A Guide to Logic Models & Theories of Change

A *logic model* is a brief (typically one-page) summary explaining in concise terms the inputs, planned activities, outputs, and anticipated outcomes of a program or initiative. In other words, a logic model summarizes how the program will work.

A *theory of change* also describes the structure of a program or initiative, and can be summarized in a chart similar to a logic model. The main difference is that the theory of change explains *why* the program is anticipated to work, in addition to *how*. Typically, a theory of change not only lays out the steps necessary to achieve the desired outcomes, but also explains why and how each step leads to the next. Although these steps can be graphically represented with boxes and arrows, an accompanying narrative is needed as well, describing the theoretical backing for each step's connection to the next one.

Logic models and theories of change can be helpful brainstorming and planning tools for program developers and evaluators, as well as providing a convenient way to describe the structure and benefits of the program to potential funders.

The documents, webinars, trainings, workbooks, and templates listed here can provide an understanding of these two related tools for planning and evaluation, and can guide organizations in developing their own models.

Logic Models — Toolkits & Guidance Documents

Logic Models: A Beginner's Guide

A basic, non-technical, plain language document introducing the concept of a logic model, explaining its basic structure, and walking the reader through the steps of building a logic model with simple examples and tips. The last page is a template for the reader to practice constructing a logic model.

Source: Indiana Youth Institute
Date: n.d.

Creating Program Logic Models

A book chapter in which the authors address these learning objectives:

1. Describe the relationship between theory of change and program logic models
2. Identify basic elements for a program logic model
3. Create a simple model
4. Recognize limitations of display

Source: *The Logic Model Guidebook: Better Strategies for Great Results (2nd Edition)* by Cynthia Phillips and Lisa Wyatt Knowlton. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications
Date: 2012

Using Logic Models Grounded in Theory of Change to Support Trauma-Informed Initiatives

A report illustrating how an agency might use a logic model to guide its efforts in developing a program, using as an example a fictional organization proposing a trauma-informed child welfare initiative.

Source: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Date: 2020

Logic Model Toolkit: Quick Reference Guide & Annotated Logic Model Template

A brief, step-by-step approach to creating logic models, based on a review and synthesis of the logic model literature and on agency experiences using logic models to manage large-scale projects. The toolkit is intended to provide the essential information and guidance needed to create a logic model from scratch, and includes links to additional resources.

Source: Prepared by AEM Corporation, Education Services, referenced by the U.S. Department of Education as a technical assistance resource
Date: 2016

Developing & Using a Logic Model

A general overview of the development and use of logic models as planning and evaluation tools, provided as part of a series of heart disease and stroke prevention program evaluation guides. The examples used in this resource all come from the medical sector.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Date: n.d.

Identifying the Components of a Logic Model

A two-page quick guide providing definitions and examples of the key components of a logic model. It includes a link to a more detailed step-by-step program evaluation guide.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention
Date: n.d.

Logic Model Development Guide: Using Logic Models to Bring Together Planning, Evaluation, & Action

A detailed orientation to the underlying principles and language of the program logic model and its use in program planning, implementation, and dissemination of results. Consists of four chapters:

1. Introduction to Logic Models
2. Developing a Basic Logic Model for Your Program
3. Developing a Theory-of-Change Logic Model for Your Program
4. Using Your Logic Model to Plan for Evaluation

Source: W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Date: 2004

Logic Models: A Tool for Effective Program Planning, Collaboration, & Monitoring

A brief (4-page) overview of the role of logic models in effective program planning, collaboration, and monitoring. It defines the four components of these models — resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes — and explains how they are connected. This resource is intended to help practitioners and evaluators better understand a program's mechanics and structure, and chart a course toward improved policy and practice.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific.
Date: 2014

How to Develop a Logic Model

A hyperlinked guide designed primarily for program managers and other agency staff who are not trained researchers themselves but who need to understand the rationale and process of conducting research. It provides an overview of the basic elements of a program logic model and walks through the steps of logic model development with examples. It includes links to templates and sample logic models.

Source: The Compass — A curated collection of social and behavior change (SBC) resources
Date: Current

Logic Model: A Comprehensive Guide to Program Planning, Implementation, & Evaluation

An online guide to building logic models, with several sections:

1. What are Logic Models and Why are They Important in Evaluation?
2. The Key Components of a Logic Model: Inputs, Activities, Outputs, Outcomes, and Impacts
3. Creating a Logic Model: Step-by-Step Guide and Best Practices
4. Using Logic Models to Guide Evaluation Planning, Implementation, and Reporting
5. Common Challenges and Solutions in Developing and Using Logic Models in Evaluation
6. Enhancing the Usefulness and Credibility of Logic Models: Tips for Effective Communication and Stakeholder Engagement
7. Advanced Topics in Logic Modeling: Theory of Change, Program Theory, and Impact Pathways
8. Resources and Tools for Developing and Using Logic Models in Evaluation

Source: EvalCommunity
Date: Current

Logic Model Workbook

A do-it-yourself guide to the concepts and uses of logic models. Describes the steps necessary for creating program logic models. Includes templates and tips for readers to construct their own logic models.

Source: Innovation Network
Date: n.d.

Logic Models — Online Courses

Enhancing Program Performance with Logic Models

A self-paced online course that provides a holistic approach to planning and evaluating a program. It helps program practitioners use and apply logic models, discussing what a logic model is and how to use one for planning, implementation, evaluation, or communicating about the program. The course consists of the following seven sections:

1. What Is a Logic Model?
2. More about Outcomes
3. More about Your Program "Logic"
4. What Does a Logic Model Look Like?
5. How Do I Draw a Logic Model?
6. How Good Is My Logic Model?
7. Using Logic Models in Evaluation

Source: University of Wisconsin, Division of Extension
Date: Current

E-Learning Course Series: Foundation to Becoming a Data-Informed Organization

An e-learning series that offers a brief (15-minute) online course providing information and tools to create or refine a program's theory of change, and a more detailed (25-minute) course with a step-by-step overview of how and why to develop a logic model.

Source: University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service, Catherine E. Cutler Institute, Data Innovation Project
Date: Current

Logic Models: Skill-Builder Workshop Series

Logic Models to Support Program Development & Evaluation in Urban Districts

Session 1 of a two-session workshop series. This video lasts 1.5 hours and has the following learning objectives:

- Introduce logic models as an effective tool for program and policy design, implementation, and evaluation.
- Invite participants to practice the elements of a logic model.
- Provide guidance in appropriate steps for building a logic model for a program or initiative.

Source: Regional Education Laboratory at EDC
Date: 2013

From Logic Model to Program Evaluation

Session 2 of the above workshop series. This video lasts 1.5 hours and has the following learning objectives:

- Reintroduce logic models as an effective tool, specifically for evaluation.
- Invite participants to practice using logic models to develop evaluation questions and indicators of success.
- Provide guidance in how to determine the appropriate evaluation for a specific program or policy.

Source: Regional Education Laboratory at EDC
Date: 2014

Logic Models for Program Design, Implementation, & Evaluation: Workshop Toolkit

Facilitator and participant workbooks for the two workshop sessions described above.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences and Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands
Date: 2013–2014

Logic Models — Templates

Generic Logic Model Template

A one-page logic model template, annotated to describe the contents of each box. It was developed as a guide for a federal reporting system.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Institute of Food and Agriculture
Date: n.d.

Editable Flowchart & Table Templates for Brainstorming

Editable templates that can be downloaded and shared with a team to facilitate brainstorming. The table format has boxes for identifying the inputs, outputs, and anticipated outcomes of a program. The flowchart template, provided in editable Word and Excel formats, has editable boxes and arrows suitable for indicating which inputs lead to which outputs and which outputs, in turn, lead to which outcomes. This framework helps the team to brainstorm about *how* and *why* the program is expected to produce its outcomes and is suitable for developing a theory of change. The arrows connecting the boxes would typically be accompanied by a brief narrative explaining why the box on the left is expected to lead to the box on the right.

- Word Format Flowchart
- Excel Format Flowchart
- Word Format Table

Source: University of Wisconsin, Division of Extension
Date: 2009

Theories of Change

Logic Models versus Theories of Change

Logic models and theories of change share many components but differ in important ways. This webinar reviews both, explains the similarities and differences, and walks through several real-life examples to address the following questions:

1. Why distinguish between a logic model and a theory of change?
2. When do we use a logic model vs. a theory of change?
3. Do we need both?
4. Which comes first?

The slides include a full transcript of the presentation in expandable boxes on the top left-hand corner of each slide.

Source: The University of New Mexico Evaluation Lab
Date: 2021

Theory of Change Basics

A brief (9-page) overview of theories of change; their uses in program planning, quality reviews, and outcome evaluations; and indicator examples. There is a section on "backward mapping," which reverses the pathway to program outcomes by starting with the desired outcomes and asking what preconditions and intermediate steps are needed to achieve them.

Source: ActKnowledge
Date: 2012

How to Use a Theory of Change to Monitor & Evaluate Social & Behavior Change Programs

Most programs designed to make changes in social structures or behaviors are based on an existing social science theory applied to the program's specific setting, goals, and objectives. A program's theory of change, therefore, is an explanation of the stages through which the program aims to produce the change(s) it targets, and how each leads to the next. This is a how-to guide for program managers and other staff responsible for monitoring progress. It gives real-life examples, provides helpful graphics, and links to resources. Learning objectives:

1. Understand the rationale for building a program-specific theory of change based on a behavior change theory.
2. Identify progress indicators and incorporate them into a Monitoring & Evaluation Plan.
3. Learn how data can help assess whether the program reached its desired outcome, and if not, why not.

Source: Breakthrough RESEARCH
Date: 2022

Theory of Change Review

A 40-page report commissioned by the U.K.-based nonprofit organization with the improbable name Comic Relief which provides grants to communities around the world for programs to fight poverty and promote social justice. This report describes how the organization uses theories of change, what difference they have made in its work, and lessons learned. The report has an executive summary and an introductory chapter that defines theories of change and answers some frequently asked questions about their use.

Source: Comic Relief
Date: 2011

Theory of Change Workbook — A Step-by-Step Process for Developing or Strengthening Theories of Change

A workbook designed for use during a theory of change brainstorming session. It poses the questions that need to be addressed collaboratively and provides space for the facilitator to take notes. It is available in English and Vietnamese as downloadable Word documents. A slide deck version in PowerPoint format is available for use during brainstorming. The Word version has a glossary and a link to examples of completed theories of change. The PowerPoint version has slides for the glossary but not the link to samples.

Source: USAID Learning Lab
Date: n.d.

Alternative Approaches to Program Planning & Evaluation

Many of the logic models and theory of change frameworks listed here were developed with Western societies and cultures in mind. They are taught in most academic settings and valued by grant makers. When applied to non-Western cultural settings, however, they may lead to misleading results or yield initiatives that are not appropriate for the community. In fact, in many cases they may have unintended negative consequences. The frameworks included below address this cultural mismatch by offering approaches that reshape the logic of program planning and evaluation in response to the norms and values of specific communities. Although most of these examples feature indigenous communities, the culturally sensitive approaches they demonstrate can be adapted to other cultural settings as well.

The 'Most Significant Change' Technique — A Guide to its Use

Like theories of change, Most Significant Change (MSC) is a method of defining desired program outcomes, describing how they will be achieved, and explaining why they are achievable. Like logic models and theories of change, this technique is ideally developed collaboratively through brainstorming, and it is a strategy for monitoring progress toward outcomes. Unlike a theory of change, which produces quantifiable outcome indicators and relies on them to monitor progress, MSC is a qualitative approach. Instead of measurable outcome indicators, it relies on stories from the participating community to monitor success and to identify barriers. It is best suited to participatory program planning and evaluation, especially in cultural contexts where truth value is judged more by "voice" (storytelling) than by academic methods for establishing validity. This book (104 pages) takes the reader through the steps of the technique, reviews types of settings and initiatives where it has been successfully used, and discusses future directions. Four appendices provide detailed guidance for practitioners, including examples of story collection formats, significant change stories, story reporting formats, and a facilitation guide for story collection. The book's overall approach aligns with strategies for decolonizing research and evaluation methods.

Authors: Rick Davies and Jess Dart
Date: 2005

Are We There Yet? A Communications Evaluation Guide

A user-friendly, step-by-step guide for developing a program evaluation strategy, using plain language rather than technical jargon. Although the purpose is similar to the examples of logic models and theories of change included above, it is tailored to community-serving organizations that value implementing and evaluating their initiatives in partnership with the communities they serve. To that end, it incorporates communication with the community as a major aspect of the initiative. In addition to obtaining input from the community during planning stages, communicating interim and final results back to the community is addressed as an important factor. Communication methods range from print and television to social media such as blogs and networking sites as means for the organization to share results with a broad audience. A worksheet at the end guides the reader through the steps of program planning and evaluation.

Authors: Developed by Asibey Consulting for The Communications Network
Date: 2008

Indigenous Evaluation Overview

A one-page summary of a culturally competent evaluation approach appropriate for initiatives implemented by and for indigenous communities.

Source: Urban Indian Health Institute
Date: n.d.

Evaluation in Indian Country

A five-minute video narrated by Rose James (Lummi-Duwamish) "in collaboration with master weavers and community members of the Lummi Nation to create dialogue around Indigenous Evaluation."

Source: Urban Indian Health Institute
Date: 2018

Indigenous Evaluation Methodologies

This report is written in an academic language but provides plenty of definitions and sidebars to help the non-academic reader navigate the terminology. It provides a critical view of Western methods and their colonizing effects when applied to indigenous communities. It then lays out a theoretical and practical basis for a program evaluation framework suitable for initiatives implemented in indigenous settings. The emphasis on community-based participatory research and the importance of centering the community context makes the report relevant to other cultural settings as well. The powerful notion of "two-eyed seeing" developed by Elder Albert Marshall is discussed as a model for combining the strengths of Western and indigenous knowledges to conduct culturally sensitive research and evaluation.

Source: Written by Marisa Van Bavel for the Public Health Agency of Canada
Date: 2022

Indigenous Evaluation Framework Book

A web page with links to the 10 chapters of the book plus a list of handouts and additional resources. Unlike the mostly linear flow of traditional logic models and theories of change, the indigenous framework is represented as a series of concentric circles. Core cultural values shared by most American indigenous peoples, such community, place, gifts, and sovereignty, are central to the framework. Incorporating indigenous knowledge and the wisdom of elders into program planning and evaluation are emphasized. Collecting evidence through storytelling is discussed in detail.

Source: American Indian Higher Education Consortium
Date: 2014