WHY DEVELOP LOGIC MODELS OR THEORIES OF CHANGE? HOW CAN THEY BE USEFUL?

A logic model or theory of change for a particular program, initiative or strategy is often developed in collaboration with the evaluator. That is because the evaluator needs to identify benchmarks for implementation of activities and indicators of short- and long-term outcomes to track progress and measure results. Once theories of change pictures and logic models are developed, those involved in designing and implementing the program or strategy often find that they are now better able to describe to outsiders what they are doing, why and to what end.

When a theory of change or logic model is developed for a strategy, one of its main benefits is helping identify expected results along the way to the hoped-for community change.

• These may be called interim results or short-term outcomes.

• The nature of your strategies, the degree of success in getting them implemented, and their reach will affect when interim results or short-term outcomes can reasonably be expected.

• Since the community changes sought by most groups concerned with racism may take a number of years to realize in full, it is important to be able to measure interim results.

• Measuring these results will help identify strategies that are not paying off as expected, are only benefiting some of the intended group, or use more resources than the benefits they produce.

• There may also be important and positive interim results — successes that can be expanded or replicated, that help leverage additional support and resources, and that keep your group and its allies and constituencies motivated to stay the course.

The value of having a clear, concise and usually visual way of describing a program or strategy for communication purposes is only one benefit of developing a logic model or theory of change. The process of development itself can strengthen the understanding and commitment of program leadership and staff or of collaborative partners by providing the opportunity for assumptions and expectations to be put on the table for discussion and agreement.

Other benefits -- ones that should encourage development of a logic model or theory of change, regardless of plans for evaluation -- include:

• Anticipating weaknesses, limitations or gaps in program or strategy activities that need to be addressed to achieve the desired impact on outcomes

• Identifying components of a program or strategy that need to be coordinated, or the sequence in which these components should be implemented, to be most effective and efficient

• Highlighting factors outside of the program or strategy that either affect its implementation or its impact -- so that potential partnerships or collaboration with other groups or organizations who might address those factors can be pursued

• Setting priorities among possible benefits that could be tracked