

# Change and Implementation in Practice

## Webinar Discussion and Activity Guide



## Theory of Change



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 guide and recorded webinar 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. Gather your team to watch the recorded theory of change webinar to learn about using a structured approach to develop a sound theory of change, common mistakes in developing a theory of change, and strategies to prevent them. Then use this guide to practice skills, facilitate discussions, and lead your team to move learning into action.

## Get Ready

Before viewing the webinars, prepare your team by sharing the “Change and Implementation in Practice: Theory of Change” brief to build a common understanding of the key concepts and terms related to theory of change. Individuals can use the short theory of change videos and workbook to reflect on the development process and prepare for team discussions. Ask group members to compare their experiences in planning or implementing something new with the process described in the brief. As a group, identify the benefits and challenges of developing a sound theory of change to address problems. Consider the benefits and challenges for the agency, for families and children, and for each team member.

Help your team connect concepts by asking members to make notes as they watch the webinar:

Think about a time you solved a complex problem. How did you know what needed to change?

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?

## Dive In

Watch the recorded webinar “Building the Path to Better Outcomes: Developing a Theory of Change.” The webinar explores the essential functions when developing a theory of change, characteristics of a sound theory of change, multiple approaches for development, and common mistakes and strategies to avoid them.

Pause the video at 21:50 and ask your team to review the potential long-term outcomes. Discuss which, if any, would be a good long-term outcome to consider. Is it specific, measurable, and achievable?

- ◆ Improved safety outcomes for children under age 5 in Region 1.
- ◆ Increased placement stability among youth ages 13–17.
- ◆ Improved connections between children and youth in out-of-home care and their birth parents.

- ◆ Improve engagement of noncustodial fathers in service planning over the next 2 years, ensuring they receive the services that meet their needs.
- ◆ All of the above.

Continue viewing and make note of the presenter's explanation.

## Talk About It

After viewing the webinar, allow your team to reflect on their notes. Lead a conversation about the different methods for developing a pathway to change, common missteps, and strategies to avoid them.

- ◆ Select questions to spark dialogue and move toward action.
- ◆ What was the biggest takeaway from the webinar?
- ◆ Have we used a structured process like this before to develop a pathway for change?
  - ◆ Were we successful in identifying the root cause, target population, problem statement, and long-term outcome?
  - ◆ What challenges did we encounter?
- ◆ Who should be at the table to develop a theory of change?
- ◆ What types of roles should be represented? What knowledge, skills, experience, and expertise are needed?
- ◆ In your experience, which roles are most frequently omitted from the discussion?
- ◆ Have we developed a logic model for our program/service?
  - ◆ If so, how does it differ from a theory of change?
  - ◆ Why is this important?

For practice, select a problem related to permanency, safety and risk assessments, service array, or family engagement, and use the staircase method or "so that" method to develop a theory of change.

Identify the problem statement and target population for developing a theory of change.

- ◆ Do you have a clearly defined problem statement, root cause(s), and target population?
- ◆ What data and information do you have that support these as the problem statement, root cause(s), and target population?
- ◆ Do you have consensus from stakeholders that these are the problems that need to be addressed?

Identify the long-term outcome you hope to achieve or changes that need to take place to successfully address the problem.

Does this outcome reflect changes in:

- ◆ People?
  - ◆ Does it reflect behavioral changes or enhanced knowledge or skill?
- ◆ The organization?
  - ◆ Does it reflect policy changes or cultural shifts?

### How to Develop a Theory of Change

1. Gather information on the problem statement, root causes, and target population.
2. Identify a long-term outcome.
3. Develop the pathway of change (causal links).
4. Define actions.
5. Document assumptions and rationale.

- ◆ Systems?
  - ◆ Does it reflect improved collaboration or accessibility?
- ◆ Is it specific, measurable, and achievable?

Develop a pathway from the problem statement to the long-term outcome. Consider:

- ◆ What conditions, results, or accomplishments will help lead from the identified problem statement and root cause to the identified long-term outcome?
- ◆ Will these conditions, results, or accomplishments lead to the outcome? Why or why not?
- ◆ Will any of these conditions, results, or accomplishments need to happen at the same time to reach the objective?
- ◆ Have actions been defined for each condition (causal link) in the pathway of change?
- ◆ Does each action have a cause and effect relationship with the causal links (i.e., if you do x, then you can achieve the causal link)?
- ◆ Have you considered the barriers that might prevent any of the conditions from taking place?
- ◆ Have you considered what other resources or partnerships might be needed to help achieve the actions?
- ◆ What, if any, expectations or contextual issues are there for the pathway to be achieved? Are the assumptions documented with supporting research and data wherever possible?
- ◆ If not, where might you access some research and data?

### Take the Next Step—Ask:

- ◆ What would it take to start using the theory of change process with our team?
- ◆ What next steps could our agency take to begin developing a theory of change for problems or unmet needs?
- ◆ What strategies can we use immediately to improve practice?

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