

WHAT IS A THEORY OF CHANGE?

A Theory of Change is a tool for building organizational effectiveness. It surfaces previously unspoken assumptions about what an organization does and why, and the intended impacts of the organizational activities, both in the long and short-term.

Having a Theory of Change can be useful in several different ways, including:

1. Helping an organization or system to be aligned on the same page about why it does what it does
2. Aligning actions to achieve intended outcomes
3. Ensuring that resources (time, money, etc.) are most strategically used
4. As a guide for evaluation efforts
5. As a guide for future strategic decisions

A Theory of Change typically addresses the following questions:

1. What is the impact we are seeking as a result of our work?
2. What preconditions (short and medium term outcomes) are needed to exist in order to achieve our desired long-term impact?
3. What are the inputs (resources), activities and interventions we use?

Additionally, some organizations choose to articulate the values and principles upon which their work is based as a part of their Theory of Change.

A Theory of Change can be visually depicted in a variety of ways. What is most important is that it makes sense to the people inside of the organization and is a useful tool for guiding strategy and evaluation.