

They have many features in common:

- Both focus on outcomes – that is, in what you want to accomplish.
- Both should be grounded in your analysis of what it takes to create the change, and your understanding of why conditions are as they are now. That analysis should take into account power, privilege, oppression, racism and other factors.
- Both describe the strategies -- the sets of activities or programs -- that are intended to address those factors and change the outcomes.
- Both depend on a set of assumptions about why these strategies should make a difference in the desired outcomes.
- Both are generally represented in the form of charts or graphs (not just text or words).

This website includes examples of theory of change pictures and logic models. It also includes tools, resources and links to websites with more information, including ways to develop your own theories of change and logic models.