

Theory of Change Overview Guide

*Theory of Change Overview
and Organizational Examples*

Overview

A Theory of Change is a tool to help organizations understand the change they are seeking to achieve in the world. Ultimately, the Theory of Change is a *north star*, clarifying the long-term impact an organization is seeking to achieve, and a *strategic blueprint*, outlining all the conditions that are needed to bring about that intended impact. A Theory of Change can a) help organizations clarify who they aim to engage in programming (also known as your target population), b) inform how to grow strategically and allocate resources to mission critical activities, c) create a common language that provides clarity on organizational goals and alignment, d) stimulate innovation and learning (which can inform strategic planning and program design), and e) serve as a foundation for your measurement, evaluation, and learning activities.

There are three parts to our Theory of Change Approach.

- ▶ **First, Identifying the Problem.** When developing a Theory of Change, it's critical to have a deep understanding of the problem you're trying to solve. This requires thinking about the intended impact you seek, as well as the need you are trying to address, and whose needs your programs are designed to engage and benefit (target population).
- ▶ **Second, Generating the Solutions.** A Theory of Change includes an articulation of the core components of your work. In this stage, you want to think about the connections between the different aspects of your work and group key programs and strategies accordingly. You also want to think about how your programs/investments lead to the intended impact and what outcomes you need to measure along the way to ensure you are on the right track.
- ▶ **Third, Pulling it All Together.** In drafting your Theory of Change, it is essential that you identify and test the assumptions you've made as part of the process, and pressure test your Theory of Change with stakeholders. At the heart of this process, you will want to center equity by thinking about how you can meaningfully involve constituents in the pressure testing process to ensure the Theory of Change reflects their lived experience.

This guide includes an overview of our approach to developing a Theory of Change and includes the following:

- ▶ **Theory of Change Approach (pages 4-14).** This guide provides an overview of the key parts of our approach to developing a Theory of Change. In the first part of the process - *identifying the problem* - organizations identify the broader problem and their desired change and then determine the organization's more specific intended impact. In the second part - *generating solutions* - organizations articulate their strategy and demonstrate how the core components lead to change in outcomes over time. And, in the third part - *pulling it all together*

- organizations identify and test the assumptions you've made as part of the process, and pressure test your Theory of Change with stakeholders.

- **Homeless Youth Organization Example.** To illustrate the process, we trace a sample Theory of Change for an organization serving homeless youth throughout this guide.
- **Applying an Equity Lens.** Each section includes an overview of applying an equity lens to this work. It is important to explore the role of equity in performance measurement and evaluation efforts. This involves many components, such as analyzing data and information about race and ethnicity, understanding disparities and why they exist, and looking at root causes, problems, and solutions through an equity lens.
- ▶ **Sample Visuals (pages 15-18).** This guide also includes sample visuals created by organizations who have participated in this Theory of Change development process. The organizations represented are Women Against Abuse, Philabundance, and a collective impact literacy initiative.
- ▶ **Narrative Template (pages 19-29).** The final section of the guide includes a Theory of Change narrative template that includes the key elements for each part of the Theory of Change process.

Theory of Change Approach

Part 1: Identifying the Problem

Background: *Desired Change & Broader Problem*

A Theory of Change begins by exploring the desired change you are seeking in the world. It is broad, visionary, and aspirational. It also provides background on the problem you are working on and considers the range of issues that need to be addressed to solve that problem. This part of the process involves reviewing internal and external research to better understand the root causes and systemic barriers influencing the problem you are addressing and exploring the following questions:

- ▶ **Why:** What change do you want to see in the world and why does this matter?
- ▶ **Who:** Who could your programs/investments reach?
- ▶ **What:** What is the scope, nature, and extent of the problem?

Example: Desired Change & Broader Problem (Homeless Youth Organization)

The National Runaway Switchboard (2009) estimates that on any given night 1.3 million homeless youth are living unsupervised on the streets, in abandoned buildings, with friends or with strangers. These living situations place youth at higher risk for physical abuse, sexual exploitation, substance abuse and death. Our city is not immune from the issue of youth homelessness; however, we have not yet fully put in place the funding, services, and strategies to address the issue. The community has made progress during the past ten years, but the issue of youth homelessness continues. Our organization has seen the number of homeless youth continue to rise and served over 1,000 homeless youth through our continuum of homeless programs in FY2012.

Once on the streets, youth are faced with employment and financial obstacles that make exiting homelessness difficult. Research has shown that homeless youth experience unemployment rates ranging from 66% to 71%, and the majority of homeless youth lack the education and employment skills to compete in the labor market, become gainfully employed and move toward economic independence, given systemic inequalities (Ferguson, Bender, Thompson, Maccio & Pollio, 2012). In addition to lacking employment skills to exit homelessness, the majority of these youth also lack the necessary life skills to live and maintain permanent housing in the community.

Besides lacking skills, homeless youth often experience emotional barriers to transitioning out of homelessness. Research has shown that homeless youth experience high rates of trauma both on

the streets and prior to becoming homeless. It has even been stated that being homeless is a form of psychological trauma in itself due to life on the streets being characterized by impoverished conditions, daily struggles to meet basic needs and repeated victimizations. The negative effects of repeated exposures to these traumatic events often inhibit youth from employing the psychosocial skills necessary to transition to permanent housing (McManus & Thompson, 2008).

Our organization has confirmed that youth we serve experience a high prevalence of trauma as evidenced by the results from the Adverse Childhood Effects (ACE) assessment. The ACE scale explores to what degree an individual has experienced adult perpetrated trauma prior to the individual turning 18. Of homeless youth served, 75% had a score of greater than 4 on the ACE scale compared to only 12.5% of the general population, with higher ACE scores strongly correlated with multiple adverse mental and physical health care outcomes. The high prevalence of trauma among homeless youth has led to safety and trust being grounding principles in our work with homeless youth.

Your Organization's Role: *Intended Impact & Specific Need*

The intended impact focuses on what your organization is trying to achieve in service of the desired change. It includes a more specific target population and the long-term impact you are working to achieve and will hold yourself accountable to. The intended impact statement typically follows this type of format: **“X population in Y geography will accomplish Z outcomes.”** This part of the process also identifies the more specific need your organization is working to address and how that responds to the needs of your target population.

- ▶ **Why:** Consider what success looks like in the future. What impact will your organization hold itself accountable to over the long-term and why does this matter? Are key stakeholders aligned on the goals?
- ▶ **Who:** Identify the primary constituents who are at the center of your work. Who is the target population that would benefit most from your programs/investments? What is the geographic focus of your work? Is the Theory of Change informed by the needs and voices of your constituents?
- ▶ **What:** What would the community look like without your organization? What more specific part(s) of the broader problem are you working to address? Does the Theory of Change capture what the organization is working to achieve? Is the Theory of Change understandable and accessible? Does the Theory of Change recognize how structural issues have shaped the problems faced by different groups and led to differential outcomes?

Example: Intended Impact & Specific Need (Homeless Youth Organization)

Despite all of the obstacles homeless youth face, we have found that the youth we serve continue to demonstrate resilience and this underscores our mission and approach to our work.

Our mission is to value the potential of all youth, supporting and challenging them to embrace their future and achieve independence, ensuring that their voices are heard.

If successful, our intended impact is that homeless youth between the ages of 12 and 21 in San Francisco will exit homelessness permanently.

Our target population we serve includes homeless youth who:

- ▷ are 12-22 years old,
- ▷ are emotionally stable as evidenced by a score of below 30 on the Pediatric Symptom Checklist,
- ▷ are drug free,
- ▷ and demonstrate motivation by attending 3 sessions focused on intake, assessment and orientation.

The objectives of the admission process are to determine eligibility, identify immediate crisis needs and assist youth through referral and linkage to meet those needs, begin to develop trust, and educate the applicant about the program, so the youth can make an informed decision about participating. To determine eligibility, youth will participate in an admission process consisting of three meetings, over a three to four week period.

During this time, staff will engage the youth to begin to build a trusting relationship with youth, and to prepare them for program entry. Research describes that for youth transitioning off the streets beginning with building a trusting relationship is critical and entails a gradual process. Youth need to see participating as a positive experience, rather than surrendering personal control. By moving intentionally through an admission process, youth are more likely to view program participation as a choice to be anticipated, not an immediate outcome (McManus & Thompson, 2008).

Applying an Equity Lens

- ▶ **Consider Constituents:** Consider constituents' goals and experiences. Incorporate constituents' perspectives into defining need and creating the Theory of Change (and where possible, co-creating with constituents).
- ▶ **Consider Root Causes and Systemic Factors:** Consider the root causes and systemic factors contributing to the needs the organization is trying to address.

Part 2: Generating Solutions

Strategy: Core Components

The Theory of Change provides an articulation of the strategy and an overview of how the core components of your work (e.g., the programs/investments) and activities align to that strategy. It typically addresses the following things:

- ▶ **Core Components:** How do you organize your work (e.g., different program or grant-making areas)? How do those components align to the overarching strategy and which are most critical for achieving your intended impact?
- ▶ **Activities:** How do specific activities align to the core components of your work? What is the needed dosage and quality of implementation?
- ▶ **Gaps:** Is there anything missing from your current work that you need to do in order to achieve the outcomes/intended impact?
- ▶ **Assumptions:** What assumptions are you making about how your components address the specific needs of your target population?

Example: Core Components (Homeless Youth Organization)

Our work is carried out through a variety of strategies, including a continuum of services and programs for homeless youth:

- ▷ Street Outreach Program designed to meet the basic needs of youth ages 16-24
- ▷ Transitional Living Program for youth ages 17-22
- ▷ Emergency Youth Shelter for youth ages 12-17

This continuum provides options for youth based on their needs and goals and is based on integrating two core approaches: Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) and Positive Youth Development (PYD).

Utilizing a **Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)** approach to delivering services is critical to helping youth overcome the negative effects of trauma. TIC has been shown to lead to better outcomes for youth, such as improved self-esteem and relationships and increased safety and housing stability (Hopper, Bassuk & Olivet, 2010). We incorporate the following components in our programs by:

- ▷ Recognizing the impact trauma has on behaviors (having flexible expectations, providing and/or linking to medical care and counseling)

- Assisting youth in meeting basic needs (food, clothing, personal hygiene items)
- Providing a safe environment (Emergency Youth Shelter, Transitional Living Housing, Drop-In Center)
- Providing opportunities for youth to gain control and self-confidence (skill building and wellness activities such as Street Yoga)

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a best practice approach specifically designed to help youth acquire the knowledge and skills to become healthy, independent adults and works nicely in conjunction with TIC (National Resource Center for Youth Development, 2013). Positive Youth Development strategies focus on giving young people the chance to form relationships with caring adults, build skills, exercise leadership, and help give back to their communities. This is accomplished through treating youth with respect, recognizing youths' skills and abilities, peer learning, peer facilitated events and celebrations, and volunteer opportunities. Once youth are exposed to these new opportunities and have a chance to succeed (through school, work or independent living) and build confidence they begin to develop **hope**, which has been documented to be positively connected with goal attainment and positive outcomes (Averill, 2012).

By redesigning our programs, we believe there will be greater alignment between the needs of our target population, the core elements of our program model, as well as our capacity for delivering the services and achieving our desired outcomes. It is within that context that we articulate the following hypothesis as a basis for holding ourselves accountable.

Outcomes: *Change Over Time*

Outcomes capture the impact of your work over time (e.g., short-, medium-, and long-term). They should be connected to your core components and should be building towards your intended impact. It is likely that multiple components work together to achieve these outcomes. When developing this part of the Theory of Change, it is important to consider your hypotheses and the assumptions you are making about how your programs/investments lead to your desired outcomes and how these assumptions may be influenced by your biases/worldview.

- ▶ **Short-Term Outcomes:** Short-term outcomes typically capture changes in knowledge, attitudes or awareness.
- ▶ **Medium-Term Outcomes:** Medium-term outcomes typically capture changes in skills, behaviors, and actions.
- ▶ **Long-Term Outcomes:** Long-term outcomes typically capture changes in status or condition.

Example: Outcomes (Homeless Youth Organization)

If we serve homeless youth, ages 12-22, who are emotionally stable, drug free and motivated and provide them with a safe and nurturing environment, individualized case management, job readiness and life skills instruction for a minimum of 6 months, plus 6 months of follow-up services, then we expect youth will obtain and retain employment, transition into and maintain permanent housing and become self-sufficient members of the community.

More specifically, we believe that youth who participate in our program (for a minimum of 6 months) will:

- ▷ ***In the short-term:***
 - ▷ Participants increase their level of confidence
 - ▷ Participants increase their level of hope
 - ▷ Participants become more self-sufficient
- ▷ ***In the medium-term:***
 - ▷ Participants obtain employment
 - ▷ Participants move into permanent and supportive housing
- ▷ ***In the long-term:***
 - ▷ Participants retain employment (*for a minimum of six months*)
 - ▷ Participants move into permanent and supportive housing (*for a minimum of six months*)

Applying an Equity Lens

- ▶ **Consider Range and Significance of Outcomes:** Organizations should consider the range of potential outcomes and select outcomes that are significant (for the target population, not just those traditionally valued by groups in power).
- ▶ **Acknowledge Change is Not Linear:** Organizations should be cognizant that change is not always linear (particularly given systemic inequities).

Part 3: Pulling it All Together

Again, the Theory of Change is ultimately a *north star*, clarifying the ultimate impact your organization is seeking to achieve, and a strategic blueprint, outlining all the conditions that are needed to bring about that intended impact. A Theory of Change is not a mirror that reflects back what an organization currently does, but provides an opportunity to determine what an organization should stop, start, or revise doing to realize long-term goals. To develop an initial draft of the Theory of Change, you will pull in research and evidence to support your theory and describe the key assumptions. You will also pressure test (gather feedback related to) your Theory of Change both internally and externally to ensure it functions as you anticipate.

Consider Narrative & Visual Forms

There is no one “right” format for a Theory of Change. Consider developing a narrative and/or visual ToC (see Sample visuals and narrative template in a later section). Your Theory of Change should be useful for your organization and take whatever format that makes the most sense. Also consider:

- ▶ **Organizational & Community Culture, Approach, and Practices:** Consider images, language, structures that resonate with the culture, approach, and practices within your organization AND the communities you serve.
- ▶ **Communicate Your Impact:** Ensure your narrative and visual communicate your impact in a clear and compelling way.

Testing Assumptions: Using External and Internal Research

Assumptions are the conditions that are needed for success that your Theory of Change is based on. Assumptions are crucial to consider because if they are incorrect it can completely alter how your programs/services work. Below are some questions to consider when examining the underlying assumptions in your Theory of Change:

- ▶ **Problem:** What assumptions are you making about the root causes influencing the problem you’re addressing and the barriers to change?
- ▶ **Need:** What assumptions are you making about the needs of your target population?
- ▶ **Program Implementation:** What assumptions are you making about whether the dosage (amount of programming) and duration (length of programming) of your services are enough to realize your outcomes?

- ▶ **Program Quality:** What assumptions are you making about the quality of your program(s)?
- ▶ **Outcomes:** What assumptions are you making about the outcomes that matter most to your stakeholders?
- ▶ **Process of Change:** What assumptions are you making about the connection between your activities/strategies and intended outcomes?

Evaluating Evidence: Questions to Consider

- ▷ What assumptions are we making?
- ▷ What evidence do we have to support our assumption?
- ▷ What evidence do we need to gather? Consider both internal (organizational data) and external (local or national) evidence.

External Research: Assumptions to Consider

- ▷ What does the research say about your constituents' needs and the barriers they face?
- ▷ What does the research say about best practices in your field? Does the research suggest that you are providing a sufficient dosage of your activities?
- ▷ What does the research say about the extent to which your components and activities are likely to lead to your desired outcomes?

Internal Research: Assumptions to Consider

- ▷ Do your participants reflect your desired target population?
- ▷ What dosage are you actually providing of your programs and services?
- ▷ Do you have the resources needed to achieve your desired outcomes?

Pressure Testing: *Gathering Feedback*

One really important way to test assumptions is through the pressure testing process. This is a critical way of applying an equity lens to your work. There are three key steps to developing a pressure testing plan:

- 1) **Purpose & Audience:** Who do you want to collect feedback from? What specifically do you want to learn?

Purpose & Audience

It's important to consider what you want to learn from the pressure testing process. This isn't just about sharing your Theory of Change and saying "what do you think?" It requires being explicit about what part of your Theory of Change you want to test, what you want to learn and why. It's also important to consider the goals of your pressure testing and to increase the level of participation. In order of least to most participatory, potential goals of your pressure testing are to:¹

- ▷ **Inform:** To provide information.
- ▷ **Consult:** To gather feedback.
- ▷ **Involve:** To ensure feedback is heard and considered.
- ▷ **Collaborate:** To partner with to make decisions.
- ▷ **Empower:** To provide authority to make decisions.

Once you've defined the purpose, you want to think about who you want to gather input from and how that input will be used. Pressure testing isn't just a box to check. It's critical to gather meaningful constituent feedback/stakeholder input to inform your work. Consider pressure testing your Theory of Change with:

- ▷ **Staff** to get them on board and invest them in the process.
- ▷ Your **board and organization leadership** to make sure it aligns with the resources and vision of your organization.
- ▷ Your **constituents** to see if it resonates with their needs and experiences.
- ▷ **Others in your field** to see if it connects to best practices.

- 2) **Approach:** Consider the following for each stakeholder: What is the best method for pressure testing? When is the best timing to engage stakeholders?

Approach

Once you've determined who you want to gather feedback from, then you need to think about how you will gather that feedback and when.

- ▶ **Methods:** There are many different methods you could use to gather input (e.g., presentation vs. email/survey vs. one-on-one input vs. phone). You want to think about which method will work best for the stakeholder group. Regardless of the method, you want to ensure you are creating a safe space for conversation and are open to listening to and learning from different perspectives. Another thing to consider is if there is an existing activity where clients or staff are already a "captured" audience which makes it easier logistically for both you and the client. However, you'll want to use participatory methods:²

¹ Source: https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf

² For more detailed information on participatory methods, please see source:

<https://en.healthnexus.ca/sites/en.healthnexus.ca/files/resources/participatoryevaltoolkit.pdf>

- ▷ Rating different options
- ▷ Prioritizing options
- ▷ Grouping/sorting/categorizing ideas
- ▷ Developing advisory committees

▶ **Timing:** You need to consider if now is the right time to gather feedback.

- ▷ Do your stakeholders have the bandwidth (time, emotional, etc) to respond?
- ▷ Does your staff have the bandwidth to collect feedback?
- ▷ Are you able to get in touch with stakeholders?

3) **Follow Through:** Close the loop. How will the feedback be used? How will you circle back with whoever you gather feedback from?

Follow Through

Before you begin the pressure testing process, you need to consider what you plan to do with the feedback you collect:

- ▶ **Decision-making Process:** Who has the authority to make decisions? Whose voice will matter most and why?
- ▶ **Process for Incorporating Feedback:** How will you actually incorporate the feedback you get? What will you do if this feedback runs contrary to original assumptions?
- ▶ **Closing the Loop:** How will you circle back with whoever you gathered feedback from? How will you explain how you used that feedback?

Applying an Equity Lens

- ▶ **Problem/Need:** Are the needs your organization has identified the needs that are most important to your constituents?
- ▶ **Program Implementation/Quality:** Have you accounted for all the supports your constituents might need to be successful?
- ▶ **Outcomes/Process of Change:** Do your outcomes pathways represent the lived experience of your constituents?

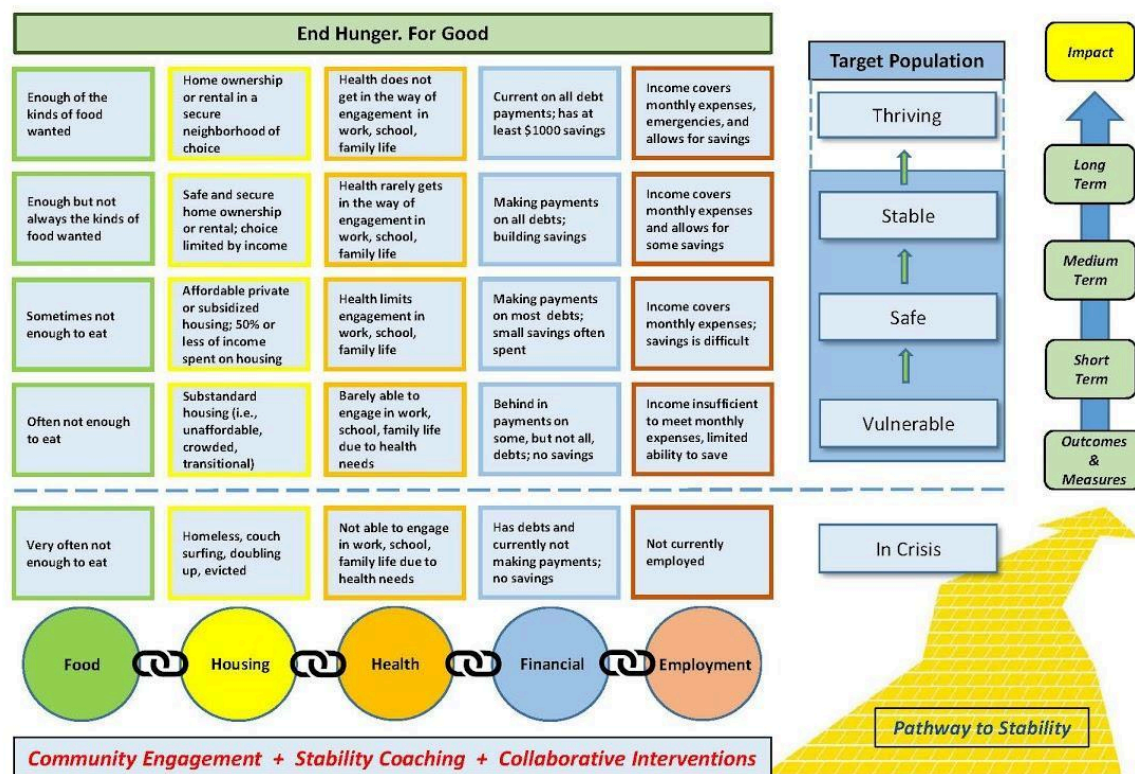
Sample Visuals

Sample #1: Philabundance

Philabundance is the Delaware Valley's largest hunger relief organization, acquiring, rescuing and distributing food to 90,000 people weekly in 9 counties in PA and NJ. Of the people Philabundance serves, 30% percent are children and 16% percent are seniors. Others who seek food assistance include people with disabilities, single parents, veterans, students and working class families. As of 2017, 1 in 8 people in the U.S. face hunger; in the Delaware Valley, that number is 1 in 5.

Philabundance recently developed a new pillar of their work, Ending Hunger. For Good, to shorten the lines at area food distribution sites and provide long-term food security for those facing hunger. Through collaboration with community providers of critical life services, Philabundance will convene cross-sector partnerships coupling its food and resources with education, financial literacy, health services, housing and/or job assistance to those in need.

Philabundance Theory of Change



Sample #2: Women Against Abuse

Founded in 1976, Women Against Abuse, Inc., is the leading domestic violence service provider in Philadelphia. Since its origin as a part-time domestic violence crisis hotline, Women Against Abuse has grown to reach more than 15,000 people each year through emergency safe haven, transitional housing, community-based supportive services, behavioral health therapy, legal services, hotline counseling, and community education, advocacy, and technical assistance.

WOMEN
AGAINST
ABUSE

THEORY OF CHANGE

INTENDED
IMPACT

=

People experiencing domestic violence
will be **SAFE** and **EMPOWERED** until
domestic violence *no longer exists*

SAFETY

EMPOWERMENT

PREVENTION

Intended Impact: People experiencing domestic violence will be safe & empowered until domestic violence no longer exists.

Long-Term
Outcomes

Survivors
maintain a place
to live that is
safe, stable &
affordable

Survivors in
Philadelphia will
experience DV-
informed
systems

Survivors will
have greater
economic
stability

Survivors
implement
coping & safety
strategies

Philadelphians
will have
healthy
relationships

Philadelphia
finds DV/IPV
intolerable

Short-Term
Outcomes

- ✓ survivors are out of immediate crisis
- ✓ survivors have access to financial resources
- ✓ survivors receive legal representation
- ✓ survivors are granted PFA/PSVI orders
- ✓ survivors regain/gain custody of their children
- ✓ survivors have knowledge of dynamics of abusive relationships
- ✓ survivors can ID strategies to enhance safety
- ✓ survivors have knowledge about the justice process
- ✓ policy environment is supportive
- ✓ social service professionals are equipped to support survivors

- ✓ survivors feel more hopeful, less isolated
- ✓ survivors have awareness of how trauma affects their life
- ✓ survivors are connected to employment resources
- ✓ survivors reduce impact of trauma in their lives
- ✓ survivors can identify coping skills
- ✓ survivors have access to trusted community resources

- ✓ training participants are able to identify resources related to DV/IPV
- ✓ Philadelphians have knowledge of dynamics and warning signs of abusive relationships

Strategies

counseling
therapy

legal options counseling
resources/referrals

psycho-education
case management
systems change

safety planning
legal representation
culture change

confidential housing
education
lobbying

SAFETY

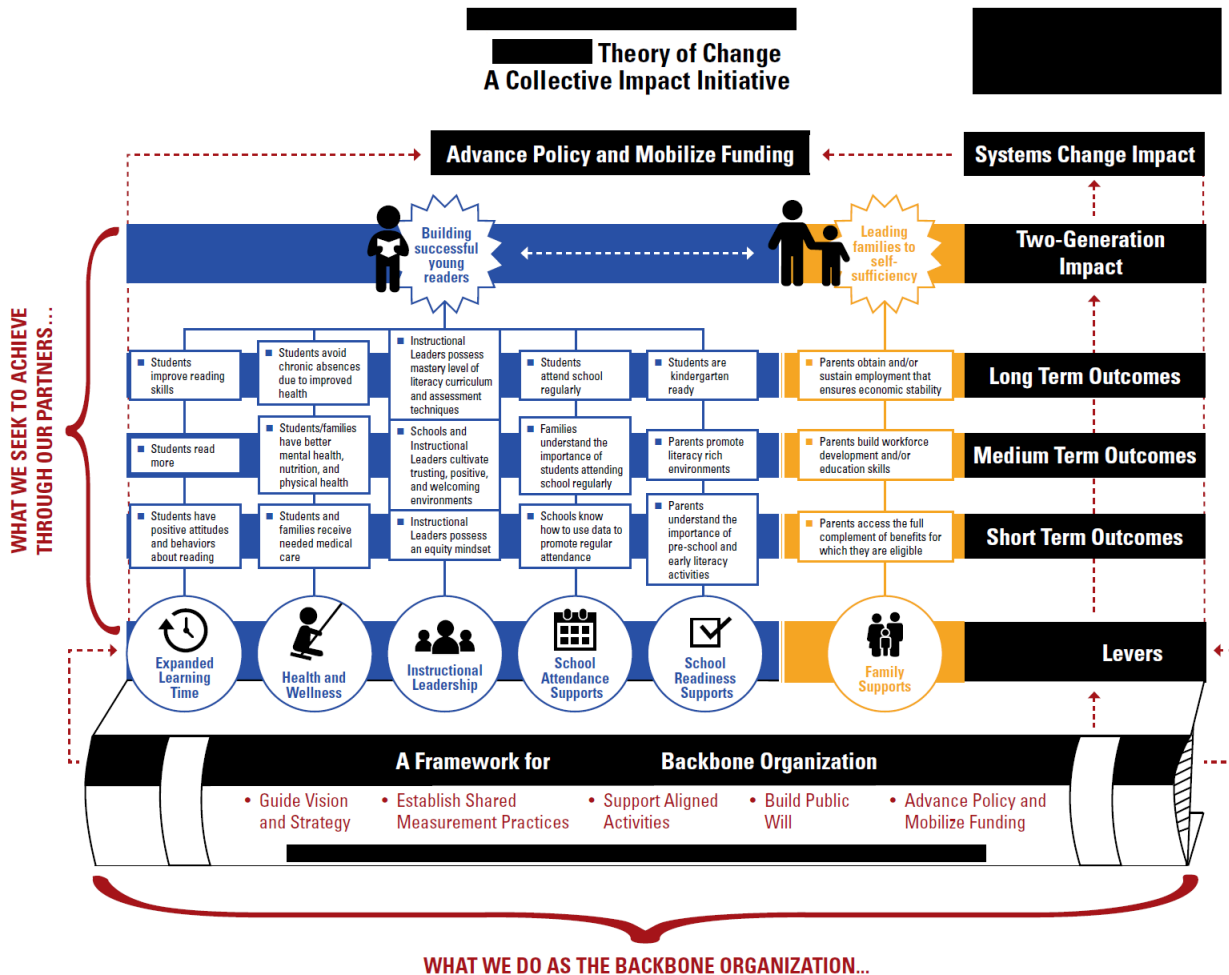
EMPOWERMENT

PREVENTION

Sample #3: Collective Impact Literacy Initiative

This Collective Impact literacy initiative located in the northeastern United States focuses on a two-generation approach to achieve the long-term goal of self-sufficiency - looking at families as a whole, addressing their immediate and long-term needs. This initiative works to provide children with an equal opportunity to a quality education, while at the same time strengthening their parents' and caregivers' financial stability, using six key strategies:

- ▶ Expanded and Summer Learning Opportunities
- ▶ Health and Wellness
- ▶ Quality Instructional Leadership
- ▶ School Attendance Supports
- ▶ School Readiness Supports
- ▶ Family Supports

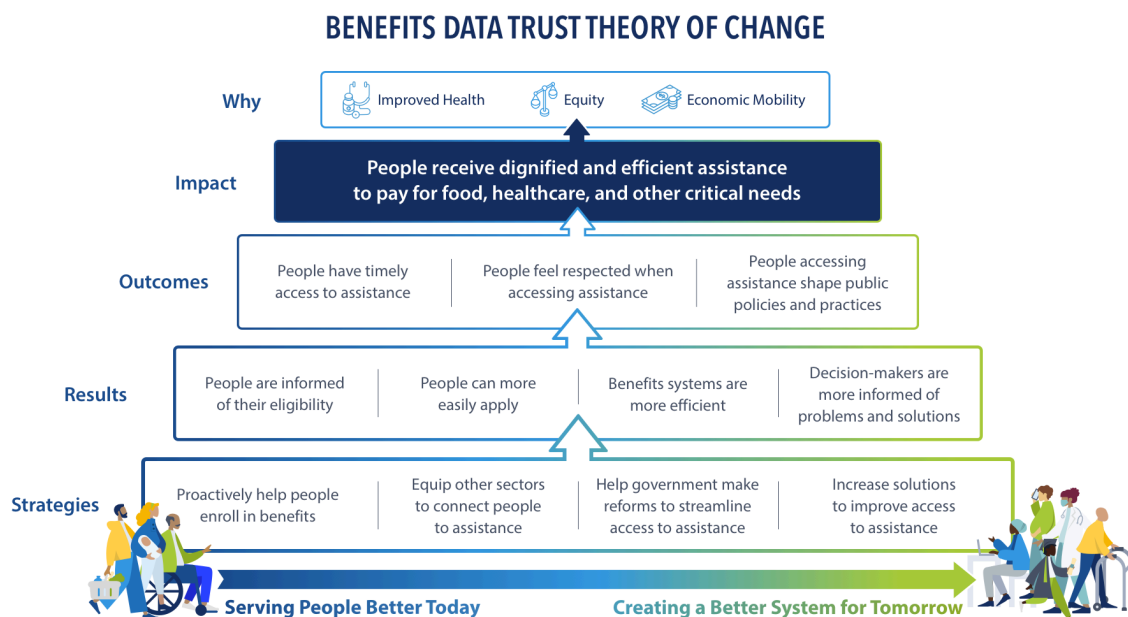


Sample #4: Benefits Data Trust Theory of Change

BDT's new theory of change and the strategies and outcomes encompassed within it are driven by the problems that the organization is trying to solve — real world problems that plague families across the country every day:

- ▶ More than 1 in 10 Americans live in poverty;
- ▶ More than \$60 billion in benefits are left on the table each year; and
- ▶ More than 9 million Americans qualify for one or more public benefit programs but are not enrolled in any assistance.

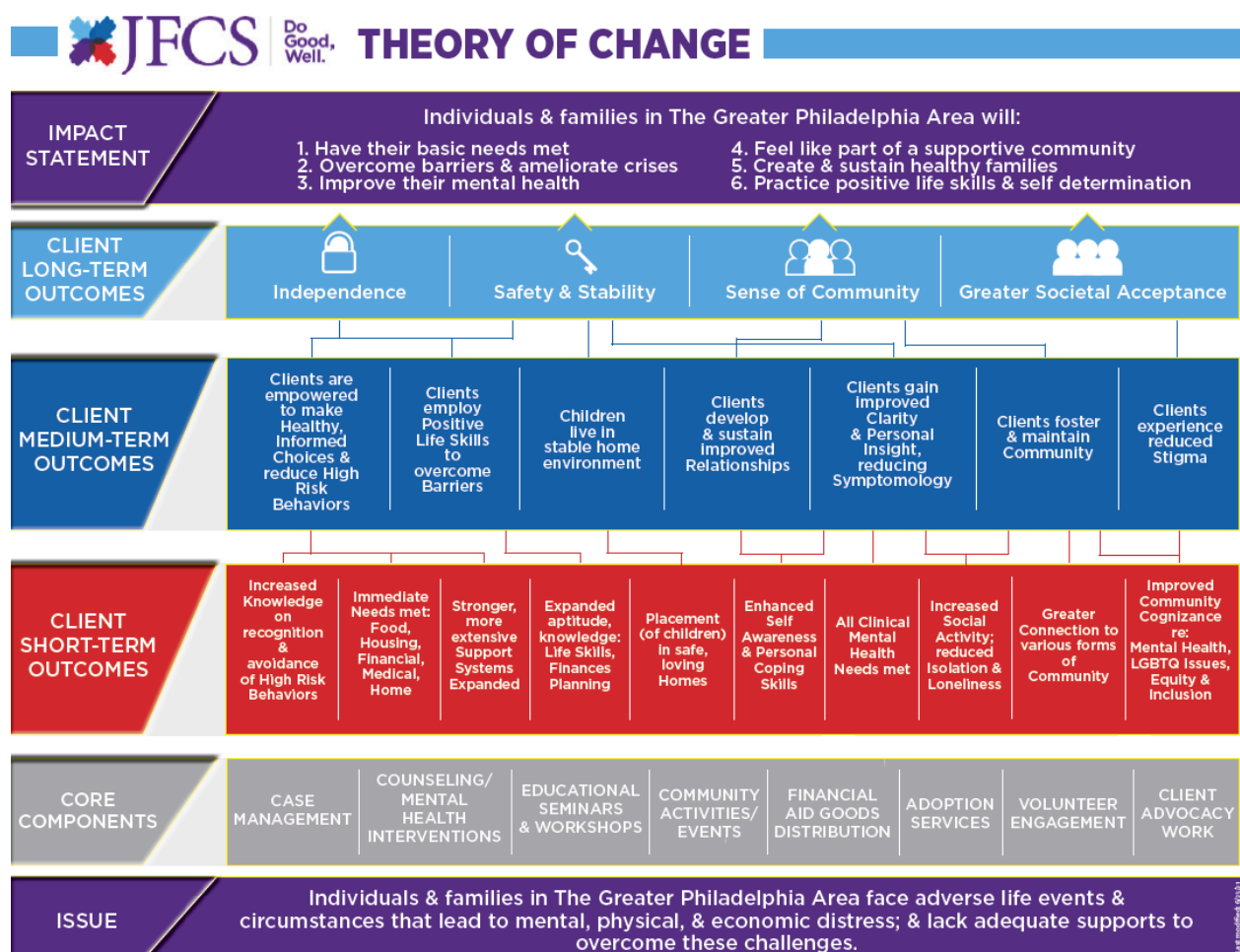
BDT's mission is to help people live healthier, more independent lives by creating smarter ways to access essential benefits and services. This new theory of change provides not only the staff, but also supporters, partners, and peers, with a clearer vision of how they plan to do just that.



November 30, 2021

Sample #5: Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Philadelphia

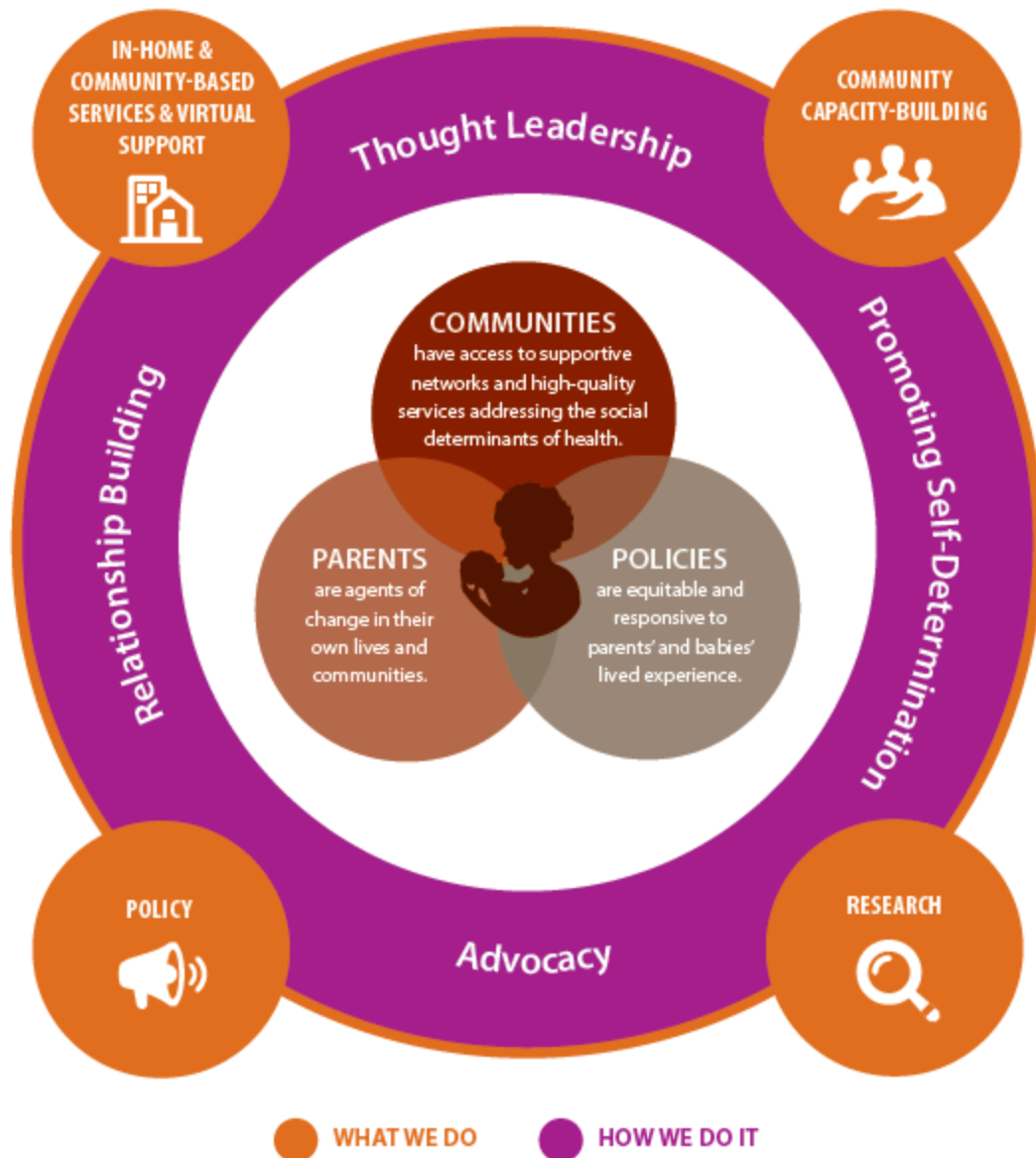
Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Philadelphia (JFCS) has a unique and vital mission: to strengthen families and individuals across generations and cultures to achieve stability, independence, and community. JFCS's values are their shared beliefs that reflect what is most important to them. In all that they do, they are grounded in Jewish values, which they have defined to reflect their commitment to the organization, people, and the diverse community they serve.



Sample #6: Maternity Care Coalition



Parents impacted by racial and social inequities in Southeastern Pennsylvania can birth with dignity, parent with autonomy and raise babies who are healthy, growing, and thriving.



Narrative Template

A Theory of Change narrative details an organization's assumptions about how change happens and why that change is important. This narrative template includes the key elements for each part of the Theory of Change. It is a guide for you to use while developing your Theory of Change, but please feel free to modify the structure so that it works best for your organization.

Identifying the Problem

Background

Desired Change

Your desired change captures the change you are seeking in the world. It is broad, visionary, and aspirational.

- ▶ **Why:** What change do you want to see in the world and why does this matter?
- ▶ **Who:** Who could your programs/services reach?

<Describe your desired change>

Broader Problem

You also want to provide background on the problem you are working on and consider the range of issues that need to be addressed to solve that problem. This involves exploring the root causes and systemic barriers influencing the problem/need you are addressing.

- **What (Broader Problem):** What is the scope, nature, and extent of the problem? Consider root causes and barriers. *Refer to any existing research you've done and note if there's any additional research you think you need to do to inform your thinking.*

<Describe the broader problem>

Your Organization's Role

Intended Impact

Your intended impact focuses on what your organization is trying to achieve in service of the desired change. It includes a more specific target population and the long-term impact you are working to achieve. The intended impact statement should follow this type of format: **“X population in Y geography will accomplish Z outcomes.”**

- ▶ **Why:** Consider what success looks like in the future. What impact will your organization hold itself accountable to over the long-term and why does this matter?
- ▶ **Who:** Identify the primary constituents who are at the center of your work. Who is the target population you recruit and would benefit most from your services? Who would it matter to if your organization closed? Think of the geographic focus - is there a core area of your organization's impact?

Here are several example intended impact statements:

- ▶ K-8 children in the Kensington neighborhood in Philadelphia will be prepared for success in high school.
- ▶ Homeless youth between the ages of 12 and 21 in San Francisco will exit homelessness permanently.
- ▶ All Philadelphia working families with children will be food secure.

<Write your intended impact statement, followed by a description of your target population>

Specific Need

You also want to highlight the specific problem your organization is working to address and how that responds to the needs of your target population.

- ▶ **What (Specific Need):** Consider why your organization exists. What would the community look like without your organization? What more specific part/s of the broader problem is your organization working to address? *Refer to any existing research you've done and note if there's any additional research you think you need to do to inform your thinking.*

<Write the specific need/s you are working to address for your target population>

Generating Solutions

Your Strategy/Core Components: *How You Achieve the Intended Impact*

This part provides an overview of the core components of your work (e.g., the programs, services, and/or strategies) and activities you implement to achieve your intended impact. Consider the following questions:

- ▶ **Core Components:** How do you organize your work (e.g., different programs or service areas and/or cross-cutting strategies)? What components are most critical for achieving your intended impact?
- ▶ **Activities:** How do specific organizational activities align to the core components of your work? What is the dosage?
- ▶ **Gaps:** Is there anything missing from your current work that you need to do in order to achieve the outcomes/intended impact?
- ▶ **Assumptions:** What assumptions are you making about how your components address the specific needs of your target population?

<Write a short narrative describing your core components and how they work together to achieve the intended impact. Then fill out the table on the next page to provide more detail on each component. Please feel free to organize and label in a way that works for you (this template is just a guide)!>

Core Component: XX	
Activities (What you do)	Outputs (Dosage/Duration)

Core Component: XX	
Activities (What you do)	Outputs (Dosage/Duration)

Outcomes

Your outcomes capture the impact of your work over time (e.g., short-, medium-, and long-term). These outcomes should be connected to your core components and should be building towards your intended impact. It is likely that multiple components work together to achieve these outcomes. Consider your hypotheses and the assumptions you are making about how your program/service components lead to your desired outcomes and how these assumptions may be influenced by your biases/worldview.

- ▶ **Short-Term Outcomes:** Short-term outcomes capture changes in knowledge, attitudes or awareness.
- ▶ **Medium-Term Outcomes:** Medium-term outcomes capture changes in skills, behaviors, and actions.
- ▶ **Long-Term Outcomes:** Long-term outcomes capture changes in status or condition.

<Write a short narrative describing your outcomes and how they result from the core components and work together to achieve the intended impact. Then fill out the table on the next page to provide more detail on each outcome and how it aligns to your strategy/core components. Please feel free to organize and label in a way that aligns to how you think about your work>

Intended Impact:	
Outcomes Pathway	
Long-Term Outcomes	Alignment to Core Components (Which core components does this align to?)
Medium-Term Outcomes	Alignment to Core Components (Which core components does this align to?)
Short-Term Outcomes	Alignment to Core Components (Which core components does this align to?)
Specific Need:	

Pulling It All Together

Drafting Your Theory of Change

DESIGN	IDEAS
Questions to consider	What initial ideas do you have for design?
▶ What images, language, and structures resonate with the culture, approach, and practices within your organization AND the communities you serve? ▶ How can you communicate your impact in a clear and compelling way?	

Testing Assumptions

ASSUMPTION	AVAILABLE EVIDENCE	EVIDENCE NEEDED
What assumption are we making?	What evidence do we have to support our assumption?	What evidence do we need to gather? Consider both external evidence AND internal evidence.
Ex. Providing 3 weeks of full time workforce development training adequately prepares participants with limited employment histories for employment at an entry level job.	Our internal data shows that 75% of our participants receive an entry level job after 3 weeks of full time training.	▶ Need to explore who the 25% are who don't get an entry level job - are they participants with more limited employment histories? Did they have limited participation in the program? What are other possible barriers to success? ▶ What does research on other programs say is needed to adequately prepare our target population for entry level employment? ▶ What do our constituents say is needed?

Pressure Testing

PURPOSE/AUDIENCE		APPROACH	FOLLOW THROUGH	
Stakeholder Who do you want to collect feedback from?	Rationale & Decision-Making What is the purpose and what specifically do you want to learn? Who has the authority to make decisions?	Methods & Timing What is the best method for collecting feedback? When is the best timing?	Using the Feedback How will the feedback be used?	Closing the Loop How will you circle back with whoever you collected feedback from?
Constituents	The purpose is to involve constituents and and gather input on the following: ▸ Are the needs we have identified the needs that are most important to our constituents? ▸ Does our outcome pathway represent the lived experience	▸ Interviews during already scheduled one-on-one meetings in the Summer ▸ Focus group at the end of our September monthly training	▸ Our leadership team will meet in October to discuss the feedback and come to consensus on the final theory of change that incorporates feedback across all	▸ We will share updates at our November training about how feedback was incorporated and why decisions were made ▸ We will send out an announcem

	<i>of our constituents?</i> <i>Our leadership team will determine the best way to incorporate the feedback.</i>		<i>stakeholder groups</i>	<i>ent in our November newsletter</i>