What are theories of change?
Theories of change are a description of the research base or roadmap of the belief system (e.g., assumptions, “best practices,” experiences) and strategies for making positive change in the lives of individuals and the community. They provide a clear expression of the apparent relationships between actions and hoped-for results. Theory of change frameworks are highly individual and reflect an organization’s or community’s unique needs and preferences for what kind of changes it wants to make as a result of its efforts.

How are theories of change used?
Theories of change are used by organizations or communities to guide them toward a long-term goal. Groups will enter the process at different points, and build it out and narrow it down. It is a participatory process that is democratic and flexible.

Why use theories of change?
Theories of change provide a high-level lens for accountability and aid planning and communication with funders and other stakeholders. They are an integral part of outcome-based planning and evaluation.

"Layer Cake" of Outcome-based Planning and Evaluation
The "Layer Cake" is a graphic-based illustration of the multiple components involved in Outcome-based Planning and Evaluation.


**Theory of Change**

**Techniques**

**LOGIC MODELS**
A diagram of relationships between inputs and outputs.

**Strength:** Concise picture of relationships between inputs and impacts.

**Weakness:** Works best for direct service model; more difficult to apply to community change.

**OUTCOME MAPS**
Road map that links strategies to short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes.

**Strength:** Visual picture of pathways for change.

**Weakness:** Interrelationships among strategies and outcomes can lead to complex picture.

**"SO THAT" CHAINS**
Linear sequential statement of activities and intended outcomes.

**Strength:** Clearly defined and easily understood.

**Weakness:** Presumes linear relationships if used as a solo strategy. May reflect only a slice of a bigger initiative. Does not show the interconnectedness of other strategies.

**NARRATIVE AND DIAGRAMS OF WORKING ASSUMPTIONS**
Narrative statement of underlying assumptions, as well as illustrations.

**Strength:** Detailed description of underlying assumptions.

**Weakness:** Tends to be lengthy and complex.

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**Types of Change**

Many types of incremental change must occur along the way to deep, lasting change. These types of changes may reflect actual changes in people's lives, changes to entities beyond the individual or organization, or changes in public or private investment.

**IMPACT**
Changes in the lives of individuals and family.

**Examples:** attitude, knowledge, skills, behaviors, values, health, economic status.

**Impact-targeted Strategies:** direct service, demonstration.

**Sample Outcome Statements:**
- **Changes in knowledge:** increased knowledge among neighborhood residents of community resources.
- **Changes in health:** decreased blood pressure.
- **Changes in financial status:** increased family savings.

**INFLUENCE**
Changes in group, community, organizations, institutions and systems that support and/or sustain changes in people's lives.

**Examples:** visibility of an issue, community tolerance for problem/condition, changes in community norms, changes in partnerships, changes in public awareness, changes in public will, changes in policies, changes in regulations, changes in services.

**Influence-targeted Strategies:** research, TA/consultation, system analysis, policy analysis, convening, advocacy, dissemination.

**Sample Outcome Statements:**
- **Changes in visibility of issue:** media increase frequency of coverage of issue.
- **Changes in partnerships:** partners increase referrals to one another.
- **Change in political will:** legislators co-sponsor bills that support community priorities.

**LEVERAGE**
Changes in public investment, private investment and/or philanthropy that support and/or sustain changes in people's lives.

**Examples:** pooled funding/co-investments/integration of funds, additional funding for a priority issue, in-kind resources allocated to a priority issue.

**Leverage-targeted Strategies:** co-investment, financing TA, workforce analysis.

**Sample Outcome Statements:**
- **Changes in public funds:** new funding methods (pooled, matched, blended) increase monetary resources to support community priorities.
- **Changes in philanthropy:** foundations previously uninvolved in community begin to provide funding for community programs, agencies and initiatives.
- **Changes in resources available to the community:** new physical resources (computer rooms, meeting rooms) are available to the community.