

Logic models: Better thinking for better results

Tips from the Wilder Research program evaluation workshop series

Your human service program is meant to make a positive difference in the lives of people in your community, or perhaps to improve your community as a whole.

But how? Developing a program theory – a logical and reasonable description of why the things you do should lead to intended outcomes – can help you answer this question.

A logic model – based on your program theory – provides a road map that visually connects program activities with their desired results so that your board, staff and other stakeholders can move towards your goals.

Benefits of a logic model

If developed thoughtfully, a logic model can be used for multiple purposes. It can help you:

- Describe your program to funders or potential funders.
- Spell out the underlying beliefs and assumptions of your program.
- Identify and build consensus on what activities and outcomes are essential to reach your goals.
- Train new program staff to help them understand how the program works and to clarify their role in promoting positive benefits for participants.
- Control program drift by reviewing your model to ensure services remain consistent with your program's intended purpose and approach.
- Provide a basis for developing an evaluation design – helping you decide which participant outcomes are the most important ones to measure.
- Assess your program's likelihood of success, and identify opportunities for improvement.

Laying out the evidence

An effective logic model is built on a solid program theory. Some questions to consider in developing your theory:

- IF the activity is provided, THEN what realistically should be the result for participants?
- WHY do you believe the activity will lead to this result?
- What evidence do you have that the activity will lead to this result (e.g., previous results, published research, or consistent feedback from participants)?

How to build a logic model

Before building your logic model, you want to make sure that your program theory is based on good underlying evidence about what makes programs successful and how people really change.

When you are confident in the validity of your theory, you are ready to create your logic model. Your logic model should clearly and visually demonstrate how one thing leads to the next, using short phrases to represent things that you explain in more detail in the program theory.

Your logic model can be a flow chart, table, text or a combination of these, as long as it maps the following components and the connections between them:

Inputs – the resources and materials that go into your program (e.g., funding, staff or volunteers, facility, transportation services, supplies.)

Activities – major services provided directly to your clients.

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Outputs – the amount of service provided, most often expressed in numbers, such as the number of people who participate in an activity or the hours of service received.

Outcomes – the actual impact (the change that results). These can be short-term, intermediate and long-term. Short-term outcomes include changes in knowledge, attitudes and skills; intermediate outcomes usually refer to behavioral changes; and long-term outcomes refer to more global changes such as community impacts.

The model should show the connections between your inputs and your activities, between your activities and outputs, and between your outputs and each sequence of outcomes. One activity could lead to multiple outcomes, or multiple activities could lead to only one outcome.

Final steps: Review and revise

It usually takes multiple revisions of the model before it reaches its final form. As you review your draft, ask yourself:

- Does the logic model include all of the most important activities and services?
- Are outcomes clear and realistic? Do they represent meaningful changes?
- Are the connections between components logical? What evidence supports the connections?

Common challenges and solutions

Staff are not invested in the process

Focusing on the importance of this discussion—rather than seeing it as just a task to complete—can increase engagement in the process. Building a logic model provides an opportunity—all too rare in the everyday provision of services—to discuss what it is

about your work that is most meaningful and to renew your appreciation for the ways your program can change lives and communities.

Model is too complicated

Focus on the most important activities and outcomes, and cut back on detail. Avoid jargon. Describe your activities and outcomes in language that is understood by a wide range of stakeholders.

Stakeholders disagree about model or outcomes

Although it might be difficult, keep key stakeholders involved, including staff, program participants, collaborators, or funders. Involving stakeholders does not mean they need to be included with all tasks and they do not need to have sign-off authority. Focus on the process, not the product.

Take time to explore the reasons for disagreement about what should be captured in the logic model. Look for the assumptions, identify and resolve disagreements, and build consensus.

Additional resources:

The Logic Model for Program Planning and Evaluation—
<http://www.uidaho.edu/extension/LogicModel.pdf>

Logic Model Development Guide—
<http://www.wkkf.org/knowledge-center/Resources-Page.aspx>

The Community Tool Box—Developing a Logic Model or Theory of Change
http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_main_1877.htm

Everything You Wanted to Know About Logic Models But Were Afraid to Ask—
<http://www.insites.org/documents/logmod.htm>

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

This tip sheet is part of a series developed for our evaluation workshops. Find others at www.wilder.org/report.html?q=tips2008
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