A theory of change serves as a valuable tool to illustrate a series of changes that must occur to address a problem or need. Without a theory of change, agencies may move down the wrong path when trying to solve a problem.

**Key Takeaways**

A well-constructed theory of change:
- Serves as a roadmap that illustrates the needed steps to move from a problem to a desired outcome
- Sets the foundation for selecting an appropriate intervention
- Helps partners and stakeholders get on the same page about what needs to happen to reach shared goals
- Guides strategic planning and later evaluation

Data, critical thinking, and meaningful stakeholder input contribute to the development of a sound theory of change.

**What It Takes to Get It Done**

- Gather information on the problem statement, root cause(s), and target population.
- Identify a long-term outcome.
- Develop the pathway(s) of change (series of causal links).
- Define actions that could bring about needed changes.
- Document assumptions and rationale.

**Theory of Change**

A theory of change includes a series of causal links (conditions, changes, short-term outcomes) that must unfold to achieve the desired outcome. Together, these links make up the pathway of change from the root cause(s) of the problem to the long-term outcome.

**A theory of change and logic model are related but different tools.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory of Change</th>
<th>Logic Model</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illustrates the pathway from the root cause(s) of the problem to the desired outcome</td>
<td>Presents program inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes in a structured, linear way</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helps explain how and why change will occur</td>
<td>Helps teams understand expected results</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is generally developed before selecting a specific program or strategy</td>
<td>Is generally developed after selecting a specific program or strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports intervention selection</td>
<td>Supports monitoring and evaluation</td>
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Theory of Change Milestones

- Development and documentation of a theory of change that reflects:
  - The root cause(s) of the problem
  - A credible pathway to move from the problem to the desired, long-term outcome

The creation of a theory of change helps prepare agencies for intervention selection and design/intervention implementation.

Need more information on creating a theory of change?
Detailed resources are available on the Change and Implementation in Practice website at https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/cqi/change-implementation/theory-of-change/

- Indepth brief offers step-by-step guidance. Learn the details of how to create a well-supported theory of change and see examples.
- Short videos and a workbook reinforce key concepts. Use for training and to start thinking about application in your agency.
- Recorded webinars feature real world examples. Hear lessons learned and tips from experts and peers.

Key Change and Implementation Topics

- Monitoring, Evaluating, and Applying Findings
- Intervention Testing, Piloting, and Staging
- Implementation Planning and Capacity Building
- Theory of Change
- Problem Exploration
- Readiness