

Theory of Change

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Basics

Theory of What?

As we define it, a Theory of Change defines all building blocks required to bring about a given long-term goal. This set of connected building blocks--interchangeably referred to as [outcomes](#), results, accomplishments, or preconditions--is depicted on a map known as a pathway of change/[change framework](#), which is a graphic representation of the change process.

Built around the pathway of change, a Theory of Change describes the types of [interventions](#) (a single program or a comprehensive community initiative) that bring about the outcomes depicted in the pathway of a change map. Each outcome in the pathway of change is tied to an intervention, revealing the often complex web of activity that is required to bring about change.

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A Theory of Change would not be complete without an articulation of the [assumptions](#) that stakeholders use to explain the change process represented by the change framework. Assumptions explain both the connections between early, intermediate and long term outcomes and the expectations about how and why proposed interventions will bring them about. Often, assumptions are supported by research, strengthening the case to be made about the plausibility of theory and the likelihood that stated goals will be accomplished.

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Stakeholders value theories of change as part of program planning and evaluation because they create a commonly understood vision of the long-term goals, how they will be reached, and what will be used to measure progress along the way.