

Theory of Change

“Every program is packed with beliefs, assumptions, and hypotheses about how change happens- about the way humans work, or organizations, or political systems, or eco-systems. Theory of change is about articulating these many underlying assumptions about how change will happen in a program.” Patricia Rogers, UNICEF

What is a Theory of Change (TOC)?

A TOC is a diagram or narrative that explains how change happens, and how a particular program’s activities contribute to each level of results. It helps understand the relationships between problems or opportunities you are addressing and the strategies you’re using to get the work done. A TOC includes assumptions about change and how change happens.

Logic Model vs. Theory of Change

Logic Model	Theory of Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linear representation of change • Descriptive: States only what is thought to be achieved • Usually three results levels (output, outcome, impact) • Is normally shown as a matrix or flow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Room for complexity and deep questioning • Explanatory: Explains what, how and why you think change happens • Shows multiple pathways of change • Gives the big picture, including issues that you can’t control (environment, government, etc.) • Diagram + narrative text (The diagram is flexible and doesn’t have a particular format)

Almost any type of logic model will present your initiative in terms of resources, activities, short and long-term outcomes. These are useful tools, and can help clarify goals and communicate the basics of how an initiative works to others. Theory of Change takes these approaches further: it requires more specificity about goals and about the conditions needed to reach them.

When you have a complete Theory of Change, you will have:

- A clear and testable hypothesis about how change will occur that not only allows you to be accountable for results, but also makes your results more credible because they were predicted to occur in a certain way
- A visual representation of the change you want to see in your community and how you expect it to come about
- A blueprint for evaluation with measurable indicators of success identified
- An agreement among stakeholders about what defines success and what it takes to get there
- A powerful communication tool to capture the complexity of your initiative

Examples:

[North York Community House Theory of Change](#)

[South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services Theory of Change](#)

Questions that help you identify assumptions:

- Why will this particular set of outcomes contribute to the desired goal?
- What do we assume about cause-effect relations?
- What do we assume about the needs, interests and behaviour of stakeholders?
- On the basis of what evidence, knowledge, experiences or impressions do we make our assumptions.