



CREATING A THEORY OF CHANGE

A step-by-step guide

WHAT IS A THEORY OF CHANGE?



A Theory of Change (ToC) is a useful tool that can support organisations to think through and articulate how a programme, project or other stream of work is expected to deliver impact for stakeholders.

Usually presented as a roadmap or journey, a ToC outlines how specific actions lead to desired outcomes, clarifying goals, assumptions and strategies for achieving long-term impact. A ToC provides a detailed blueprint that explains the logic behind an initiative, ensuring that all aspects of the work are aligned towards achieving the desired outcomes that contribute to the impact.

As a tool, a ToC provides a helpful, structured way of thinking things through, working back from the intended impact to consider the intermediate steps and what needs to happen for the desired changes to occur.

Alongside clarifying objectives and goals, a ToC is useful for a number of reasons, including...

Strategic planning: By breaking down the steps needed to achieve long-term goals, a ToC provides a structured approach to planning. It helps to identify the necessary resources, timelines and key milestones, making the process more goal-oriented.

Monitoring and evaluation: A well-defined ToC includes specific indicators for success at each stage. This makes it easier to monitor progress and evaluate effectiveness.

Communication: A ToC offers a clear narrative that explains the logic behind a piece of work. This makes it easier to communicate the purpose, approach and expected impact of a project.

GLOSSARY

There are a number of components involved in creating a ToC. Here's a quick guide to some terminology you'll come across...

Assumptions: The underlying beliefs about how change will happen.

Activities: The actions and work that will lead to outputs and outcomes.

Barriers: The conditions or factors that slow down, disrupt or block the change process.

Context: The external environment or conditions that might affect the implementation of the work.

Enablers: The conditions or factors that help drive the change forwards.

Impact: The broader, long-term change you're trying to achieve.

Inputs: The resources, materials and initial conditions that are necessary to carry out the activities.

Outcomes: The changes, benefits or learning that result from the outputs that lead to the ultimate goal. These can be short-term, medium-term, or long-term.

Outputs: The immediate results or products of the activities.

Primary stakeholders: The individual or group who are directly affected by the work and are central to shaping the TOC.

Stakeholders: All of the individuals, groups or organisations that have an interest in, or are by affected by, the work.

OUTCOMES VS OUTPUTS

When creating your ToC, it's important to be able to distinguish between outputs and outcomes. This will help you to be able to understand the difference between what the work does and the impact it seeks to achieve.

Outputs are the immediate, quantifiable products or services delivered by the work such as the number of workshops conducted, reports published or people trained.

Outcomes are the changes or effects that occur as the result of these outputs, such as improved skills, behaviour change or increased awareness.

The separation of outputs and outcomes ensures that any monitoring and evaluation efforts based on your ToC are meaningful, not just measuring whether an activity was completed, but also focused on the desired changes you expect to see as a result.

Here are some examples of outputs vs. outcomes for an adult literacy programme...

Outputs	Outcomes
500 adults complete basic literacy classes	Improved literacy of participants
10,000 literacy workbooks distributed to adult learners	Enhanced employability of participants
500 flyers distributed to create awareness of programme	Enhanced quality of life for participants
50 literacy classes conducted	Increased confidence and self-esteem for participants

THEORY OF CHANGE TEMPLATE

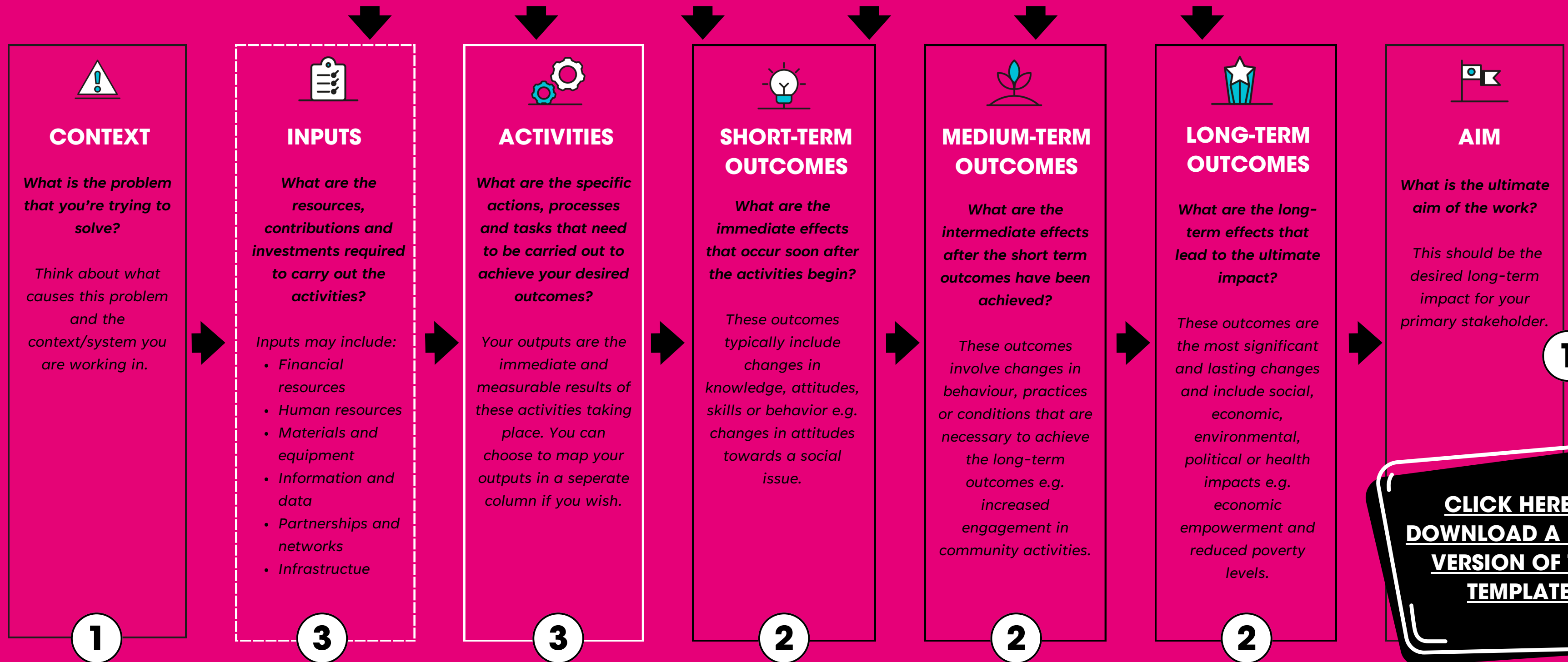
CAPACITY



ENABLERS/BARRIERS

What are the conditions and factors that will facilitate or hinder the success of this work? These can be internal (e.g. strong leadership) or external (e.g. political instability).

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[CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD A BLANK VERSION OF THIS TEMPLATE.](#)

THEORY OF CHANGE

TOP TIPS



Now that you've familiarised yourself with some ToC lingo, understand the stages involved in the process, and are ready to start drafting your own, here are some top tips to bear in mind...

Know your primary stakeholder: Before you begin, you will need to identify the primary stakeholder you want to develop your journey of change for. This is the group of individuals who will directly benefit from your project or intervention. Tailor your ToC to address their specific needs, challenges and goals.

Work backwards: Start by identifying the context (the problem you're trying to solve) and the overall aim of the project (the impact you want to have). Then, work backwards by mapping the outcomes you want to see, the activities that will achieve these outcomes and the resources needed to make the activities happen. This will help to ensure your plans are focused on your desired impact.

Specify the time periods: It can be helpful to define timeframes for each stage of the ToC, establishing when you expect to achieve certain milestones and outcomes, ensuring that your timeline is realistic and aligns with your resources and capacities.

Map the causal pathways: Throughout the process, continuously ask yourself how the activities will lead to the outcomes, what will be achieved at each stage and why these outcomes are important. Draw clear, visual pathways that link your activities to your outcomes. This helps to establish cause and effect relationships that will drive forward the change process.

Identify assumptions: Taking time to identify, check and challenge your underlying beliefs and assumptions about how change will happen will ensure your ToC is realistic and grounded in evidence. This will make it easier to identify any potential barriers.

Engage stakeholders: Actively involving stakeholders throughout the ToC process will help make sure that your ToC is grounded in the realities of those your project will benefit. This can increase buy-in and support for the work.

Keep it dynamic: A ToC should be a live document, open to revisions and updates as new information, feedback or changes in context arise. Regularly reviewing and refining your ToC will keep it relevant and effective, allowing your project to adapt and change over time.

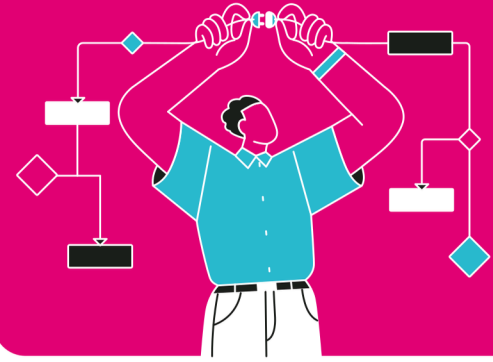
Communicate clearly: Document your ToC in a way that's easy to understand and communicate, use visuals carefully, make sure that your language is concise and use clear explanations so that all stakeholders can grasp the logic and purpose of your strategy.

Have fun: Creating a ToC can be a creative and collaborative process. Getting people together in a room to think about achieving real impact can generate exciting and innovative ideas and insights. So, don't forget to enjoy the journey and have some fun drafting your ToC!



OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

BRINGING OUR VISION TO LIFE



Public services in the North West work for every person, every time, making it the best place to grow up, grow wise and grow old.

01 PUBLIC AND THIRD SECTOR ARE FACING TOUGH CHALLENGES



Pressure on the sectors makes them reactive instead of proactive



The system remains fragmented and lacks the necessary connections



Funding pressures make recruiting and retaining quality staff difficult



Not enough resources are allocated to listening deeply to communities



Leaders feel isolated, burned out and unable to challenge the status quo



Funding is inadequate: not enough, too short term or too restricted

02 BUT WE ARE ON A MISSION TO MAKE THINGS BETTER



We bring big-picture thinking, imagination and hard graft to help public and third sector leaders not just think differently, but do differently.

We get them moving on the projects that really matter: the ones that make the most impact on the lives of everyday people.

06 SO THAT PEOPLE IN THE NORTH WEST CAN ACCESS



Health services earlier, reducing escalation of need



Family support earlier, reducing cycles of problems



The skills and tools to manage their emotional wellbeing

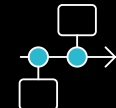


Children's social care that is higher quality and more purpose led



Adult care models that maximise independence

05 TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM



Teams find space to be proactive and not just reactive



Public and third sectors are interconnected and collaborative



Organisations are able to recruit and retain quality staff



People recognise their voice and views in the services they can access



Sector leaders feel supported, connected and able to explore disruptive solutions



Organisations can access adequate funding to deliver transformative impact

04 USING OUR KNOW-HOW



We take the time to truly listen

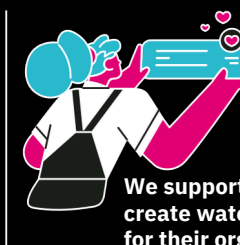
We're always learning, we're not experts in everything we touch, and neither is anyone else



We make sense of complexity, keeping things as simple as they can be

We're not afraid to disrupt the status quo if we find there's a better way of doing things

03 BY PARTNERING WITH PUBLIC AND THIRD SECTOR ORGANISATIONS



We support leaders to create watertight plans for their organisations



We get money into the hands of those who will put it to best use



We build stronger workforces, with inspiring leaders and great cultures



We put those who need support at the heart of impactful product and service design



We tweak frameworks and infrastructure so they're fit for purpose

HERE'S OUR THEORY OF CHANGE. CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT WHAT WE DO.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Interested in learning more about the work we do, or how we can support your organisation on your change journey? Get in touch...



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