

Change and Implementation AT A GLANCE

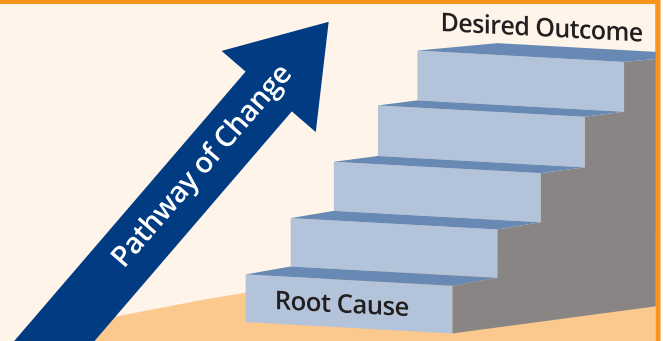
Theory of Change



A theory of change serves as a valuable tool to illustrate a series of changes that must occur to address a problem or need. Without a theory of change reflective of a racial equity vision and developed in partnership with lived experts, agencies may move down the wrong path when trying to solve a problem.

Theory of Change

A theory of change includes a series of causal links (conditions, changes, short-term outcomes) that must unfold to achieve the desired outcome. Together, these links make up the pathway of change from the root cause(s) of the problem to the long-term outcome.



Structural racism is at the root of racial and ethnic disparities and is directly linked to problems child welfare systems struggle to tackle. It is critical to consider its impact throughout theory of change development.

What It Takes to Get It Done

- Gather information on the problem statement, root cause(s), and the populations to be served
- Identify a long-term desired outcome
- Develop the pathway(s) of change (series of causal links)
- Define actions that could bring about needed changes
- Document assumptions and rationale

Get the Most Out of Your Theory of Change

As you gather information:

- ◆ Consult with people who understand and have experience with child welfare, racial oppression, and the issue being explored

As you identify a long-term outcome:

- ◆ Ask youth and families with lived experience what success looks like to them
- ◆ Explore who will benefit the most—and who will benefit the least—from your team's vision for change, and identify how this learning will inform inclusion in the change effort

As you develop the pathway(s) of change and define actions:

- ◆ Identify how the perspectives and priorities of youth and families with lived experience will inform what changes are needed and how they should unfold
- ◆ Identify how actions will reduce disparities in outcomes
- ◆ Consider multiple intersecting factors (race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, gender/gender identity) as well as different domains (structures, systems, institutions) in theory of change development
- ◆ Examine potential unintended consequences that could result from each link in the pathway of change

As you document assumptions and rationale:

- ◆ Document how your theory of change reflects a racial equity vision
- ◆ Identify how your theory of change addresses structural racism and its impact on outcomes
- ◆ Ask your partners, including community members and lived experts, if your theory of change “tells a story” in relatable language, and make recommended changes to ensure that your theory of change can be understood and shared by diverse groups

Key Takeaways

A well-constructed theory of change:

- ◆ Serves as a roadmap that illustrates the needed steps to move from a problem to a desired outcome
- ◆ Sets the foundation for selecting an appropriate intervention
- ◆ Helps partners get on the same page about what needs to happen to reach shared goals
- ◆ Guides strategic planning and later evaluation

Data, critical thinking, and input from lived experts and other partners contribute to the development of a sound theory of change.

A theory of change and logic model are different but related tools:

Theory of Change

- ◆ Illustrates the pathway from the root cause(s) of the problem to the desired outcome
- ◆ Helps explain how and why change will occur
- ◆ Is generally developed before selecting a specific program or strategy
- ◆ Supports intervention selection

Logic Model

- ◆ Presents program inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes in a structured, linear way
- ◆ Helps teams understand expected results
- ◆ Is generally developed after selecting a specific program or strategy
- ◆ Supports monitoring and evaluation

Looking for more?

- ◆ Explore additional [theory of change resources](#).
- ◆ See [Change and Implementation in Practice](#) for more information about other change and implementation topics.
- ◆ Find questions for consideration at each phase of the process in "[Focusing on Race Equity Throughout Change and Implementation.](#)"
- ◆ Learn more about the integration of lived expertise in "[Strategies for Authentic Integration of Family and Youth Voice in Child Welfare.](#)"

Key Change and Implementation Topics



Click on each icon in the Change and Implementation graphic for more information.

Once the theory of change has been developed, it is time to consider which [interventions](#) will help achieve desired outcomes.

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