7 May 2015

Dear Friends,

We hope you enjoy this week's edition of Newsflash!

Sincerely,

The Firelight Team

Resource) An Introduction to Theory of Change

by Andrea Anderson, Aspen Institutue Roundtable on Community Change

What Is a Theory of Change?

A theory of change (TOC) is a tool for developing solutions to complex social problems. A basic TOC explains how a group of early and intermediate accomplishments sets the stage for producing long-range results. A more complete TOC articulates the assumptions about the process through which change will occur and specifies the ways in which all of the required early and intermediate outcomes related to achieving the desired long-term change will be brought about and documented as they occur.

What Is the Value of Creating a TOC?

Community initiatives are sometimes planned without an explicit understanding of the early and intermediate steps required for long-term changes to occur; therefore, many assumptions about the change process need to be examined for program planning or evaluation planning to be most effective. A TOC creates an honest picture of the steps required to reach a goal. It provides an opportunity for stakeholders to assess what they can influence, what impact they can have, and whether it is realistic to expect to reach their goal with the time and resources they have available.

How Can Initiatives Create a TOC?

Little exists in the way of a methodology for applying the TOC approach to real-world situations. The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change seeks to fill this gap by developing tools and training materials to help program stakeholders create TOCs; we developed a process that community-based initiatives can use to create TOCs.

When I first began to work with groups to create theories of change, most of us thought that TOC was purely an evaluation exercise. But the more I worked with program stakeholders, the more I realized that the exercise of creating a TOC is really an expectation management tool that can benefit planning as well as evaluation; I found that just asking people to articulate assumptions about the change process they hoped to bring about produced a lot of blank stares, or produced work that wasn't quite at the level of critical thinking that we thought was important. So we came up with a step-by-step process that helps to unpack a group's thinking about how to bring about desired changes and how to go about documenting that change in a systematic fashion.

What Is the Process of Creating a TOC?

The first step is for stakeholders to be clear about what they want to produce through their initiative. We find group members often have very different ideas about what they are working toward.

The next step is for stakeholders to think about all of the preconditions—the building blocks or requirements—that must exist in order to reach their long-term goal. They then need to consider, in light of this big picture perspective, which of these preconditions (otherwise known as outcomes) they will take responsibility for producing.

Usually there is just a subset of outcomes that they can influence. Some preconditions are beyond the sphere of influence of any single initiative, such as needing a stable economy to produce enough jobs to reach an employment goal. Others may be beyond one program's influence, but stakeholders could suggest ways that a particular program may be able to influence other programs to act, or they could identify areas for strategic collaboration or partnerships. For example, a precondition for a school readiness initiative might be that all children are properly immunized and healthy before they enter school. A small initiative couldn't influence this precondition, but it may be able to help bring it about through collaboration with others in the community who could directly influence this key precondition for success (see box for a summary of the steps).

What's the Difference Between a TOC and a Logic Model?

A logic model is a tactical explanation of the process of producing a given outcome. It outlines the program inputs and activities, the outputs they will produce, and the connections between those outputs and the desired outcomes. Alternatively, a TOC, as we define it, is a strategic picture of the multiple interventions required to produce the early and intermediate outcomes that are preconditions of reaching an ultimate goal.

Once a precondition (or outcome) has been identified through the TOC process, a logic model can be used to explain how that outcome will be produced. Thus, one TOC could actually be linked to a number of logic models, because a logic model could be constructed to illustrate how to produce each outcome in the TOC map. The TOC summarizes work at a strategic level, while a logic model would be used to illustrate the tactical, or program-level, understanding of the change process. A Microsoft PowerPoint presentation on the TOC website, www.theoryofchange.org, explains this issue in more detail.

For more information visit: http://www.theoryofchange.org/

(Article) Six Theory of Change Pitfalls to Avoid

by Matthew Forti, Stanford Social Innovation Review

Over the past decade, more and more nonprofits have developed a theory of change—that is, an articulation of the results an organization must achieve to be successful, and how it, working alone or with others, will achieve them. Organizations do this either of their own volition or because funders, board members, or other parties ask them to do so. In fact, according to Innovation Network's State of Evaluation 2010, half of nonprofits report having a theory of change, and of those, nearly 80 percent either created or revised it in the past year. But simply putting boxes and lines down on paper doesn't guarantee that your organization will make better decisions.

To start, a good theory of change should answer six big questions:

1. Who are you seeking to influence or benefit (target population)?
2. What benefits are you seeking to achieve (results)?
3. When will you achieve them (time period)?
4. How will you and others make this happen (activities, strategies, resources, etc.)?
5. Where and under what circumstances will you do your work (context)?
6. Why do you believe your theory will bear out (assumptions)?

Theories of change come in all shapes and sizes, from "wiring diagrams" typically used by direct service organizations (see Nurse Family Partnership's) to "systems maps," typically used for more complex interventions that need to influence multiple actors (see Healthy Child Care Washington's, page 36). Organizations sometimes use different versions for different audiences; for example, they may use a summary graphic for outside audiences, and a detailed prose version for leadership and staff.

In our ten-plus years of supporting clients in theory of change work, we've found six major pitfalls that, if avoided, can help nonprofits create actionable theories of change.

1. Confusing accountability with hope. A theory of change must clarify what results a nonprofit will hold itself accountable for achieving; in other words, what results must it deliver to be successful. Defining results in this way will force your organization to get real about the impact you are signing up to create, not just what you hope will happen. While dreaming big and setting lofty goals, such as ending world hunger, can inspire your stakeholders, these are better left for your mission statement rather than your theory of change.

2. Creating a mirror instead of a target. A good theory of change doesn't simply reflect what an organization is already doing; rather, it articulates what the organization wants to be held accountable for, and works backward to identify necessary activities, strategies, resources, capabilities, culture, and so on. If your theory of change work hasn't led you to propose any changes to these elements, you probably haven't taken a hard enough look.

3. Failing to take the external context into account. The best theories of change explicitly integrate the anticipated actions of regulators, the work of peer organizations, expected changes in the economic climate, and other factors. For example, if you are battling homelessness in a community, knowing that a coalition is soon forming to triage and coordinate the activities of providers may lead you to think differently about what activities you deliver and what results are achievable. A deep understanding of the external context will help you create a more realistic theory of change.

4. Not confirming the plausibility of your theory. While internal dialogue is a common starting point for theory of change development, the process should not conclude without a concerted effort to verify whether your "theory" is plausible. Consider the example of FIRST, a nonprofit that inspires young people to become science and technology leaders through hands-on, mentor-based programs. The organization's recent effort to refine its theory of change included a thorough "literature review" of key evaluation studies and meta-analyses to determine what it takes to get youth into science and technology majors; discussions with evaluators and academics to assess whether FIRST's activities were sufficient to generate its proposed results; and reviews of qualitative data from mentors, coaches, and alumni to understand what was most valued by the organization's constituents. Though these efforts took time, they helped FIRST perfect their program model and program delivery practices in advance of implementing changes.

5. Creating a theory that isn't measurable. To be able to test, refine, and improve your theory of change over time, you need to be able to measure its key elements. A common way to operationalize your theory of change is to get specific—articulate the input, output, and outcome indicators the theory of change suggests you should track (also known as creating a "logic model"). If you can't actually gather these indicators at the right frequencies to learn what's working, you may not be specifying your theory of change at a deep enough level (for example, you may need to define intermediate outcomes that are predictive of longer-term aspirations).

6. Assuming you've figured it all out. To get the most out of your theory of change, you need to recognize and explicitly account for the uncertainties that underlie your plan. Learning organizations carefully specify their assumptions, regularly reflect on whether those assumptions are bearing out, and consider what new assumptions they might test to further improve impact. One simple but powerful mechanism to accomplish this is to create a "learning agenda"—a simple list of assumptions and hypotheses that your organization can test at some frequency. A learning agenda can help ensure that your organization's theory of change is constantly revisited.

For similar articles visit: http://www.ssireview.org/blog

(Accepting Applications) European Microfinance Award: Grant for Microfinance Services in Post-disaster, Post-conflict Areas & Fragile States

Deadline: 3 June 2015

The European Microfinance Platform has issued a call for applications for the 6th European Microfinance Award to recognize microfinance in post-disaster, post-conflict areas and fragile states, and welcomes applications from institutions that have demonstrated an integrated response to support and build resilience for vulnerable households and communities living in exceptionally difficult environments or circumstances.

Award will recognise MFIs that operate in post-disaster/post-conflict areas and provide financial and non-financial services aimed to increase the resilience of the affected, vulnerable population. The Award of **€100,000** is granted by the Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs – Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs and is jointly organised by the Ministry, the European Microfinance Platform (e-MFP) and the Inclusive Finance Network Luxembourg (InFiNe.lu) in cooperation with the European Investment Bank (EIB). It will be presented at the Award Ceremony on 19th November 2015 during the European Microfinance Week.

Successful applicants should demonstrate an effective strategy to increase both their own resilience (i.e. operations, staff, policy, control) and that of their clients (appropriate financial and non-financial services), while ensuring responses that provide both for the immediate, medium- and long-term needs of the latter. They must be active in the financial services sector and be based in a developing country. Various types of microfinance institutions are eligible including NGOs, cooperatives, MFI networks, investments funds, commercial banks, development banks, leasing firms, insurance companies, etc.

For complete details visit: http://bit.ly/1bHpj3D

(Accepting Nominations) The Equator Prize 2015

Deadline: 27 May 2015

Equator Prize 2015 Eligibility Requirements

In order to be eligible for the Equator Prize 2015, nominees must:

- Have been in operation for at least 3 years
- Be a community-based or local group, operating in a rural area
- Be located within a country receiving support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), excluding countries with a high level of development (see list of eligible countries below)

Eligible Initiatives

- Community-based organizations
- Community-based enterprises and cooperatives
- Community-based initiatives associated with conserved areas or other biological reserves
- Indigenous groups
- Women's groups
- Youth groups
- Non-governmental organizations

Selection Criteria

Equator Prize 2015 winners will be selected by a Technical Advisory Committee and an International Jury of Eminent Persons. Nominations will be assessed based on the following selection criteria:

Impact: Initiatives that have improved community wellbeing and local livelihoods through the protection, restoration and sustainable management of forests; sustainable agriculture and food security; community-based adaptation to climate change; or biodiversity conservation.

Indigenous and Community Empowerment: Initiatives demonstrating indigenous and local community leadership, the empowerment of local people, and the advancement of local and indigenous peoples rights over lands, territories and natural resources.

Partnerships: Initiatives that are forging effective partnerships with governments, the private sector, civil society, research institutes and other stakeholders.

Innovation and Transferability: Initiatives demonstrating new approaches that overcome prevailing constraints and offer knowledge, experience and lessons of potential relevance to other communities.

Empowerment of Women and Social Inclusion: Initiatives that promote the equality and empowerment of women and marginalized groups.

Resilience, Adaptability, and Self-Sufficiency: Initiatives demonstrating adaptability to environmental, social and economic change, resilience in the face of external pressures, and improved capacity for local self-sufficiency.

For complete details visit: http://bit.ly/1I1JCH4

(Youth Fellowship) Open Society Foundations Youth Exchange

Deadline: 15 May 2015

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Youth Fellowship Program (Youth Fellows) supports young activists and organizers as thought-leaders and allies in crafting solutions and new youth-focused approaches to open society challenges. The fellowship funds work that supports and enriches understanding of youth-led methodologies for change and inspires conversations within the Open Society Foundations and in the world.

Prospective fellows could be a youth activist tackling a critical open society issue in their respective region, or might be given for projects that are dedicated to creating tools or content-rich material (toolkits, studies, etc.) that more broadly supports youth work.

Fellowship applications should relate to at least one of the following areas of work:

- Youth mobilization and innovation in traditional human rights movements (i.e. the LGBTQ rights movement, disability rights, women's rights, drug policy reform, etc.)
- Youth participation and civic engagement particularly around elections
- Youth-led movements
- Youth-led work in the field of justice (for example, policing, pre-trial detention, incarcerated youth, or alternative sentencing)
- Youth tactics in advocacy and awareness-raising (for example new media, arts activism, peer-to-peer networks, etc.) around human rights issues
- Youth in closed or transitional societies

Fellows should take advantage of the considerable intellectual and logistical resources of the Open Society Foundations and expect to contribute meaningfully to the Foundations' thinking in return. While Youth Fellows will work outside of Open Society Foundations core offices, they will liaise with the Youth Exchange to identify opportunities for both in-person and virtual engagement with Open Society Foundations staff and partners. The

Youth Exchange will work with each individual Fellow to identify additional opportunities for the Fellow to learn from and collaborate with Open Society Foundations staff and partners through site visits, speaking engagements, and other fora.

Fellows may produce a variety of work products including publications such as reports or blogs, infographics and other visual content, innovative education and training resources and tools, the launch of new campaigns or organizations, or creation of artistic or cultural expression projects. They may also engage in activities such as hosting panel discussions, traveling to conferences, and presenting on their work in other public spaces.

ELIGIBILITY

- All applicants should be under the age of 30.
- While we will consider applicants who are currently employed by a civil society organization or university, we will request additional information to confirm that the individual is acting on their own in regards to their proposed project, and that their current employer is flexible with their independent role as an OSF Youth Fellow.
- The Youth Exchange accepts proposals from anywhere in the world, with a particular interest in proposals from the global south.
- Applicants should possess a deep understanding of their particular field and a record of successful movement-building initiatives, innovative project management experience, and/or experience in research/tools development.
- Applicants must be proficient in spoken English.

INELIGIBILITY

- Only individuals may apply. We will not accept proposals that are clearly on behalf of an NGO or other formal organization.
- Fellows may not use stipends to replace funding for activities or projects that a host organization is already implementing
- Enrollment for degree or non-degree study at academic institutions, including dissertation research
- Please note that under federal tax rules applicable to U.S. private foundations, the Open Society Foundations cannot support lobbying activities. Projects that include lobbying activities will not be funded.

FELLOWSHIP AWARD STRUCTURE

- Fellows will receive a stipend of $35,000-50,000 depending on experience and current income.
- The Fellowship will also cover some travel and project costs related to the Fellows' work to be discussed

SELECTION PROCESS

Applications will be reviewed by a selection committee comprised of Open Society Foundations staff. Reviewers consider whether the applicant's background, track record, and depth of expertise give reason to believe that the project will be successfully completed and whether the applicant offers persuasive evidence that the fellowship project will significantly inform the public and the Open Society community.

SELECTION AND NOTIFICATION CYCLE

- Applications must be submitted by May 15, 2015
- Applications will be reviewed in May/June 2015
- Applicants will be notified of their status in late June 2015
- Short-listed applicants will be invited for an in-person, Skype, or telephone interview by July 1, 2015
- The Fellows will be notified in late July 2015
- The Fellows will be announced in early August 2015

HOW TO APPLY

All interested applicants should complete the online application form listed on the fellowship homepage and submit supporting materials for consideration.

Applicants may submit a project proposal or other materials in a language other than English, as long as they also submit an English translation. Certified translations are strongly recommended.

Once the initial information has been entered, applicants receive login details and an ID number that allows them to make additions and revisions to the form until materials are submitted. The ID number should be quoted in any correspondence.

The program strongly encourages applicants to submit only electronic supporting materials. However, if applicants have hard copy materials that they feel are essential to the evaluation of their project, they can list these at the end of the project proposal. Fellowship staff will reach out to applicants should it be necessary to review these materials.

Note: Only applicants without Internet access may send an application by post. A PDF application form can be downloaded below. All others must apply online.

For more details visit: http://bit.ly/1JcQs9T

As part of the Firelight Foundation's Capacity Building Program, Firelight provides "Newsflashes" to share relevant resources and information with our active grantee-partners via weekly emails and via post on a monthly basis. We hope that by facilitating access to information for grassroots, community-focused organizations, programming for children and families, as well as organizational development, is enhanced. Past editions of the Firelight Newsflash can be found on our website: http://www.firelightfoundation.org/resources/newsflash

We welcome your comments, feedback and ideas for upcoming Newsflashes at newsletter@firelightfoundation.org

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