grantcraft
PRACTICAL WISDOM FOR GRANTMAKERS

Mapping Change

Using a Theory of Change to Guide Planning and Evaluation

Contents

Evaluation Techniques: A Series of Brief Guides

This guide was written by Anne Mackinnon and Natasha Amott, with assistance from Craig McGarvey. It is part of the GrantCraft series.

Publications and videos in this series are not meant to give instructions or prescribe solutions; rather, they are intended to spark ideas, stimulate discussion, and suggest possibilities. Comments about this guide or other GrantCraft materials may be sent to Jan Jaffe, project leader, at j.jaffe@grantcraft.org.

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What is a "theory of change"?

A theory of change describes a process of planned social change, from the assumptions that guide its design to the long-term goals it seeks to achieve. Grant makers who have created theories of change explain that having a theory helps them and their grantees draw logical connections between activities and outcomes. It helps them to articulate exactly what propositions and assumptions their work is testing — and therefore what they should be assessing in their evaluation plan.

Grant makers, grantees, and theory of change consultants seem to share a common sense of the process for developing a theory of change. The work often starts by gathering together the key planners of an action or program, a group that may involve grant makers, project designers, evaluators, community residents, and other constituents. The theory unfolds as the planners work backward from the long-term impact they're seeking to achieve through specific goals, strategies, and milestones. At each step, they carefully probe the assumptions that underpin their beliefs about what will work and why and how it is likely to have the effect they anticipate.

What does "theory of change" really mean, in practice? Grant makers who use the term may be describing anything from a detailed map to a general storyline. What they agree on is that a theory of change is valuable if it helps them and their grantees understand the relationship between the problems they're addressing and the strategies they're using to get the work done. As one former grant maker put it, "When you're clear about your theory, it's easier to see what's possible and what's not possible to achieve with the intervention you've chosen to support. It helps you think about what other inputs might be needed and whether your input might fit in a catalytic place. And it helps you examine whether or not your intervention will be powerful enough."

At the formal end of the theory-of-change spectrum, one grant maker worked with a grantee to develop a seven-page flow chart that was used to test ideas for a field-building initiative with colleagues at a large foundation. Starting with assumptions about the environment in which grantees are doing their work, they diagrammed four initiative goals, each supported by a set of assumptions about why and how that particular goal would be important. They then broke each goal down into discrete objectives and grant making strategies, along with key evaluation questions and milestones that would indicate progress toward each goal. Interestingly, among the assumptions mapped were the grant maker's own active role in an emerging field.

More informally, another grant maker explained the theory behind a program to improve conditions for low-income children: "The basic idea was that children do well when their families do well, and families do well when they're supported in neighborhoods, and being a supportive neighborhood means having opportunities for families to connect to economic opportunity, social networks, and quality services and supports. . . . It was a different way to frame the problem. The problem isn't families; the problem is that families aren't connected." That insight led the foundation's program staff to ask local teams of residents to design interventions to help families connect to systems of support in their own neighborhoods.

Another example comes from a grant maker at a foundation that sees its own theory of change as "a basic set of principles or values about the way we do our work." By articulating those principles and values (mainly having to do with the importance of ensuring that poor people are involved in designing poverty reduction programs), and by doing some "prodding and critical analysis" to test the commitment of prospective grantees to those same values, the foundation is better able to "see if the match is right."

Where the examples in this guide come from

This guide draws on the experiences of grant makers, grantees, and consultants who have used theories of change to plan, guide, and evaluate their work. Our contributors come from a variety of fields, including education, job training, local economic development, international human rights, health care, and management. Their experiences with theory of change are also widely varied: we talked with long-time users and newcomers, professional evaluators and nonprofit executives, people who have written about theory of change and people who aren't quite sure what the term really means. Our goal has been to gather and share knowledge about an area of practice that many grant makers say they find both intriguing and confusing. A complete list of those who contributed to this guide is on page 11.

Theory of change or logic model?

Some people use the terms "theory of change" and "logic model" interchangeably. Others say that it is important to maintain a distinction between the two. What do the two terms mean? And what's the difference between them?

- A **theory of change** takes a wide view of a desired change, carefully probing the assumptions behind each step in what may be a long and complex process. Articulating a theory of change often entails thinking through all the steps along a path toward a desired change, identifying the preconditions that will enable (and possibly inhibit) each step, listing the activities that will produce those conditions, and explaining why those activities are likely to work. It is often, but not always, presented as a flow chart.
- A **logic model** takes a more narrowly practical look at the relationship between inputs and results. It is often presented as a table listing the steps from inputs or resources through the achievement of a desired program goal. Some grant makers use separate logic models to chart the implementation components of theory of change.

A grant maker who worked for several years on a program to improve the quality of life in low-income neighborhoods clarifies the distinction: "Logic models connect programmatic activities to client or consumer outcomes. But a theory of change also specifies how to create the right kinds of partnerships, hold the right forums, do the right kinds of technical assistance, and help people operate more collaboratively and be more results focused."

As one evaluator noted, between the two definitions are many "hybrid approaches that are less simplistic than traditional logic models but not as comprehensive as theories of change." The right model will depend on many factors, including the complexity of the project, the time line, and the operating style of both grant maker and grantee.

For more on the two methods and how they can be used singly or together, see *Theories of Change and Logic Models: Telling Them Apart*, at www.theoryofchange.org. The website, a project of ActKnowledge and the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, includes many tools and resources for creating theories of change. For an illustration of what a theory of change and logic model look like when they are written out, see page 8.

Getting Past the Evaluation Jargon

As grant makers, we want evaluation and assessment techniques that help document and analyze the work we support in ways that are meaningful to our foundations, grantees, and wider field or community. To help grant makers weigh the advantages of different approaches, GrantCraft offers the **Evaluation Techniques Series: A Series of Brief Guides**. Each guide explains the basics of one technique, answers common questions about its use, describes how some grant makers are applying it, and includes a list of resources for readers who want to learn more. See **www.grantcraft.org** for other titles in the series.

Why would a grant maker develop and use a theory of change?

For a foundation, one grant maker explained, a theory of change is a powerful way to promote "accountability and transparency. It's a way to explain why we fund what we are funding." Applied to evaluation, it can help grant makers and grantees alike know if their work is achieving the changes they intend. Theory of change is one tool grant makers use to help themselves and their grantees understand change, manage the change process, and assess the effects of their work.

The concepts and techniques that we now associate with theory of change began to emerge from the work of evaluators in the 1970s and 1980s. The term "theory of change" came into use in the early 1990s, largely in the context of foundation-supported "comprehensive community initiatives," or CCIs. Dedicated to improving the quality of life in low-income neighborhoods, usually with the involvement of neighborhood residents, CCIs tended to be too broad in their strategies and goals, too susceptible to unexpected inputs and events, and too likely to change course in midstream to be assessed with more traditional evaluation methods. Theory of change gave CCIs an inclusive method for planning their work, involving and getting buy-in from many constituencies, and deciding on milestones along the way toward neighborhood transformation.

Grant makers have recognized the value of using theories of change in a wide range of projects and with varying degrees of intensity. Some foundations use the approach to shape their operating principles and design their own program strategies. Some use it to help grantees or grant seekers design projects, manage organizational change, or plan for replication and growth. Many find it essential in situations where the desired outcome is difficult to define or quantify — better neighborhood quality of life, for example, or a more effective nonprofit organization, or lasting impact in a foundation's field of interest.

Practically speaking, a theory of change is helpful because it enables grant makers and program planners to accomplish several things:

- **Establish common principles and vocabulary.** Reflecting on work she did to help grantees develop a theory of change, one grant maker said, "It provides a common language to talk together among yourselves and to people out in the public about what you're doing and how you're doing it." A consultant who helped plan a new international fund for social justice made a related point: "Without a clearly articulated theory of change," he explained, "planning is almost inevitably *ad hoc*, prone to undue influence by key individuals and in danger of leading an organization in directions not necessarily focused on the mission."

- **Make implicit assumptions explicit.** Most people have a theory of change that drives their work, though it is often rooted in implicit assumptions that haven't necessarily been vetted openly or logically thought through. One grant maker, for example, invited a grantee to develop a theory of change for a project to expand an award-winning recovery program for people with drug addictions. As the conversation unfolded, the grantee's staff realized that they had always assumed that a 30-day program was the right length of time for every individual's recovery. Fairly quickly, they began to question their assumptions: How, they wondered, had their program settled on 30 days in the first place? Would being flexible about the number of days enable them to treat more individuals successfully? The grant maker remarked, "They looked at their program through a different lens and said, 'Our outcomes are good, but why aren't they better? How can we make them better?'"

- **Identify resources and check them for adequacy.** Listing the myriad factors that could contribute to change tends to highlight outside resources, financial and otherwise, that might need to be tapped. One grant maker said that developing a theory of change helped her and her grantees "be smart about encouraging some sort of infrastructure development, not taking on all the responsibility of building everything ourselves. We needed to bring together a strategic alliance of partners — schools along with hospitals along with businesses along with government — who were willing to be co-responsible for a common set of results." Another said that developing a theory of change for the foundation's own work helped her and her colleagues think about what level of "impact, influence, and leverage" they could reasonably expect to have with the financial resources at their disposal.

- **Design more realistic plans of action.** An evaluator who often works with grantees explained, "I think the value added of theory of change is that it really forces people to question their own assumptions about whether what they're trying to do will work." "A theory of change is not a program plan," said one grant maker, "but it establishes habits of mind that let you create a good program plan."

As another grant maker put it, theory of change helps to develop a program that is "plausible, doable, and testable."

- **Clarify lines of responsibility.** Because a theory of change helps surface the implicit nature of a program, both grantee and grant maker end up with a very clear idea of what they're accountable for. A grantee recounted that developing a theory of change "pushed us to say what outcomes we were willing to hold ourselves accountable for, meaning that we would hold ourselves accountable to meeting them, to tracking them, and all of that."

- **Create more meaningful evaluations.** The director of a foundation said that evaluation at his organization used to take a very traditional approach, in which external evaluators would essentially "make a scrapbook of some snapshots that looked back in time against some of the work that had been done." It was not a dynamic tool for program officers to work with, nor was it very helpful in advancing the foundation's mission. After program officers became involved in working with grantees to develop theories of change, evaluation became more integrated within their daily and ongoing work, sparking regular moments of organizational learning.

- **Maintain healthy skepticism.** "A theory," said one evaluator, "is something you test. Ideally, its components are based in empirical research, but — and this is the point — the theory is not proven." A theory of change can be valuable, she explained, for helping grant makers and grantees check back over time to see if the elements they believed would be crucial have actually made their anticipated contributions.

Framing evaluation questions

By making explicit the interrelated strands a complex initiative, a theory of change can draw out the questions a grant maker will want to be asking over time, either through formal evaluations or more informal monitoring. For example, an actual theory of change for a national field-building initiative posits that long-term success will depend on expanding knowledge in a relatively new area of practice. Strategically, therefore, the grant maker expects to commission a range of scholarly and applied research, then support activities to help people in the field absorb and aggregate what is learned.

The theory of change lists three overarching evaluation questions regarding that particular strand of the work:

1. Is strategic research informing and improving policy interventions in regulatory, legalistic, and judicial settings?
2. What progress is being made toward the development of frameworks, indicators of progress, and other knowledge tools?
3. To what extent are professionalized policy organizations and grassroots groups sharing strategic research, and finding it helpful?

The theory of change also lists "milestones" or "indicators" to watch:

- Mechanisms to coordinate, integrate, and aggregate scholarly work in the field
- Evidence of tools to unify and advance the field
- Increase in research that cuts across different policy issues and disciplines
- Evidence of vehicles for transfer and dissemination of new knowledge to policy advocates and grassroots groups
- Evidence of greater reliance among policy advocates and grassroots groups on strategic research
- A nationally recognized and diverse set of public interest scholars begin to emerge and advance the field's case in a variety of forums, disciplines and institutions

A mini-case study: Theory of change as the basis for strategic planning

As part of its strategy to help high-performing nonprofits grow and expand, one foundation decided to support in-depth business planning for its grantee organizations. A prominent consulting firm signed on to help. But first, the foundation asked many of its grantees to develop their own theories of change.

"What we discovered," said a grant maker who was involved in designing the strategy, "is that business planning somehow doesn't quite work unless it is grounded in a theory of change for the organization. In essence, a business plan is a delivery blueprint — how you're going to deliver social good to the world. But if you don't have a theory of change through which that social good is going to be created, a business plan lacks the appropriate level of focus on the creation of social value. A business plan will look at many other things, but it won't necessarily look at social value."

To find out more about the process, GrantCraft talked with the executive director of a grantee organization that provides employment services to ex-offenders and with the facilitator who led her and her team through the creation of a theory of change.

How did the grantee produce the theory of change?

Over three days of conversation, a team (made up of the organization's executive director, four program directors, and two representatives from the consulting firm that would later help with the business planning) clarified the grantee's target population and the objectives it sought for its clients, then worked backward through a series of questions about the assumptions underlying their work. Their goal was to construct two theories of change: a program theory of change and an organizational theory of change.

The program theory of change articulated why the organization delivers services in the way it does to its particular population of clients — in other words, what the organization hopes its clients will achieve, and how and why its services foster those outcomes. The organizational theory of change articulated "what the organization must do, and do differently, in order to optimize its ability to deliver its program theory of change," as the grant maker who facilitated the conversation put it.

In the process, the grantee participants found that they had to specify four things as clearly as possible:

- who, exactly, was in their client population
- what outcomes they were aiming for, and how those outcomes could be recognized (using indicators) and measured
- what services they delivered to help their clients reach the desired outcomes
- the implications for the organization in terms of internal structures and operations, additional staffing, and support

Each item was crucial to the business plan they would subsequently develop to guide the organization's growth.

What was accomplished by constructing a theory of change?

"I have to admit that I was surprised by how helpful it was," the executive director recounts. Before the theory of change work, she says, she would have had easy answers to many of the questions they explored: "I would have said, 'Yeah, of course I can describe our client population!" Yet it took the group several hours to agree on a firm definition. "It was around the edges that there wasn't agreement," the grant maker reflected, "but managing the edges of your target population is the most challenging thing in any human service agency."

In the end, the grantee — and the foundation — attained the following:

- **A clear picture of organizational purpose.** As the grantee remarked, "I liked that it made big definitions become really concrete." Gaining consensus among themselves was valuable but also a little unraveling at times for the members of the nonprofit team. One of the most important "ah-ha" moments came after someone said that the organization assumed that helping ex-offenders get and keep jobs would reduce recidivism. At that point, they realized that their program doesn't actually do anything specifically to address recidivism. "So," the facilitator asked, "do you want to hold yourselves accountable for reducing recidivism rates?" In the long run, the organization decided to focus on holding themselves accountable for their clients' continuing employment, but also to track recidivism to see if their assumption – that getting and keeping a job reduces recidivism – holds up.
- **A stronger sense of organizational needs.** A strong theory of change helps only if the organization has the appropriate resources to carry it out. In this case, the grantee talked through the staffing requirements — programmatic, supervisory, and administrative — associated with refining and expanding their program model. As the program officer said, the group recognized as they planned that "everything has an organizational consequence."

- **A greater capacity for analysis.** For the foundation, one attraction of the theory of change approach is its ability to encourage a culture of learning and analysis within grantee organizations: "We think that the traditional approach of working with grantees, in which an external evaluator is hired to design evaluation methods, create the data collection system, analyze the data, and develop a report, is not a way that furthers the work of non-profit organizations. It doesn't build capacity or improve performance management."

- **A blueprint for evaluation.** The grantee organization is currently participating in an impact evaluation of a number of workforce development programs. Outcomes, indicators, and measures identified as part of its theory of change have been incorporated into that study. The organization expects that the evaluation will help them to address some fundamental questions about program efficacy and the performance measures they should be tracking to manage and improve their operations.

To learn more . . .

Several organizations offer helpful information on theory of change — and even some templates that grant makers or grantees may find helpful for creating their own theory of change or logic model.

- **Theory of Change (www.theoryofchange.org)**, a collaborative project of ActKnowledge and the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. This comprehensive website offers a wide array of background information, tools, and sample documents that can help grant makers and grantees get started with theory of change.

- **W. K. Kellogg Foundation (www.wkkf.org).** The *Logic Model Development Guide*, a companion to the foundation's *Evaluation Handbook*, focuses on how to develop and use a logic model.

- **Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (www.geofunders.org).** GEO provides links to various resources on theory of change, including the INSP Theory of Change Development Tool and GEO's own emerging organizational theory of change.

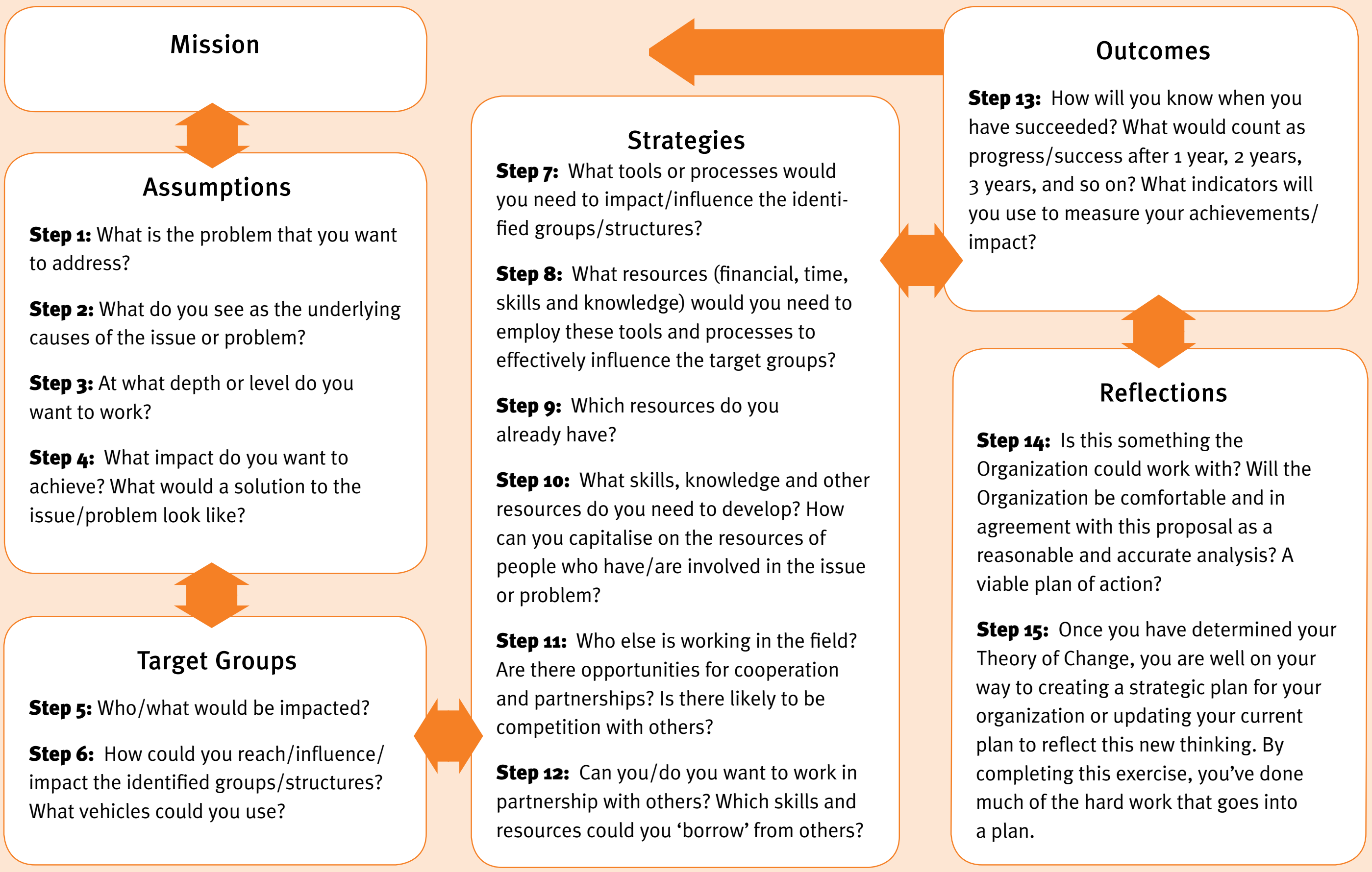
- **Annie E. Casey Foundation (www.aecf.org).** *Theory of Change: A Practical Tool for Action, Results and Learning*, the foundation's handbook for community organizations involved with its Making Connections program, is available on its website.

- **International Network on Strategic Philanthropy (www.insp.efc.be).** The *Theory of Change Development Tool* and accompanying manual may be downloaded from the INSP website.

Picture this: writing a theory of change or a logic model

Theories of change and logic models come in many shapes and sizes, but here's a general idea of their respective formats.

Theories of change are usually illustrated in dynamic (and often quite complex) formats, using boxes and arrows that help to diagram a process and explain how its elements fit together — and why it should work. The following example, from the International Network on Strategic Philanthropy's *Theory of Change Development Tool*, gives an overview of the steps involved in creating a theory of change, questions to ask, and how the information (and relationships among the information) can be visualized and depicted. It is available at www.insp.efc.be.



Logic models are often shown as tables, with headings that help planners describe a specific process by breaking it down into its logical components. Here's an example from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's *Logic Model Development Guide*, available at www.wkkf.org. The guide also shows other sample formats.

Resources	**Activities**	**Outputs**	**Short- & Long-Term Outcomes**	**Impact**
In order to accomplish our set of activities we will need the following:	In order to address our problem or asset we will accomplish the following activities:	We expect that once accomplished these activities will produce the following evidence or service delivery:	We expect that if accomplished these activities will lead to the following changes in 1-3 then 4-6 years:	We expect that if accomplished these activities will lead to the following changes in 7-10 years:

Common questions about theory of change

Is creating a theory of change something you do inside your foundation or something you ask your grantees to do?

It's both. Foundations large and small have used theories of change to clarify their own goals and to set a path that everyone understands and endorses. According to the executive director of a small Midwest foundation, creating a theory of change sharpened his organization's strategy and turned its staff into a real team: "Six or eight months ago, we had a collection of people who occupied the same space with very good intent, and with the desire to do good work, but with no chance of doing it because we didn't have a commonly held view of our belief systems, what our work was, how we do our work, how we relate to each other, and so on."

Moreover, foundations now routinely ask their grantees to produce theories of change to map the work the foundation is supporting. Some grant makers build the process into proposal development, while others require grantees to create theories of change after grants are made and projects are getting under way. It's not unusual for the grant makers managing a multi-site or especially complex program to develop an overall theory of change, then support the creation of further, more specific theories of change by individual grantees or sites.

How can a theory of change help with evaluation?

A good theory of change can clarify what should be measured, when, how, and by whom. One grant maker explained that constructing a theory of change poses four crucial questions that can lead to an effective evaluation: "Is the intervention meaningful? Is it plausible? Is it doable by this particular organization? And is it measurable?" Those questions apply whether the "intervention" is a large foundation's entire grant making strategy or a local afterschool project funded by a small family foundation.

To make sure the theory lends itself to evaluation, a consultant who often works with foundations offers two pieces of advice: First, emphasize the importance of "basic quantitative data collection to capture relevant figures, such as number of beneficiaries, money spent, numbers hired, etcetera." Second, identify points of inquiry at which you can reasonably expect to see specific outcomes, focusing on program elements that link most directly to your long-term desired impacts. Some of those points may occur at shorter intervals, while others may apply only after several years. Again, these suggestions are equally relevant to foundation-wide and project-specific theories of change.

How do grant makers help grantees produce theories of change?

Some grant makers work with grantees to develop theories of change, while others bring in outside consultants. The decision usually comes down to the degree of expertise of the foundation's own staff, and how willing the foundation is to pay for outside support. Larger foundations often deploy their evaluation staff to help grantees construct theories of change, usually in collaboration with program staff.

One foundation invests in a two-step training process for applicants who have submitted a letter of intent and been given the green light to develop a proposal. The foundation pays an evaluator to work with five to six grantees at a time, with at least two people from each organization participating in the training. In the first training session, teams develop their theories of change; in the second, they look at what evaluation techniques to use. The foundation spends about $25,000 each year to train approximately 24 grantees receiving a total of $1 million in grants.

The same evaluator is available to answer questions and review grantees' proposals prior to submission to the foundation. "The consultant is the right messenger" for asking the detailed questions necessary to produce a theory of change, the grant maker noted, because he is perceived as neutral and can therefore talk candidly with grantees about their work and the problems they're likely to encounter.

A grant maker involved with a large, multi-site program helped grantees become familiar with theory of change by using it in program planning before urging them to apply it in evaluation: "We soft pedaled it with the sites for the first couple of years so that folks wouldn't get caught up in evaluation anxiety. We told people, 'Don't worry about that. It's coming when we get clear about what the work is.'"

Do grantees' theories of change help foundations assess the impact of their grant making?

Most foundations that ask grantees to produce theories of change also use those documents as blueprints for reporting on the progress of their work. According to one grant maker, he and his colleagues compare reports against milestones set out in the grantee's theory of change, conduct regular site visits, and catch up with grantees regularly. They also use outside evaluators to interview grantees toward the end of a multi-year grant period.

Yet developing a reporting format that colleagues agree on and that's also workable for grantees can take some discussion. "Some people felt like qualitative information is just fine, and so we'll collect vignettes each year," said one grant maker regarding the conversation inside her foundation, "but we also had people who wanted much more hard data. The reality is, we're ultimately going to get something in the middle. And that's probably fine, given the groups we're funding and the kind of work we're doing."

Even harder is figuring out what to do with grantee results in the aggregate. What do those results say overall about the effectiveness of a foundation's grant making? One program officer recalled that he and his coworkers tried to look at the results of all their grants together but found it difficult because every program was a little different. Another grant maker acknowledged this same difficulty, noting a lack of agreement about whether to "lump" or "split" the accomplishments of grantees: "The lumpers would like to see us find ways to aggregate the accomplishments of our grantees across the portfolio," he explained, "and the splitters say it's impossible because each grantee is unique. This has not been resolved on our staff or with our board."

Are there times when developing a theory of change isn't a good idea?

As the mini-case study illustrates, creating a theory of change is mainly helpful for articulating and thoroughly probing the assumptions behind an intervention or program model, thereby laying a foundation for more practical implementation planning. "In some ways," said one consultant, "it's a critical thinking exercise. It's theoretical. If what you need is an instrumental plan, a logic model is probably more appropriate." Several people also mentioned that developing a theory of change can be hard and time-consuming work, "maybe not what you want to insist on with your grantees" when the grant is relatively small, the proposed work fairly straightforward, or the organization already stretched thin.

What lessons should grant makers keep in mind if they decide to use a theory of change approach?

Grant makers offered five general types of advice:

- **Make time for your own learning.** Some foundations adopt theory of change to learn about the effectiveness of their own programs; others are curious about the trajectory of the work they fund. In either case, adopting a theory of change approach requires a strong commitment to learning. Says one grant maker, support within the foundation ideally starts with the board: "Do you as a foundation even want to do this work? That means having a board that's interested in this information."

  Beyond the board, grant makers who want to use theory of change need to develop knowledge and buy-in among their colleagues. As one grant maker remarked, "Good theory of change work is labor intensive, and consequently you need not only to have the staff to do it, but also . . . you need to train staff." A program officer working in the evaluation unit of a large foundation discovered that they needed to carve out time for joint reflection between program and evaluation staff. Once they did that, she said, "we all ended up with a lot more appreciation for how to help theory of change happen on the ground."

- **Communicate your expectations clearly to grantees.** Several grant makers stressed that they are careful to communicate their expectations upfront by explaining why having a theory of change is important, what the process is like, and what to expect from it. Grantees, one grant maker explains, need a "clear notion of what it is we're asking people to take seriously." Another noted that he always emphasizes to his grantees that articulating anticipated outcomes — a crucial part of developing a theory of change — is not the same as "negotiating a contract." The real purpose is to be "transparent around the objectives, the goals, and not that if you're off by a percentage point we won't renew the grant."

  And remember, said one grant maker, that using a theory of change may defy grantees' assumptions about what it means to work with a funder. In particular, noted one grant maker, it requires a closer partnership (and more transparency about weaknesses and potential problems) than most organizations are accustomed to: "The factor that we didn't weigh as heavily as we should have is that it takes a while for people to see that the foundation is not operating the same way it always has."

- **Listen to grantees and adapt to their needs.** Some grant makers also raised the reality that the ideas and process involved in theory of change work don't come easily to all grant makers and grantees. As one described it, "Logic models, linear thinking, outcome data, etc., are things we in foundations like to have because they make looking at the variety of programs we fund much easier. However, these are not necessarily valued by everyone….We have to understand that our grant making cannot be one size fits all." Flexibility is important. One grant maker has experimented with having grantees represent their theories of change in different ways, including tables, flowcharts, and simple written documents, in order to find the format that works best for them.

- **Be creative and inclusive about getting people to the table.** One grant maker used a collaborative process to encourage two groups from different parts of the country to sharpen their strategies for addressing the problems of neighborhoods just outside municipal boundaries whose residents, many of them poor, do not receive basic city services. Recognizing "the importance of collaborations between different ethnic communities and of evolving legal theories among advocates from different contexts," the foundation brought together civil rights lawyers and community leaders — African Americans from North Carolina and Latinos from California — for a series of meetings to discuss and refine their theories of change. "Some of the strictly legally focused attorneys felt bothered by our push for those meetings, doubting that they would have any impact," she recalled. "They were proven wrong and proudly say so now." One lesson, from her point of view, is that "people affected by the problem we are seeking to solve have great wisdom, passion, and practical suggestions. We sometimes come up with twisted or ineffective solutions without their participation."

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