Theory of change

Aim:

This session explores the concept of a theory of change, asking who are the causes of the problem, who has the power to effect change (and why don't they) and how can we redistribute power to create the opportunity for a different outcome.

Learning outcomes:

At the end of this session participants will be able to:
- Feel: confident using a theory of change approach to their planning
- Know: that power mapping is a core part of any strategic approach to change.
- Do: use the various tools outlined to plan strategic interventions to effect positive change.

Resources needed:

1. Speakers notes (this document)
2. Presentation: Building communities through stories
3. Ella Baker School of Organising Info Sheet: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1dt_kAqzpfTj8n6SvXTtMtHZ7ZhmYnYYpqFDmyhXG6PU

Facilitation

These facilitator's notes are designed to assist you to present these materials. If you are familiar with the subject, you may feel confident to speak more informally and in your own voice. The notes are however a useful fall back for people who are either new to the subject, or new to facilitation. If this is presented by two facilitators, our recommended division of the sections is as follows

If you are delivering this with two facilitators, we recommend the following division of the presentation:

Facilitator A, slides: 1, 6-11, 16-20, 25-27, 33-38
Facilitator B, slides: 2-5, 12-15, 21-24, 28-32, 39-41

Duration:

2 hours

Room configuration:

On-line

Slide 1 Title slide	[INSTRUCTION to presenter: Introduce yourself and explain ground rules] I want to start by saying a little about the Ella Baker School of Organising before we begin. We're a not-for-profit training organisation which has grown out of our experiences of trade union, community and anti-racist organising. Part of the School's ethos is that communities—however defined—are able to find their own solutions. Our role is to introduce some ideas, and generate a discussion that allows course attendees to think through for themselves the answers that fit the needs of their community. The aim of this session is to explore the planning tool that is referred to as a theory of change. This session is designed to be interactive and at various times, we'll place you all in smaller groups in separate chat rooms with a task to undertake. Now two things can happen, either you all jump in head-first and start discussing the task, or you all sit around waiting for someone else to start. So please, when you get in the chat room, can everyone take responsibility for getting the discussion up and running and for making sure everyone has the chance to participate. And, can everyone make sure they don't contribute so much that others never get to have a say? Finally, please feel free to use the chat facility. ALL GOOD?
Slide 2 Theory of change	The term theory of change is often used by people, wishing to sound knowledgeable, and so it can often just be seen as a buzz word, or a phrase that funders like to hear. In fact, it's a powerful tool to help us conceptualise how we will make change happen. Too often, faced with an injustice, people will resort to familiar tactics, start a petition, call a strike, have a protest march, organise a boycott, write to their MP etc. without thinking which of these tactics—or combination of them—is most likely to create the change we want.

Slide 3 Contents	So, we're going to discuss what is a theory of change —and in the process identify what it's not. We'll look at some tools that can help us construct a theory of change, and then we'll look at applying them to a particular challenge that someone on here suggests. So, if you are involved in a campaign, and want to use this session as a testing bed, then please put something in the chat box. Later we will select one suggestion and roll with it.
Slide 4 **Theory of change**	Here's a simple **definition** of a theory of change A *strategic* process by which we identify a *winning* approach to a*chieving* positive change, and the *specific* milestones and *tactics* that are required to effect that change We could spend a lot of time seeking an agreed distinction between **strategy** and **tactics**, but for our purposes a strategy is an ***overview of how individual steps*** achieve our overall goal, and the ***individual steps might be achieved through tactics***. For example, an employer might make a <u>strategic decision</u> that they want to reduce the number of staff they employ to become more competitive. They might decide to simply freeze all recruitment, knowing that over time, the number of staff on the payroll may come down. They might offer voluntary severance packages, paying people to leave knowing that over time, the cost of the payments would be outweighed by the overall savings on the wage bill. Or, they might simply decide to select people they don't think are particularly productive and make them compulsory redundant. <u>Each of these are tactics</u> which may, depending on the specific circumstances, help them to achieve their strategic objective. But before we start, let's get everyone chatting. I'm going to put you into a chat room, where you can share your reasons for attending this

	session and what you hope to get out of it. You will only have five minutes, so no more than one minute each!
Slide 5 Breakout	*[INSTRUCTION: Put people into breakout rooms and give them ten minutes—when they come back, ask them to feedback via the chat facility]*
Slide 6 Will include	There are several elements to a good theory of change. • <u>A pathway</u> that illustrates the relationship between a number of short, medium and long-term outcomes that are each necessary steps to achieving the final goal—in other words a route map. • <u>A method</u> of measuring progress preferably using SMART Objectives (Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound). • <u>Planned interventions</u>, things that we will do, to navigate the steps on our pathway to success. • And really importantly an <u>articulation of the assumptions that underlie the theory</u>. In some ways, this is like the practice of mindfulness, being aware of and reflecting on our thought process.
Slide 7 Theory of change	It's always nice to know where a tool comes from. Theory of Change evolved from concerns that charities in particular had no idea if their interventions were actually working. Often, organisations simply did what they had always done, and expected to be funded on the basis of their ability to deliver projects, irrespective of whether those projects delivered any real change. Unfortunately, while it's been adopted by the sector, it's not clear that it's effectively addressed this problem—either with charities, or with their funders.
Slide 8 Not a theory of change	Often things that are labelled theory of change are nothing of the sort. Here is a typical error. An organisation starts by articulating what it does

	—and wants to obtain future funding for—and articulates its end goal, but the bit in the middle is a bit vague. [click] ***{…continued…}*** Indeed, it's as if magic is supposed to happen to convert the <u>tactics into a coherent strategy</u>. This is a common problem, and the resulting document is often called a theory of change, but it's not. Indeed, it might simply be a theory of how things stay the same.
Slide 9 Insanity	This is a great quote, often misattributed to Albert Einstein. In fact, it was a recovering alcoholic in a meeting who coined this phrase. However, it's typical of much of what is done by the progressive trade union and community sector. We do what we are familiar with, without thinking about what role it plays in a strategy to achieve change.
Slide 10 Dynamic theory	Another other really common error is to write a theory of change as if it's a static document. In reality, the world changes around us constantly. Opportunities arise, and they also disappear. So, for example, the #metoo movement swept the world two years ago, and it created a moment when action on sexual harassment of women was most likely to have an impact. Today, we are in the middle of the #BlackLivesMatter wave, which has greatly increased the potential for real change in the patterns of racism in our society. New possibilities exist, and they must be acted upon. However, even if the world stays the same, our interventions will change the power dynamics within it, and therefore we need to constantly re-evaluate the changing patterns of power. This is why a theory of change needs to be a learning tool. There must be evaluation and reflection at every stage—and of course, you can learn just as much by the way from a set-back as you can from a success.

Slide 11 Word Map	As we have said, the theory of change model evolved out of the charity sector. The aspiration was that it would show a more detailed causal relationship between planned interventions and hoped for outcomes. But there's one thing that is almost always missing from theories of change, and that's an evaluation of <u>why</u> the problem arose, and why those with the power to resolve it have not done so already.
Slide 12 Assata Shakur	Assata Shakur, was an active member of the Black Panther Party and related organisations. She once said: *Nobody in the world, nobody in history has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them.* Some Black Lives Matter protesters wear t-shirt which say: Assata taught me' a reference to a play of the same name. But it's an interesting perspective. And, of course, she's not alone.
Slide 13 Frederick Douglass	Frederick Douglass was an escaped slave, and a national leader of the abolitionist movement in the USA. He famously wrote <u>*the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave in 1844*</u> as a tool to expose the barbarity of slavery to a wider audience. He didn't believe in appealing to the kindness absent in the heart of tyrants.
Slide 14 Power concedes	This is perhaps his most famous quote, it comes from a long passage, where he also says, poetically: *If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.* *This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle.*

Slide 15 Breakout	OK, let's take a few moments to consider this. To what extent do we agree and/or disagree with Assata Shakur and Frederick Douglass? I am going to paste the quotes into the chat box for your ease of use. What implications does this perspective have for our 'theory of change'? You have ten minutes [INSTRUCTION: post the quotes and after ten minutes take some feedback in the chat box and then move on] Nobody in the world, nobody in history has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.
Slide 16 **Organised money**	Which brings us to the question of **power.** This is a quote from Benjamin Todd Jealous, who, at the time, was the executive director of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). It's worth thinking about for a number of reasons. Is organised money always on the wrong side of history? Are organised people always on the right side of history? And are there times when organised money can win against organised people?
Slide 17 **Black Panthers**	Huey P Newton of the Black Panther Party talked a lot about power. The organisation's motto was 'all power to the people'. Here he explores and expands upon Karl Marx's famous maxim: 'the philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it' Specifically, he argues you cannot have effective action without first having an analysis of the social forces at work.

Slide 18 **Forms of** **Power**	Power is a strange thing, we all recognise it when we see it openly exercised, but it can be elusive, and it's often exercised covertly. It's been defined as the ability to effect change. Here are some suggested forms of power in a social context: **Moral Power** Ability to inflict reputational damage, we can think for example of Unite the Union's campaign with regards to Sports Direct, and how it forced the company to rethink its labour practices. **Institutional Power** Legal system rules and regulations. Here we are talking about the protection that is afforded by law, rules or conventions. **Structural power** The power that comes from your position within a system. So, for example, the RMT union has a great deal of structural power because it can stop London Underground, and bring the city to a halt. Equally, Facebook has a great deal of power because of the influence it has on the flow of news. **Positional Power** The power which is abdicated to those in leadership roles. Boris Johnson has a lot of power because of his position, Theresa May once had that power, but it's now gone. **Associational power** The power that comes from building an organisation that can collectively assert what would otherwise be relatively limited individually power.
Slide 19 **Changing the** **outcomes**	It's fair to say that those with power tend to use it to accumulate advantage, or to gain more power. So, if we want to change the outcome of a complex system, we probably need to change the power balance within it. There are a number of ways of looking at this. **Power within**, is about supporting people to develop the capacity to act for themselves or by assert their existing rights and acting upon them the create change. It's perhaps best illustrated by the women's movement in their consciousness raising phase.

	Power with involves people coming together to create their own solutions. A good example would be the Mutual Aid networks that have sprung up around Covid. Equally, it could be a group of people on an estate who decide to run a 'buyers co-operative', buying wholefoods at wholesale rates and distributing between themselves. And of course it's demonstrated when workers form themselves into unions—anywhere when people collectively organise. **Power over** is when your boss tells you to do something you don't want to do. It also occurs when a group of people get organised (for example in a trade union) and make a person who previously had power (i.e. their boss) change their decisions because their power has now become limited.
Slide 20 Breakout	So let's stop for a second and consider the types of power we're seeking to rebalance. Whose power, and what types of power do we wish to diminish, and whose power do we wish to build —and what types of power do we aspire to? In your groups, you might want to think about a specific campaign, or different examples from different initiatives you're involved in. ***[INSTRUCTION: Give people ten minutes and then take some feedback]***
Slide 21 **Useful Tools**	Now that we have discussed power, we can begin to think about the useful tools that can help us to think through our theory of change. I'm, going to suggest five, but there are no doubt more… • **Fishbone exercise,** which looks at causes • **Powermapping,** which looks at the relative power in a system • **SWOT exercise,** which allows us to begin to think about what influence we can have. • **Stepping stones/critical path exercise,** is about making tactical decisions about interventions and pathways based on the previous three exercises • **Assumption check,** which is where we try to surface and evaluate our otherwise implicit assumptions.
Slides 22 **Fishbones**	With any problem, there'll be a number of causes of the problem. Often there'll be multiple causes, and often these can be grouped into categories, and within each category there'll be sub-causes.

	This can be represented by a fish skeleton… the problem is on the right, and the causes are listed in the various bones to the left. So, for example, we might want to think about widening inequality in the UK. One cause that we might identify is the 2008 financial crash, which itself will have several subclauses, not least deregulation of the banking sector. Equally, we might say austerity was a cause, which itself may have been caused by the election of David Cameron as Prime Minister, which itself would have sub-causes, and so on.
Slide 23 **Fishbones 2**	If we want to eradicate the problem, one obvious place to have an intervention is just before the head, if we can severe the head from the causes, then job done. Problem solved, nice and simple.
Slide 24 **Fishbones 3**	In reality, we rarely have the ability to have such a decisive impact, what happens more often is that we have a number of interventions that take out some of the causes of the problem. If we choose the right interventions, and are successful in neutering a number of causes, then these can feed through the system to such an extent that the problem is fatally undermined. The question then becomes, how do we choose which interventions to make? One answer relates to the power balance within the system
Slide 25 **Power mapping**	Many people will be familiar with power mapping. It's basically a way of visually representing the players in a particular scenario and identifying who your most powerful targets are, and where your most powerful supporters are. However, it's more than that, because it can also help identify 'players' who are not yet in the game. In this figure, we have power on the y axis, and support or opposition on the x axis.
Slide 26 **Axis**	A great way to represent this is with an axis, and with the ubiquitous post-it notes that are such a useful tool.

	You write the names of particular 'players' on the post it notes, and then place them on the axis with their position reflecting their power and level of support.
Slide 27 Players	Often the players are • **Responsible for creating the problem**; petrochemical companies for example may be responsible for CO2 emissions. • **Suffering from the problem**, people whose lives are directly impacted by the problem, these often have little power, but maybe there are ways to build their power? • **Decision makers** who have the power to address the problem, parliament for example. But in other scenarios it could be someone like a head teacher, or a police chief. • Able to **directly influence** the decision maker, so that might include a school governor, or a more local politician. • **Opinion formers** these might be the national press, but they could also be an organic leader living on an estate. • **Organised allies**, trade unions, a cycling group, a tenants committee, or Extinction rebellion etc. • **Organised opposition**, this could be a pro-fracking lobby, the countryside alliance, or groups like the RAC advocating for the building of more roads and bypasses. But often those who are able to totally shift the balance of power are the previously unorganised groups—the latent, un-organised 'potential players'. If you think about the African American Civil Rights movement, it was the eruption of mass participation that transformed the movement from merely protesting racism to winning real reforms.
Slide 28 Spectrum	Another way to think about this is about the 'spectrum of support diagram. You can see that with any social movement there'll be everything from active supporters to active opposition. If you can isolate the active opposition and the target, and move everyone else one segment to the left, you'll have decisively rebalanced the power in the system. Once the balance of power has changed, it's likely that the rules of the game will change to follow that power.
Slide 29 SWOT	Having undertaken the fish and power analysis exercises, it's necessary to become a little more grounded.

	A SWOT exercise, examining your organisation's <u>Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats</u> is a great way to move forward. Strengths and weaknesses tend to relate to the organisation itself and opportunities and threats tend to relate to the external environment. Undertaking a SWOT allows you to consider what capacity you have to engage with the system change you want to generate.
Slide 30 Critical Path Analysis	Critical path analysis is a simple process to map out how change can happen. It begins by saying what is the penultimate step before we win. And then working backwards to identify the steps that are required to make that step possible. Working from the conclusion backwards helps to avoid a process, where people choose to use tactics they are familiar with—petitions, letters to MPs, strikes, protest marches etc—rather than ones that are likely to achieve the desired results.
Slide 31 Paper Plates	This exercise is best done with a series of paper plates, a number of arrows, and marker pens, plus a large expanse of floor. It's then possible to spend some time creating a map that shows the interrelated steps to success, which should correspond with the interventions identified on the fish exercise—but may not do, if these have been revised by later exercises—and it's possible to introduce timelines to see the order in which some things have to happen. Unfortunately, we have not worked out a way to do this exercise on Zoom yet, but we are working on it. Any suggestions would be helpful!!
Slide 32 Biases	Well, we have identified the causes of the problem, we've mapped the power in the system, undertaken a swot and critical path analysis. Before we write up our conclusions. We need to surface and explore our assumptions. This is a bit like practicing mindfulness. We need to come to recognise, reflect on and question our thought process. There are numerous biases that creep into our thinking and planning all the time.

	These include confirmation bias, which says if you tell me something that I already believe, I will add your opinion to my store of reasons to believe it, but if you tell me something that contradicts my core belief, I'll discount your opinion. There are more listed on the slide: the key is not to think we are free of these, but to build in a review stage in our thinking which asks, '*what assumptions have we made, and to what extent are they objectively justified?'s* One common implicit assumption is that the problem we are seeking to eradicate would disappear if only more people knew about how bad it was. This assumes that a) others would feel the same way about the need to eradicate the problem, and b) their views would be decisive in impacting on legislation, or other mechanisms to eradicate the problem. However, the evidence from issues such as blood sports, state ownership of the railways, wars in the Middle East, full funding of the NHS, is that the 'information deficit' theory has some underlying flaws.
Slide 33 **Let's Play**	We don't have sufficient time to do this properly even for a single project, but let's just play around and familiarise ourselves with the tools. You're going to have ten minutes in your groups, and I want you to choose one of these tools, perhaps one you are less familiar with, and think about how it could apply to one campaign that someone in your group is involved in. *[INSTRUCTION: Give people ten minutes then ask for feedback through chat box: Also, If people can drop a note into the chat explaining what tool their group their group explored and what knowledge, if any, did it help you to surface.]*
Slide 34 **Fishbone**	OK, I'm going to run through again the tools we looked at and see if we have any feedback from the groups that may have used it. The fishbone exercise asks what are the causes of the problem Does anyone want to feedback on using this tool?
Slide 35 **Powermap**	

	The Powermap asks, 'who are the players and what power do they have?' Did anyone use this?
Slide 36 SWOT	Did anyone do the SWOT? Let's just take one feedback. Strength/Weakness/Opportunity and Threat, as most people are familiar with this technique.
Slide 37 Stepping stones	Now we really don't have time to do this justice today, but did anyone play with this in their group?
Slide 38 Realty Check	Did any of the groups look at the reality check? It's a powerful tool, but probably best used once you have worked through the first round of developing your theory of change.
Slide 39 Breakout	Can we take a few minutes in our break-out groups to reflect on today's session, what we have learned, what we might use and perhaps something that is still unresolved, a question? Then we can take some questions and finish *[INSTRUCTION: Give people ten minutes and then take feedback from each group While people are in their group, post the link:* *https://bit.ly/ebsfeedback* *to the chat box and draw people's attention to it when they come back.]*
Slide 40	Now just to close, I would like to tell you a little more about the the Ella Baker School of Organising. We draw some of our inspiration from the African American Freedom struggle and in particular what they described as 'Freedom Schools'. As part of their struggle, they believed they needed to educate both their activists and their communities. Septima Clarke organised the first Freedom Schools. These were pop-up schools, where people were taught to read before they sought to register to vote, and there was an expectation that everyone they taught would themselves become a teacher, which is where the slogan: 'each one teach one', comes from. *{…continued…}*

	So, we'll be urging every one of you to pass on what you have gained from today to others. There's no obligation to do this, but if we're to get to scale, and to organise as widely as possible, then it's what is necessary. One of the questions in the feedback asks if you would like to discuss cascading this training on. We can train you to become a facilitator, and help you set up a session. Finally, we would very much welcome a donation—if you felt that was appropriate.
Slide 41	OK, we're done, it would be great to have any final thoughts, you can type them into the chatbox, or you can shout out. And please, don't forget to complete the feedback form. [INSTRUCTION repost the link: https://bit.ly/ebsfeedback to the chat box] It would be great if people clicked on that link now, and then completed it as soon as you are off the call. [INSTRUCTION: Take some feedback and then close—Thank everyone for their participation]