

# Theory of Change Development Guide



## What?

A theory of change is exactly how it sounds: A THEORY about how your organization is going to make CHANGE in your community

## Why?

A theory of change is useful to:

- Get everybody on the same page about the change you are trying to bring about and how you are going to do that
- Communicate to people outside of the project
- Lay out why you are going about things a certain way and why you have ruled out other possible ways of doing things
- Check where things are a bit fuzzy and get clearer as a group

## Who?

Involve a group of people who represent different perspectives on a project, program or initiative. This could include the Executive Director, Program Director, program staff, program participants, a volunteer, a Board Member and an advisory committee member. Go big enough to include different perspectives, but small enough to allow for good conversation and decision-making. If you have the budget, you might hire an experienced facilitator to lead the process



## When?

Ideally right at the beginning of a project or initiative - but later is better than never! So anytime will do. Revisit at least once a year


## Where?

You can gather in-person in a quiet space at your organization, off-site for a special day or online in a Zoom room or other online platform

## How?

- Gather a group of key program stakeholders
- Lay out some ground rules for participation. Here are a few we like to use that you might suggest and then ask the group for their own ideas:
  - » ALL ideas are welcome
  - » We need everybody's wisdom in order to succeed: If you have been sharing a lot, we invite you to lean back and let others share and if you have been more quiet, we invite you to learn forward and share
  - » Participate in the way that feels more comfortable to you - speaking, drawing, writing, dancing = all good!
- Work together to answer the following questions:
  - » **IMPACT:** What is the BIG CHANGE we are helping to bring about in our community?
  - » **OUTCOMES:** What are the smaller changes along the way to get there? How are participants and other stakeholders going to be different as a result of engaging with our programs?
  - » **ISSUES:** What is the need, issue or problem in our community that we are addressing?
  - » **STAKEHOLDERS:** Who do we hope will contribute to and be touched by our work in a positive way? (e.g. participants or clients, families, staff, volunteers, policy makers, teachers)
  - » **ACTIVITIES:** What are we going to do to help bring positive change about?
  - » **EVIDENCE:** Why do we think that this is the right way to go about doing it? Is there research that tells us so, or do we have experience from the past that we are drawing on?
  - » **ALTERNATIVES:** What other ways can we think of to go about doing it? And why are we not choosing those ways instead?
- There are lots of tools you can use like breakout groups, flip chart paper, sticky notes, coloured dots for voting, pictures and dance, Google jamboards to make the process interesting
- Try to create a brief theory of change statement. Ask everybody to work on it on their own, then share them with the room and talk about which words they like best. Here's a formula that you can use as a starting point:
  - » If we [DO X: WHAT & HOW] for [WHO], then [SMALL CHANGES] will occur, which will lead to [BIG CHANGE]
  - » Here's an example from AOC's RBC Artist Fellowship Program: If we pair up emerging and established artists and offer them high-quality professional development opportunities with other artists from across the sector, then they will grow their knowledge and build a portfolio of diverse skills, confidence and connections which will lead to a more resilient and equitable artist ecosystem
- Assign a smaller group to take the information back and condense and wordsmith into a brief document (max 2 pages) and a more polished theory of change statement
- Share back to the bigger group for feedback and refine
- Work with somebody with a good design eye to communicate your ideas using pictures along with words
- Share with your team and the world!



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