FREE TOOLKIT

Theory of Change canvas

From the problem you see to the change you want, and what has to be true on the way.

Enterprise or idea: _____ Team: _____ Date: _____

1 The problem

What is wrong, for whom, and where? How do you know?

2 What you do

Your activities: training, a product, a service, a campaign.

3 What you deliver

Outputs you can count: sessions held, products sold, people reached.

4 First changes

What changes for people within months: skills, habits, income.

5 Lasting change

What is different after a few years if it works?

6 The bigger picture

The long-term impact on the community or system you serve.

7 Who you serve

The people whose lives should change. Be specific: age, place, situation.

8 What must be true

Assumptions: what has to hold for each step to lead to the next?

9 How you will know

Signs of change you can count or observe for steps 3 to 5.

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How to use it

A Theory of Change is a short story with a logic: if we do this, then that changes, because of these reasons. Writing it down helps a team agree on what it is trying to do, spot weak links early, and explain the work to partners and funders. Work in pencil: you will change it as you learn.

Step by step

1. Start at box 1. Describe the problem in one or two sentences, in the words of the people who live with it.
2. Fill box 7: who exactly you serve. A clear group gives clear answers in the other boxes.
3. Jump to box 6, then box 5: the change you want in the long run, and what it looks like after a few years.
4. Work backwards through boxes 4, 3 and 2: which first changes lead there, what you need to deliver for them, and what you will do.
5. Between every pair of boxes, ask "why would this lead to that?" Write the answers in box 8.
6. In box 9, choose two or three signs of change you can count. The Impact measurement worksheet helps you define them.

Check your work

- [ ] Could someone outside your team read the canvas from left to right and understand it?
- [ ] Is every first change (box 4) something your activities can really influence?
- [ ] Have you written down the assumption you are least sure of? How could you test it this month?
- [ ] Did you ask some of the people you serve whether the story makes sense to them?

Tips

- Use sticky notes on a printed or enlarged copy, so the team can move ideas around.
- Keep the language plain. If a word needs explaining, choose another word.
- Review the canvas every few months. A Theory of Change that never changes is usually not being used.

Learn with a team behind you: SIA teaches these tools in its programmes. See socinacademy.org