Designing Effective Action for Change

How a Theory of Change helps you clarify the cause-and-effect relationship at the heart of your program

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Learning Objectives

By the end of the module, you will be able to:

• Describe the benefits of a Theory of Change
• Define the three elements needed to construct a Theory of Change
• Identify how the Theory of Change informs the program design
Theory of Change Elements

- Community Problem/Need
- Specific Intervention
- Intended Outcome
The most effective set of activities for volunteers and participants

- Looks at cause and effect relationships

Adapted from www.theoryofchange.org/about/
Theory of Change Perspective

- Identifies specific interventions to achieve the desired result

Adapted from www.theoryofchange.org/about/
The most effective set of activities for volunteers and participants

- Shifts thinking from “what we are doing” to focus on “what we want to achieve”

Adapted from www.theoryofchange.org/about/
Theory of Change Elements

- **Community Problem/Need**
- **Specific Intervention**
- **Intended Outcome**

- **Statistics**
  - Documenting the need

- **Evidence**
  - Guides choice of intervention
  - Supports cause-effect relationship
Everyday Life Example

- I have strep throat (problem)
- I will take antibiotics (intervention)
- I will get better (outcome)

Evidence
- Guides choice of intervention
- Supports cause-effect relationship
But which antibiotic(s) fight strep the best? (Look at evidence to make the choice)
Example: Riverton Literacy Corps

Community Problem/need

Children reading below grade level in 3rd grade

Statistics on the number of students at below grade level in program’s service area; Research on why reading proficiency by 3rd grade is important.
Example: Riverton Literacy Corps

Community Problem/need

Children reading below grade level in 3rd grade

Statistics on the number of students at below grade level in program’s service area; Research on why reading proficiency by 3rd grade is important.

Intended Outcome

Students are able to read at 3rd grade level (as measured by 3rd grade reading exam)
Theory of Change

Example: Riverton Literacy Corps

Community Problem/need

Children reading below grade level in 3rd grade

Statistics on the number of students at below grade level in program’s service area; Research on why reading proficiency by 3rd grade is important.

Specific Intervention

Individualized tutoring 3 times/week for 20 min on five “building block” literacy skills through reading, writing and verbal communication activities

Evidence: Research on building block skills leading to reading proficiency. Research on design, frequency, duration of tutoring sessions.

Intended Outcome

Students are able to read at 3rd grade level (as measured by 3rd grade reading exam)
Community Problem/Need is the specific issue your project, with its specific intervention (service activity), is designed to address. What is the extent and severity of this need in the community?

- **Statistics documenting the problem/need**
- **Evidence**
  - Guides choice of intervention
  - Supports cause-effect relationship
Statistics documenting the problem/need

Journal of Health Communication: International Perspectives
Volume 12, Issue 6, 2007

Evaluating a Minor Storyline on ER About Teen Obesity, Hypertension, and 5 A Day

DOI: 10.1080/10810730701508385
Thomas W. Valente*, Shella Murphy¹, Grace Huang², Jodi Gusek¹, Jennie Greene¹ & Vicki Beck³
pages 551-566

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Evaluation of a School-based Teen Obesity Prevention Minimal Intervention
Community Problem/Need

Data documenting problem/need should answer these questions:

• **SCOPE:** Who and how many are directly affected? How severe is this?

• **SIGNIFICANCE:** What makes this a compelling need? Is it likely to become worse? What will happen if we do nothing?

• **CAUSE(S):** Why does the need exist? How is it perpetuated?
Healthy Futures Program Example

- **Scope:** National Survey of Children and Health found childhood obesity in State X increased 23% between 2003 and 2007 – the 2nd fastest rate of increase in US (2010). CDC data show nearly one-third of children and teens are obese or overweight in Webb County (2009).

- **Significance:**
  - Obese children found to become obese adults
  - Links between childhood obesity and early onset of cardiovascular disease, and Type II diabetes
  - Webb County rising in state and national averages for cardiovascular disease
  - Long term health care costs rising

- **Causes:** Diet, sedentary lifestyle
Intended Outcome

What change are you hoping to make related to the identified need?

- **Community Need**
  - Statistics documenting the need

- **Specific Intervention**
  - Evidence
    - Guides choice of intervention
    - Supports cause-effect relationship

- **Intended Outcome**
Identifying the Intended Outcome

Healthy Futures Program Example

Possible outcomes to measure:

• Increased knowledge of what is “healthy food”
• More frequent choice of healthy foods to eat
• More frequent involvement in physical activity or exercise
• Improved physical condition
An **intervention** is the specific set of activities in which participants and volunteers will be engaged. What is the best way to achieve the intended outcome?

- **Community Need**
  - Statistics documenting the need

- **Specific Intervention**
  - Evidence
    - Guides choice of intervention
    - Supports cause-effect relationship

- **Intended Outcome**
An **intervention** is the specific set of activities in which participants and volunteers will be engaged. What is the best way to achieve the intended outcome?

**Diagram:**
- **Community Need**
- **Specific Intervention**
- **Intended Outcome**

**Statistics documenting the need**

**Evidence**
- Guides choice of intervention
- Supports cause-effect relationship
Intervention

Describe the design and dosage of your intervention (service activity):

- **Design** (who does what with whom?)
- **Dosage**
  - **Frequency** (how many sessions a week?)
  - **Intensity** (length of each session)
  - **Duration** (how many total weeks of sessions?)
Healthy Futures Program Example

- **Design:** national service participants implement the Shape Up curriculum with economically disadvantaged urban girls ages 14-16 to increase physical activity (30 minutes/session) and educate them on healthy eating
- **Frequency:** twice a week after school
- **Intensity:** 60 minutes per session
- **Duration:** 12 weeks
Testing Your Theory of Change:

IS YOUR THEORY OF CHANGE:

PLAUSIBLE: Does the logic of the model seem correct: “if we do these things, will we get the results we expect?”

FEASIBLE: Are resources sufficient to implement the chosen intervention?

MEANINGFUL: Are intended outcomes important? Is the magnitude of expected change worth the effort?
A theory of change identifies cause/effect.

The three elements of a theory of change; community problem/need, intervention, intended outcome are supported by data and evidence.

Data documenting community need should show scope, significance, and causes.
Additional Resources

CNCS Priorities and Performance Measures:  
http://www.nationalservicereresources.gov/npm/home

Program-Specific Notices of Funding Opportunities and Application Instructions:  
http://www.nationalservice.gov