Child welfare agencies continually strive to achieve better outcomes by developing, implementing, and evaluating practices and programs. A theory of change is a valuable tool that child welfare agencies can use to illustrate the pathway from where they are now to where they would like to be. This workbook and video series are part of a collection of resources designed to help agencies use a theory of change to achieve stakeholder buy-in about what needs to happen to achieve shared goals, select the right intervention, guide strategic planning, and inform evaluation and continuous improvement. Use this workbook to further your understanding of concepts and prepare to move learning into action with your team.

Cultivating Skills – Theory of Change

Getting Started and Understanding the Theory of Change Brief

This workbook is designed to support knowledge and skill development as you listen, reflect, and discuss what you have learned throughout the process. Use this workbook to spark ideas and collect your thoughts as you move through the following activities:

1. Reading the "Change and Implementation in Practice: Theory of Change" brief
2. Watching the video series on the essential functions for developing a theory of change
3. Viewing recorded problem exploration webinars and discussing with your team:
   a. "Don't Get Lost in the Forest: Using a Theory of Change to Set a Clear Path to Your Agency's Desired Outcome"

What's in the "Theory of Change" brief?

The brief offers an overview of step 4 in the Capacity Building Center for States' 12-step Change and Implementation Process, including:

1. Understanding why theory of change is important and key terms
2. Differentiating between a theory of change and a logic model
3. Identifying characteristics of a sound theory of change
4. Developing the pathway of change, or causal links, for one or multiple root causes
5. Defining actions and documenting theory of change assumptions and rationale

How can it help you in your work?

The "Change and Implementation in Practice: Theory of Change" brief offers user-friendly guidance on implementation concepts and their use to support child welfare system and practice improvements. The brief may be used as a foundational tool to develop a sound theory of change.

Linking the concepts in the series to your everyday work and experiences is an important element of understanding how to use this knowledge and these skills in practice. **Please review the following questions and consider your responses <u>before</u> viewing the videos.**

Think about a time when you had a goal in mind but were unsure how to achieve it.	
How did you decide what actions to take?	
Did you achieve the goal? How did you know?	

Video Series

As you work through each video in the series, use the questions and activities in each section to reflect on what you have learned.

Function 1: Gather Information on the Problem Statement, Root Cause(s), and Target Population

Before viewing the videos, consider your responses to the following questions:

Have you ever had a theory about how to fix a problem? How did you know what needed to change?	
Think about a time when you had a plan to change something. How did you know your plan could work? How did you know you chose the right plan to address the problem you were trying to fix?	
What made it hard to implement the changes you were trying to make? What got in your way? What did you do about it?	

After viewing "Function 1: Gather Information on the Problem Statement, Root Cause(s), and Target Population," please answer the following additional questions before moving on. Appendix A provides additional reference information on the problem exploration process for this example.

Consider the following example of a problem statement, root cause(s), and target population:
Problem statement:
  - The agency is not meeting performance standards for providing services that meet the needs of children and families, specifically fathers.

Root causes to address:
  1. Caseworkers lack knowledge and skills related to engagement of noncustodial fathers.
  2. Agency culture focuses more on mothers and does not equally value the potential role of fathers.

Target population:
  - Noncustodial fathers

What do you need to know about this problem statement and the root causes to feel comfortable using them as the foundation for your theory of change?	
What questions, if any, do you have about how to gather the information?	

Function 2: Identify a Long-Term Outcome

After viewing "Function 2: Identify a Long-Term Outcome," please complete the following reflection questions before moving on:

Consider the following long-term outcome for our example: **Long-term outcome:** ◆ Improve engagement of noncustodial fathers in service planning over the next 2 years, ensuring they receive the services that meet their needs.	
What behaviors or organizational changes does the outcome represent?	
Is the outcome specific, achievable, and understandable? Why or why not?	
Does it relate directly to the problem?	
Does the long-term outcome seem realistic? What questions would you need to ask to determine if this is realistic for a team?	
What questions, if any, do you have about identifying a long-term objective?	

Function 3: Develop a Pathway of Change

After viewing "Function 3: Develop a Pathway of Change," please complete the following activity and reflection questions before moving on. Appendix A provides additional reference information on how the team got through the problem exploration process to identify the problem statement, root cause(s), and target population, including contextual factors.

Using our example in functions 1 and 2 of this workbook and the example for root cause 1 below, develop a pathway of change for root cause 2. (Use as many causal links as needed to get to the long-term outcome.)
Problem statement:
    ◆   The agency is not meeting performance standards for providing services that meet the needs of children and families, specifically fathers.
Root causes to address:
    1.   Caseworkers lack knowledge and skills related to engagement of noncustodial fathers.
    2.   Agency culture focuses more on mothers and does not equally value the potential role of fathers.

	Root cause 1: *Caseworkers lack knowledge and skills related to engagement of noncustodial fathers.*	Root cause 2: *Agency culture focuses more on mothers and does not equally value the potential role of fathers.*
Causal link 1	*Caseworkers understand the benefits of fathers in children's lives and the importance of engaging fathers in case planning*	
Causal link 2	*SO THAT: Caseworkers conduct frequent and quality contacts with all family members, including noncustodial fathers*	
Causal link 3	*SO THAT: Caseworkers conduct comprehensive assessments to accurately assess fathers' strengths and needs*	
Causal link 4	*SO THAT: Assessments are used to identify individualized and tailored services to meet fathers' needs*	
	AND: Services that match fathers' identified needs are available	
Causal link 5 (if needed)		

Long-term outcome: Improve engagement of noncustodial fathers in service planning, ensuring they receive the services that meet their needs.

What method did you choose to develop the pathway of change?	
Do each of the causal links or steps in the pathway depend on each other? Ask why or why not at each link to check.	
Are any of the causal links you developed closer to strategies? Remember to focus on desired conditions or results, and consider who or what will change and how much change is needed at each link.	
Are there connections between the causal links in the two root causes? How might this help to define actions that address both root causes?	
Can you think of any indicators that might help to measure the success of this theory? What are they?	

Consider your own experience in developing a pathway of change. What method worked best for you? Do you have any examples you might want to share?	
What questions, if any, do you have about developing a pathway of change?	

Function 4: Define Actions

After viewing "Function 4: Define Actions," please complete the following activity and reflection questions before moving on:

Consider our workbook example and the two pathways, and take time to review the causal links you developed for root cause 2 in function 3, as well as the contributing factors in appendix A. What example actions for each causal link in root cause 2 might bring about the needed change?

Remember, it might be helpful to think about actions that align with one or more of the dimensions of capacity: resources, infrastructure, knowledge and skills, culture and climate, engagement and partnerships. Keep in mind that you are not identifying an intervention or program yet. For now, define what it will take to address the causal link and achieve the short-term outcome. Think in terms of "if we do x, we can achieve y."

Causal Links for Root Cause 1	Root cause 1: *Caseworkers lack knowledge and skills related to engagement of noncustodial fathers.*	Causal Links for Root Cause 2	Root cause 2: Agency culture focuses more on mothers and does not equally value the potential role of fathers.
Causal link 1: *Caseworkers understand the benefits of fathers in children's lives and the importance of engaging fathers in case planning*	**Potential Actions:** *Review training and coaching systems around case planning to ensure that values about engaging fathers are included.* *Review hiring policies and procedures to ensure they reflect the knowledge and skills needed to effectively engage fathers.*		
Causal link 2: *Caseworkers conduct frequent and quality contacts with all family members, including noncustodial fathers*	**Potential Actions:** *Assess how the agency is measuring the quality of its contacts and how noncustodial fathers are included.*		

Causal Links for Root Cause 1	Root cause 1: *Caseworkers lack knowledge and skills related to engagement of noncustodial fathers.*	Causal Links for Root Cause 2	Root cause 2: Agency culture focuses more on mothers and does not equally value the potential role of fathers.
Causal link 3: *Caseworkers conduct comprehensive assessments to accurately assess fathers' strengths and needs*	**Potential Actions:** *Review assessment tools to ensure they include fathers' strengths and needs.* *Review training and coaching related to completing assessments.* *Assess how the agency is measuring the quality of assessments.*		
Causal link 4: *Assessments are used to identify individualized and tailored services to meet fathers' needs*	**Potential Actions:** *Review training and coaching to ensure that service array for fathers is included.*		
Causal link 5: *Services that match fathers' identified needs are available*	**Potential Actions:** *Conduct environmental scan to assess services available for fathers and identify gaps.* *Strengthen and expand partnerships to offer services to fathers.*		
Anything else?			
Look critically at the actions you chose for each causal link. Do any of them look more like interventions? How could you revise them to reflect, "If they do [X] (the action or series of actions), then the causal link can be achieved"?			
Do any of these actions require some external support to be achieved? Why or why not?			
Consider your own experience. How can you prepare to help agencies define theory of change actions before moving to interventions?			
What questions, if any, do you have about defining actions?			

Function 5: Document Assumptions and Rationale

After viewing "Function 5: Document Assumptions and Rationale," please complete the activity and the following reflection questions before moving on:

Consider the example in the workbook so far. What assumptions can you brainstorm for the theory? Remember, assumptions are contextual issues that might affect the achievement of outcomes, including available resources, legislative requirements, and potential barriers. Please use as much space as you need.	
Assumptions	
What kind of data or research might help support some of these assumptions?	
If you identified any barriers or challenges, what strategies or supports might be needed to overcome them?	
Look back at your work so far. Is the theory you developed plausible, achievable, testable, and meaningful?	
What questions, if any, do you have about documenting assumptions and rationale?	

Appendix A

Example From Problem Exploration

Information From 5 Whys

1. Why are fathers not receiving needed services?

   Response: Because we don't have the right types of fatherhood-related services located in the right places around the state. A state survey of service providers points to shortages in critical services for men related to substance abuse treatment, domestic violence, and fatherhood programs.

2. Why?

   Response: Because our agency has not developed partnerships with service providers focused on fathers' needs.

3. Why?

   Response: Because our agency doesn't single out fathers' needs in a targeted way, so we don't look for ways to secure services to address their needs.

4. Why?

> **Response:** Because fathers and service providers are not actively engaged in program and policy development, so they don't have a prominent voice in our planning.

5. Why?

> **Response:** Because our agency culture focuses more on mothers and doesn't equally value the potential role of fathers. As a result, our agency policies, caseworker trainings, supervision procedures, and performance measures are not structured or aligned in a way that effectively guides and reinforces best casework practices in assessing and addressing fathers' needs.

Context: For many of the families we engage with, the mother is more often the primary caretaker for the child when we initiate the assessment process. The father may not live in the family household or may be absent at the time the family comes to our attention.

Contributing Factors

- Lack of available, trauma-informed resources for addressing fathers' identified needs.

- Failure of casework staff to conduct comprehensive and individualized assessments of fathers' needs.

- Infrequent and low-quality caseworker visits with fathers who are not living in their children's home.

- Lack of engagement with fathers in case plan development.

- Inadequate availability of substance abuse resources, fatherhood programs, and services for perpetrators of domestic violence in certain areas of the state.

- Caseworkers' lack of understanding of the benefits of involving fathers in children's lives.