How to plan a theory of change

inFocus IMM Guides

The theory of change technique is used by organisations around the world to map out how their products and services lead to outcomes and impact. Developing a theory of change helps to explore the assumptions behind how this change happens, and where activities fit in the wider context of society and the work of other stakeholders. You can see an example of a fictional theory of change on the following page. When planning a theory of change we recommend considering the following:

- **What is the purpose of your theory of change?**

  There are a number of different reasons for developing a theory of change that can affect who to involve in the process and its final format. It could form the basis for your impact measurement and management (IMM), help you to design a new product or service, or be used for communication and/or for fundraising purposes.

- **What is the scope of your theory of change?**

  A theory of change can be developed at different levels – e.g. for a specific product or service, an organisation, or a network or funder supporting multiple organisations.

- **Who will you involve in developing your theory of change?**

  Ideally, different stakeholders would be involved in developing your theory of change to ensure it is as representative as possible of the people and organisations you work with.

- **How will you develop your theory of change?**

  There are a variety of different methods you can use to create your theory of change, from participatory workshops through to surveys and focus groups. Ask questions to gather feedback on your theory of change.

- **Who will lead on the development of your theory of change?**

  The development of your theory of change could be led by a staff member or volunteer internally, or an external consultant with theory of change experience that could help to guide discussions and compile it.

- **Is there existing evidence for the theory of change?**

  Explore what evidence currently exists for your theory of change outside of your organisation – e.g. in academic research, other evaluations, or other theories of change.

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