2.0

Theories of Change:
Understanding your project

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What is a Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change (ToC) shows how an intervention (or project, programme, or policy) is intended to work. The 'Change' refers to the difference that you wish to make, and the 'Theory' is how you will try to make this happen (in other words, how what you do might create change). It is like a roadmap that indicates how the inputs and activities are expected to produce the desired outcomes and impact.[1]

> *A 'Theory of Change' explains how activities are understood to produce a series of results that contribute to achieving the final intended impacts.*
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A ToC can help you and your organisation visualise and understand what you are trying to achieve, why, and how. It can serve several important functions, such as helping you to think critically about whether a response will work in your local context, communicate with partners and commissioners about your plan, identify how to maximise the likelihood of meeting the intervention's desired outcomes, and monitor the progress and impact of your work.[2] The different uses of ToCs are discussed in more detail in section 2.2.

It is helpful to think of a ToC as a simplified diagram or narrative that can be built-upon, adapted and re-written over time. ToCs are sometimes called Logic Models or Logical Frameworks and can be visualised in many ways. Whichever approach or terminology you use, it is important that your ToC makes sense to you and your involved stakeholders.

- Some ToCs can be **project-level** (used for specific projects, such as your intervention), others can be more **high-level**, used for policies or wider programmes of work (such as the whole organisation, or the whole VRU). This toolkit focusses on project-level ToC examples.
- Some are more detailed than others. The underlying principle of ToCs is to show the '**causal pathways**' from your activities to your intended outcomes and impact. This means the chain of results that you anticipate your activities will set in motion, to arrive at specific outcomes. Specifically, causal links show which activities lead to which outputs, which outputs lead to which outcomes, and which outcomes lead to which impacts. Some ToCs include arrows to help visualise these pathways, but basic ToCs do not.
- Some ToCs have more components than others (see components below).

1 College of policing, 2021, Knife crime A problem solving guide, p5. Available at: https://assets.college.police.uk/s3fs-public/2021-11/Knife-crime-a-problem-solving-guide.pdf

2 College of policing, 2021, Knife crime A problem solving guide, p5. Available at: https://assets.college.police.uk/s3fs-public/2021-11/Knife-crime-a-problem-solving-guide.pdf

There are some common pitfalls that people encounter in understanding what a ToC is, or what it is for:

- It should not show operational details of an organisation; it is not a delivery plan exploring how you will deliver your outputs. Rather, it is to help you understand how your outputs (and the activities you deliver to create those outputs) will lead to your intended outcomes and impact.
- A ToC should not focus on a particular project as a snapshot, or at a particular point in time (or in chronological order).
- It should not be a 'tick-box' exercise that you complete and never look at again, but rather a tool that you revisit and adapt as your intervention and priorities evolve. It should be treated as a reference point and 'living document'.[3]

Here is a glossary of key terms, to help you better understand the language around ToCs, which we'll explore in this chapter.

As Figure 1 helps to show, a ToC traces the logic behind an intervention, visualising how and why inputs and activities are expected to lead to the intended outcomes and impact. It also shows what factors need to be in place (assumptions) for the change to be realised and considers any barriers (risks) which may prevent or delay this. Not all ToCs include this, but we believe setting out your assumptions (and the associated risks) is an important step to help you identify the casual pathways between different components of your ToC.

Some ToCs may also include information on the **context** the project is working in (i.e., other programs or funding in place locally, which may have an impact on the extent to which outcomes are met), or possible **unintended outcomes** which may arise following the activities. Also, some ToCs separate outcomes into 'immediate' or 'short-term' and 'medium-term' outcomes where appropriate.

Although there is no fixed way to present a ToC, **it should always cover inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact**.

3 TSIP, Theory of Change: eight common mistakes.
Available at: https://www.tsip.co.uk/blog/2019/7/18/theory-of-change-eight-common-mistakes-9bt5f

Components of a Theory of Change

It is helpful to think of a ToC as a diagram with several, distinct components. The basic ToC presented in this toolkit has six columns, explained in the template below.

Figure 1: Components of a Theory of Change

Rationale	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
The reason, or problem statement, for the proposed intervention. It should be evident that the intervention focused on addressing an identified need (i.e. links to the VRU SNA and Response Strategy). **Assumptions** Assumptions are a necessity to a ToC. Many assumptions can be captured with casual pathways (arrows between components) but others need to be mentioned separately. Assumptions include the necessary conditions for change, such as the resources that need to be in place for the planned changes to occur. **Risks** What are the key risks to the ToC? Focusing on the assumptions not being met are is a useful start point.	The inputs required to deliver the proposed activities. Financial and non-financial (e.g. time in kind, existing process/ systems) should be included.	The proposed activities to deliver the intended outputs/outcomes. As well as the direct support to clients, supporting activities (e.g. referral/engagement systems, staff training) should also be included.	The immediate (often quantifiable) outputs from activities. Typically, we would be interested in the number of clients engaged and subsequently supported. Other examples include the number of (group) sessions delivered and staff/ organisations trianed.	The intermediate outcomes that (are assumed) to lead to/support the intended impacts. Typically outcomes are observable shortly after the intervention. Examples include positive changes in mental wellbeing, accessing services, and progress towards positive life outcomes (e.g. education/ employment.	Impacts can be considered as the ultimate outcomes of an intervention. In the VRU context, impacts will likely focus on reductions in crime/violence. Depending on the type of intervention and intended target group, impacts can take longer to materialise and be observed.

2.1 Theory of Change worked examples

The following pages provide example ToCs we have created for fictional violence reduction and prevention projects. Figure 2 explores a locality-based youth work project which includes detached outreach and individual, one-to-one advice sessions. The arrows highlight the assumed **casual links** between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts; for example, you can see that the existing data-sharing arrangements between partners (the input) facilitates the identification of hotspots (activity) in which to deliver outreach sessions (output). These outreach sessions support the identification of individual young people in need of one-to-one support; once that support has been put in place, outcomes such as improved social and emotional skills can be realised, leading to longer term impacts including reduced criminality.

Figure 3 provides an example for a Hospital Navigator project, and Figure 4 focuses on a project designed to divert perpetrators of violence against women and girls VAWG crimes from reoffending.

Those items presented with a dotted line represent components which are vital to the project but which we assume will not lead to impact alone, without the other components of the ToC. It is not necessary to include this level of detail when creating your own ToC, but we have included this to show the extent to which you could think through your causal links.

Figure 2: Local based interventions Theory of Change

Rationale

Young people are more likely to engage within a space of their choosing. Aim to positively influence their lives by providing support and guidance and engaging them in a programme of informal social education.

Assumptions

Identifiability of gang hotspots and individuals therein. Prompt availability (and take-up) of detached sessions. Availability and take-up of tailored follow-up support. Good relationships with police and community support services.

Risks

Low take-up, difficulty getting access to areas and individuals, difficulty getting data sharing agreements in place.

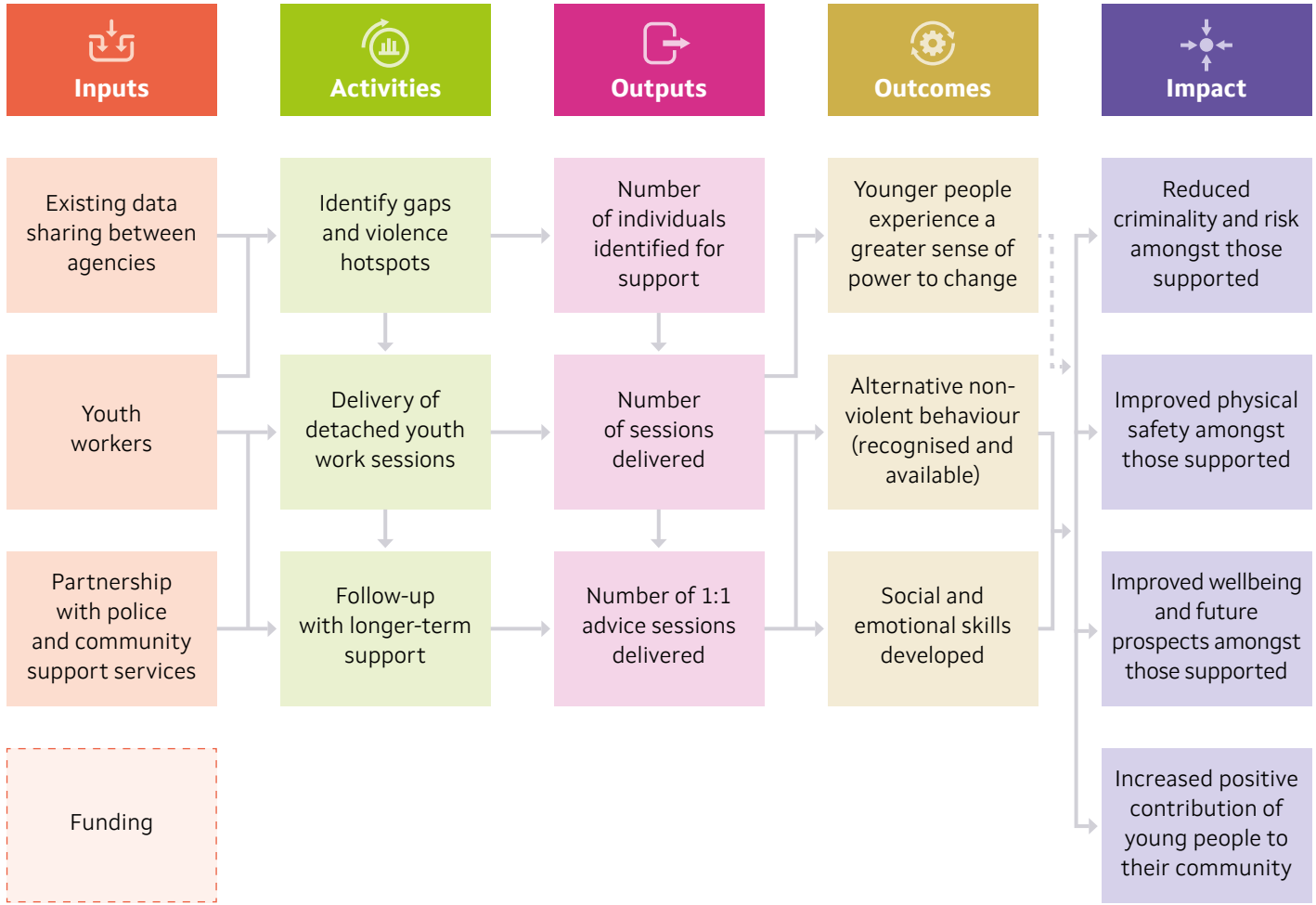


Figure 3: Hospital navigators Theory of Change

Rationale

Provide alternative, non-violent, life choices to victims of knife crime at a time when they are likely most amenable to change.

Assumptions

Substantial overlap between victims and offenders, identifiability of knife crime victims (who may also be offenders), prompt availability (and take-up) of credible providers of initial interventions and availability and take-up of follow-up support tailored to victim/offender needs.

Risks

Potential unintended/negative outcomes/impact from labelling victim as a potential offender and/or increased need to self protect/reintegrate with peers owing to recognition of vulnerability.

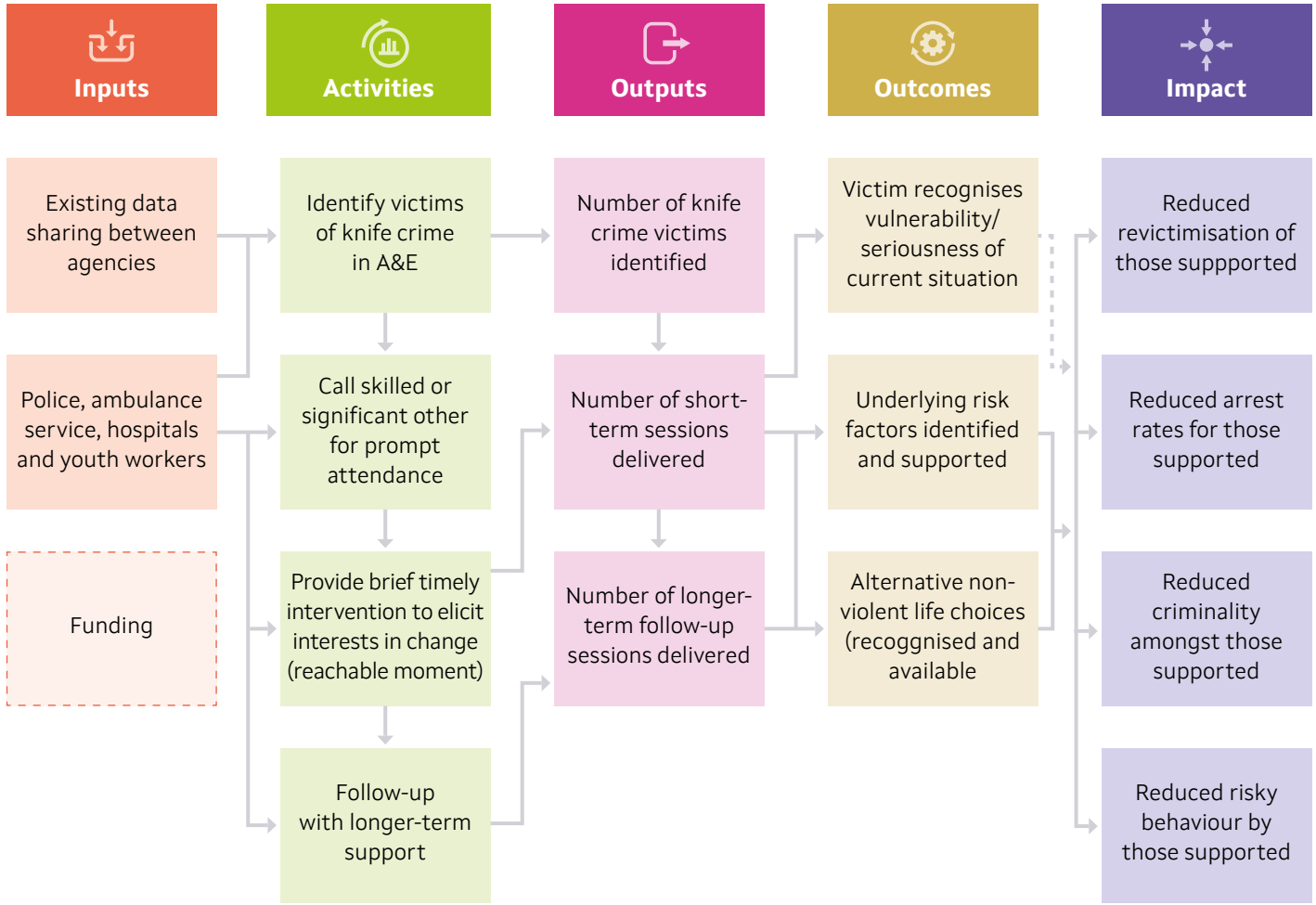


Figure 4: VAWG/criminal justice Theory of Change

Rationale

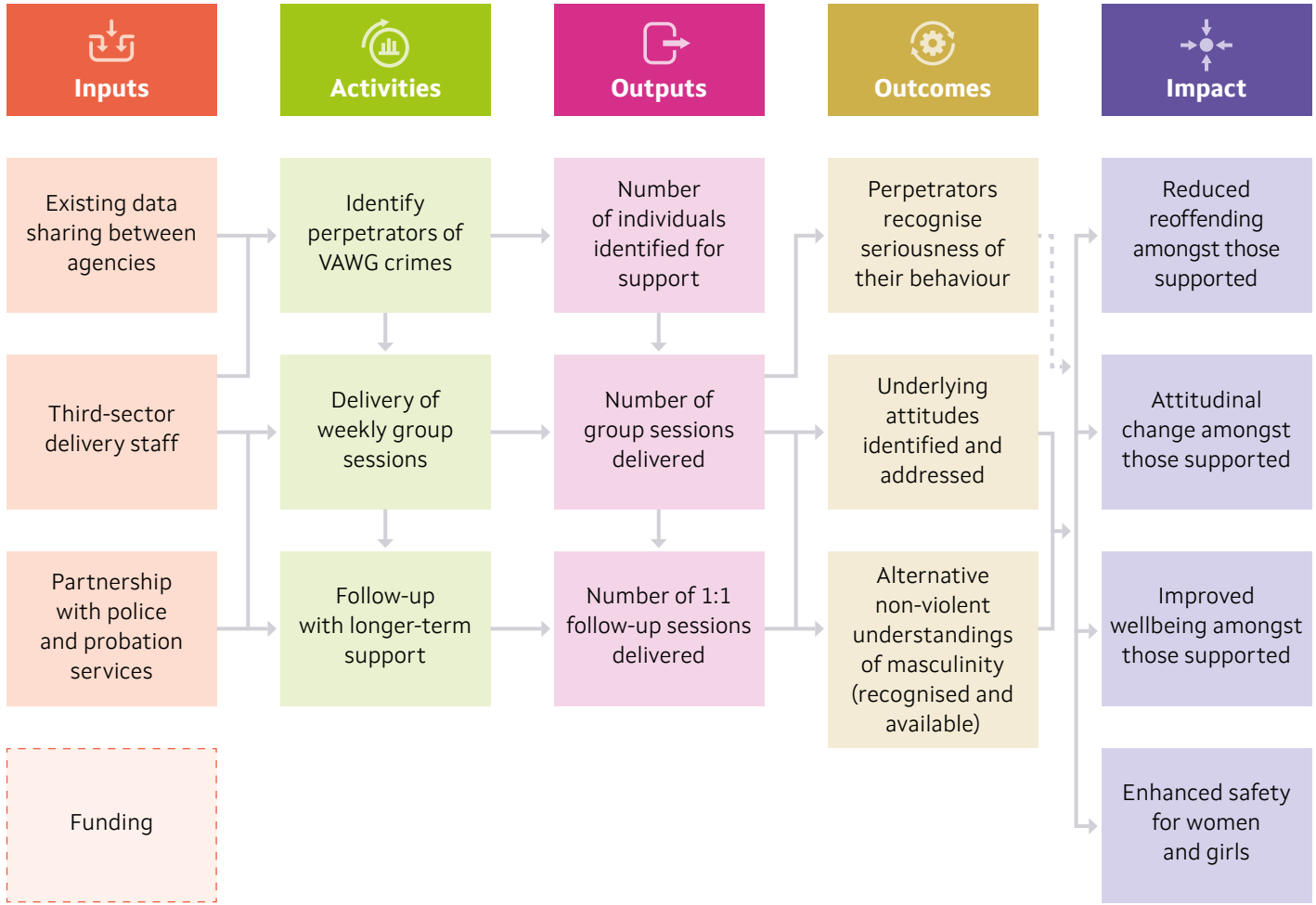
Perpetrators of VAWG crimes hold toxic attitudes towards women and masculinity. There are a lack of perpetrator-focused interventions which aim to hold perpetrators to account, while educating them and offering them opportunities to change their attitudes and behaviours.

Assumptions

Identifiability of gendered and sexual violence perpetrators (who may also be victims). Prompt availability (and take-up) of group sessions. Availability and take-up of tailored follow-up support/good relationships with probation services.

Risks

Low take-up, difficulty getting access to perpetrators, difficulty getting data sharing agreements in place due to sensitive nature of the data.



2.2 When and how to use Theories of Change

ToCs are an important tool for all stages of project delivery – they are flexible documents that can be used before, during and after an intervention. They can provide a great opportunity to ensure that your thinking is consistent from the design stage to the post-implementation stages, and in all decision-making processes. As such, you should use ToCs during:

(Co) Design of the project

- Developing activities to achieve the intended outcomes/impacts – it will support you in designing your service in a way that will optimise achieving the outcome you are looking for.
- Identifying the inputs required to deliver the activities effectively.

The development of a business case

- Ensuring the intervention meets identified needs, for example, does it link to the VRU's Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA)?
- Demonstrating to partners and funders that the intervention is logical and supported by evidence.

Delivery

- Effectively communicating the approach to delivery teams and referrers.
- Identifying when an intervention is not being delivered as intended and/or isn't leading to desired outcomes.

Evaluation

- Knowing what you are evaluating from the outset, helping to define your research questions.
- Focused and effective monitoring and evaluation approaches can be put in place from the outset of delivery.

2.3 How to create a Theory of Change

Developing a ToC should be an iterative process. By going through the development stages detailed below, we are forced to focus on the key elements and assumptions of the intervention to arrive at a ToC that is logical and accessible. This requires some critical thinking about why you are doing what you are doing.

There are four key stages involved in developing a ToC, which we'll explain in this section. They are:

- Desk review
- Initial draft
- Stakeholder consultation
- Re-draft/re-consult/finalise.

As we noted earlier, you should also be prepared to revisit your ToC throughout your project lifecycle, and update and amend it as necessary.

Desk review

When you are developing a ToC, it is very important to understand the problem you are trying to address with your intervention or project. Begin with an analysis of the context and situation, focussing on the background to the project, and outlining the problem in society you are trying to address, your target group, and their needs and characteristics.[4] Your ToC should be based on evidence, which can come from:

- **Wider literature:** Many VRU interventions are based on/adapted from tried and tested interventions, which likely have a ToC and/or supporting evidence. Whilst it is important to develop a ToC based on your specific intervention (e.g. within your local context), existing evidence is there to be used.
- **VRU/intervention documents:** For example, VRU Strategic Needs Assessments should provide the rationale and intended outcomes (that activities should be developed to meet), and business cases for existing interventions will detail the proposed activities/outcomes. This can also include evidence that your organisation has already collected, and any relevant published research.
- **The experiences of stakeholders:** Knowledge about violence and crime prevention from internal and external stakeholders (see page 20).

You might find some evidence that contradicts your theory. It is important to think this through and, if necessary, modify your approach or activities to reflect what the evidence tells you.[5] During these early stages of the ToC development process, you should ask the following questions and use research/evidence to determine answers:

1. What is the change that your programme is trying to achieve?

2. Why do you think this change is needed?

3. How will you achieve this change?

4. What is the context that might affect the ToC?

5. Who will benefit?

6. What is the most appropriate intervention for this process of change?

7. Are there alternative strategies to meet your aims?

8. What does existing evidence say about what works?[6]

The evidence can be used to establish the **rationale** (problem statement) of your ToC.

4 Harries. E., Hodgson. L., and Noble. J., 2014. Creating your Theory of Change, p8. Available at: https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk/documents/Creating-your-theory-of-change1.pdf

5 Harries. E., Hodgson. L., and Noble. J., 2014. Creating your Theory of Change, p8. Available at: https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk/documents/Creating-your-theory-of-change1.pdf

6 Government Analysis Function,2023, The Theory of Change Process – Guidance for Outcome Delivery Plans. Policy details. https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/the-analysis-function-theory-of-change-toolkit/#resources-to-help-you-assess-evidence

Initial draft

Once you have collected evidence and established the rationale for your intervention, you can begin to draft your ToC. You might find it useful to start by hand-writing your first draft, using sticky notes and a blank ToC template (see section 2.4.) to start with. Your initial draft should be based on the desk review to provide a starting point for stakeholder consultations. Here we provide some guidance on identifying what should be included in the different elements of your ToC; distinguishing between outputs and outcomes, understanding what outcomes should be, and distinguishing between outcomes and impact.

Distinguishing between outputs and outcomes

When developing a ToC, it is vital to know the difference between outputs and outcomes. Outputs are **a measure of activity**. In the context of youth violence prevention, common outputs include the number of young people engaged, the number of sessions delivered, the number of knives seized or the creation of a partnership. Outcomes refer to **the effect of those activities**. This might include improved educational attainment or wellbeing, or reduced knife carrying amongst those young people supported. Put simply, the outcomes are the change you wish to see, and the outputs are the activities or actions that will contribute to achieving that change.

Distinguishing outputs from outcomes is important because outputs may not necessarily lead to positive outcomes, and therefore do not accurately convey the impact of an intervention on their own. Outputs are important; for example, engaging 10 young people in youth work sessions is a good thing. However, this alone does not tell us anything about the effect of that work; it may not lead to discernible reductions in the overall levels of knife crime. Think about the outputs as the 'what' of your project. The outcomes are the 'so what?' in terms of what the outputs will achieve. It is important to commit to being outcomes-focussed- that is, to understand the 'so what?' of outputs. This involves focussing on measurable changes which can be attributed to your outputs.

What should outcomes be?

When you are defining your outcomes, it can be useful to consider the changes in behaviour, wellbeing, attitudes, skills, and abilities you expect to see. Use words like 'increased', 'improved', 'enhanced' or 'reduced' to describe the change you would like your programme to have. Ensure that your outcomes are SMART:

Specific: Components of the ToC, and how they connect, should be specific.

Measurable: Elements of the ToC should be measurable.

Achievable: The proposed activities and outputs, and anticipated outcomes/impacts should be, theoretically, achievable.

Relevant: Focus on what is most relevant (and attributable) to the intervention.

Time-bound: Consider the timeframes to deliver activities and achieve the anticipated outcome/impacts.

It is important that your outcomes are easy to understand by staff, beneficiaries, and stakeholders.

You can use existing outcomes frameworks to select outcomes you want to work towards. Some resources:

- We recommend the South Wales Violence Prevention Unit Outcomes Indicators – See 2. Data Indicators from page 6 onwards. The first two columns include indicators and measures for a given outcome. This resource also includes data sources for measuring these outcomes – including secondary datasets and primary methods.
- Lancashire Violence Reduction Network Outcomes Framework 2020.
- 'Home Office Indicators of Integration framework 2019 third edition' guidance on GOV.UK – select the 'Home Office Indicators of Integration framework 2019: Theory of Change Guide notes Part B' link to download the PDF and go to page 22 to read the section called 'Annex 2: The bank of Outcome Indicators of Integration.
- For measuring outcomes, you can also use the Outcomes STAR (which you will need training and a license for). This can be tailored to specific services, and is widely used across Europe, USA, and Australia.

Distinguishing between outcomes and impact

The difference between outcomes and impact lies in the fact that outcomes are typically observable during, or shortly after, the delivery of your intervention. For example, you may be able to measure an improvement in a young person's educational attainment during several weeks or months of working with them. However, the broader impact on knife crime or violence will probably not be observable for several years. Think of the impact as the 'bigger picture', long-term change you wish to create, and the outcomes as the short or medium-term, measurable precursors.

'Backwards mapping'

Backwards mapping is one useful approach to completing your draft ToC. This involves beginning your draft ToC with your long-term goal and working 'backwards' toward the earliest changes that need to occur.

First, ask yourself 'what is the overall change that this program is trying to achieve?'. A final goal or **impact** should be relatively long-term, obviously beneficial, and something that funders, commissioners or supporters would be interested in funding. It must be relevant to the needs of the target population, and plausibly linked to your project's activities.[7] Impacts can relate to the individual young people you work with, for example, reduced criminality amongst those supported, or an improvement in their wellbeing or future prospects. You can also consider broader societal impacts, for example, reduced knife crime, or enhanced safety for women and girls, wider systemic impacts, or even impacts for your organisation.

7 Harries. E., Hodgson. L., and Noble. J., 2014. Creating your Theory of Change, p7. Available at: https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk/documents/Creating-your-theory-of-change1.pdf

Once you have defined the impact you wish to achieve, you can then work backwards to plot the preceding stages and understand how this change will happen. This requires defining the **outcomes** which will support your planned impact (see section 2.3 on what outcomes should be).

You are now ready to plot which **outputs** and **activities** will help you to bring about the outcomes. There is some overlap between these two aspects of the ToC so it makes sense to work on these areas together; remember, the activities component of the ToC describes what you will do, and the outputs quantify those activities. Work backwards from your outcomes and think about what outputs will be needed to bring them about.

When you are defining your activities and outputs, it can be useful to consider questions such as:

1. What is the direct result of these activities?

2. What outputs need to be produced to achieve your outcomes?

This will involve thinking creatively about the outputs that will be most effective in bringing about your desired outcomes, and when they are best delivered. It is important to refer back to your desk research here, to consider carefully if your planned outputs will lead directly to your desired outcomes. For example, ask yourself *why* and *how* workshops will lead to improved social and emotional skills for young people, and whether there is evidence or past experience to support this.

At this point, also think more broadly about which activities to include in your ToC to support the achievement of your outputs. As well as your direct delivery (i.e., workshops, group or 1:1 sessions, sports-based activities), this might also include staff training, identification of young people, or the establishment of referral pathways. It is important to have a clear sense of the activities which could help you to reach your desired goals. This will help you work out what is achievable and where there might be gaps.[8] Some outputs will involve collaboration with other agencies and some outcomes may only be achieved if other services are also involved in some way, so these contact points or joint activities will need to be charted as part of your ToC.

If you are creating a ToC for an existing project, plot your existing activities and outputs. This is a good chance to discuss to what extent outputs are delivering your desired outcomes and may lead to some revision of what your project does. At this point, it is also helpful to explore which outcomes your work directly contributes to, and which ones are beyond the scope of your work. When using your ToC for evaluation, this step is essential to ensure you evaluate the right things (see section 5).[9]

8 Government Analysis Function, 2023, The Theory of Change Process – Guidance for Outcome Delivery Plans. Policy details. https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/the-analysis-function-theory-of-change-toolkit/#resources-to-help-you-assess-evidence

9 NCVO, How to build a Theory of Change. Available at: https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/strategy-and-impact/strategy-and-business-planning/theory-of-change/#how-to-build-a-theory-of-change

Next, identify your **inputs**. Inputs could include resources such as funding, existing operational structures and intelligence (i.e., data sharing), people and partners. Consider which resources you have available and any limitations on them.

When you are thinking about the limitations on resources you might consider questions like:

1. Is your budget ring-fenced for a specific purpose?

2. Do the people you can deploy have the correct skills?

3. Is there a time-constraint on the availability of facilities?[10]

Once you have plotted out your ToC (using the steps above), you can reflect on the **assumptions** that underpin it. Assumptions are the conditions that need to be in place to make the theory work. Thinking through assumptions is helpful to do as a team, to ensure that you agree on why one outcome will lead to another. This can draw upon evidence, common sense, and intuition. Consider the different roles of involved stakeholders, and whether they have access to the required resources (i.e., training, time, Data Sharing Agreements), and the logic behind your theory. When you are defining the assumptions, it can be useful to consider questions such as:

1. What assumptions, tested and untested, are you making for this project to work?

2. What beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, and values have shaped your ToC?

3. What evidence is there to support the links you are including in your plan?

4. What is the quality of this evidence and how reliable is it?

5. What has worked well in previous projects?

6. What do you expect to remain the same to enable your project to be carried out as planned?[11]

As you identify assumptions, consider which are critical – that is, those on which your theory rests, and which may derail your project if they turn out to be false.[12]

This leads us to identifying **risks**, which will help you assess the limitations of your programme and develop appropriate plans to minimise negative consequences. Consider what might disrupt the flow of your ToC, and how you can mitigate risks within your control. Identifying assumptions is linked to risks, for example, you may assume that young people will engage throughout the programme, but a risk is that they will disengage, which will affect the outcomes.

10 Government Analysis Function, 2023, The Theory of Change Process – Guidance for Outcome Delivery Plans. Policy details. https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/the-analysis-function-theory-of-change-toolkit/#resources-to-help-you-identify-assumptions

11 Government Analysis Function, 2023, The Theory of Change Process – Guidance for Outcome Delivery Plans. Policy details. https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/the-analysis-function-theory-of-change-toolkit/#resources-to-help-you-identify-assumptions

12 NCVO, How to build a Theory of Change. Available at: https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/strategy-and-impact/strategy-and-business-planning/theory-of-change/#how-to-build-a-theory-of-change

Finally, you may want to apply **causal links** (arrows) between different components of your ToC. Examine how each of the components connect and lead to each other; this will help you to show which activities lead to particular outcomes, and which outcomes lead to each impact. This process will help you to visualise and demonstrate how your program will have an effect, justify spending, and monitor important steps. You can either do this at the end of your initial draft, or as you go. You could go through your ToC and link:

- inputs to activities
- activities to outputs
- outputs to outcomes
- outcomes to impacts.

You do not *have* to create your draft in this reverse order. Rather, do so in a way that makes sense to you and your team. We do, however, highly recommend that you begin with rationale and impact, and then go from there. When considering the content and design of your ToC, take care that is it clearly labelled and laid-out, with colour-coding and clear pathways. Be prepared to adapt and rewrite your draft as you consult with wider stakeholders.

Stakeholder consultation

An effective ToC should take a broad view of the topic by considering the views of a diverse range of stakeholders. You should use stakeholder consultation to discuss and gather feedback on the initial draft, but it is also helpful to involve colleagues – and even other relevant stakeholders – in the drafting stage itself. Effective consultation and engagement in creating the ToC supports ownership of the document and can help with securing buy in to the project more widely.

> *Stakeholders include everyone who is directly or indirectly affected by, or has influence on, the outcomes of the project or programme.*
>
> **Government Analysis Function**

Who to involve and how to involve them

The example ToCs presented in section 2.1. are general templates; you could use them as a basis for developing your own ToC, but they should be revised and refined to reflect the specifics of your own local context and identified problem. Working with partners and affected parties can help you think through whether the response you are considering makes sense in your circumstances.[13]

Before you begin the process of identifying your stakeholders it is helpful to consider the following questions:

1. Who is affected by this project?

2. Who may have influence on decisions?

3. Who knows about issues affecting the local area of the project?

4. Who has an interest in the project?

5. Who contributes to the programme?

6. Who can enhance the scope of the issues being considered?

7. Who can help identify other stakeholders?

8. Who can adequately represent those with different viewpoints?[14]

You could include staff, partners, trustees, funders, other local organisations. In line with the public health approach, consulting with young people and communities (affected by violence) at this stage is valuable. As a ToC is a live document, it is helpful to review whether any stakeholders have been missed over the course of project delivery, especially if priorities change, and ask for their input to review your ToC at a later date.

When asking for input to the ToC, it's important to first make sure stakeholders understand what a ToC is and what purpose it serves. A facilitated group discussion, or a workshop, is an important aspect of consultation; this approach means consensus can be more easily gained and is an effective use of time.

Consultation should focus on testing the logic of the intervention with those with expert and local knowledge. It's helpful for a facilitator to have some pre-prepared questions for workshop participants to discuss; these can include views on the long-term goals of the project (the rationale and the impact), whether the assumptions the ToC is based on are correct, whether there are any gaps in the activities/outputs/outcomes/impacts, and whether any identified causal links are valid.

13 College of policing, 2021, Knife crime A problem solving guide, p5. Available at: https://assets.college.police.uk/s3fs-public/2021-11/Knife-crime-a-problem-solving-guide.pdf

14 Government Analysis Function, 2023, The Theory of Change Process – Guidance for Outcome Delivery Plans. Policy details. https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/the-analysis-function-theory-of-change-toolkit/#resources-to-help-you-identify-assumptions

Stakeholders are likely to come to consultations with different perspectives and views, and the workshop facilitator should be prepared to guide the discussion to help achieve a consensus.[15]

Here is a resource which provides more detail on ensuring effective stakeholder engagement.

Refinement and revisions

Developing a ToC is an iterative process. Once you have completed your first draft, you should re-engage stakeholders and tweak it based on their views. A ToC should be a living document – it should be revisited as new evidence and perspectives emerge or as you develop new ways of working. Evaluation can help provide evidence for whether your ToC works, and also suggest where your theory needs to be modified.[16]

Check that your ToC makes sense by asking yourself if it is:

- **Meaningful:** Does it describe the project accurately in ways that staff, trustees, volunteers and stakeholders agree with?
- **Well-defined:** Is it clear what your project will do and who your target groups are?
- **Comprehensible:** Does it enable you to give someone the 'two-minute story' of the service? Would a member of the public understand the theory?
- **Do-able:** Are the services and activities likely to contribute to the desired outcomes and impact?
- **Plausible:** Is it realistic? Does it take into account your organisation's capacity? It should be something that the programme, project or organisation could really do, not just wish it could.
- **Credible:** Are people outside your organisation likely to believe it? Is the secondary evidence you include credible with your stakeholders?
- **Testable:** Can you test the theory through a series of testable hypotheses? All elements should theoretically be able to be assessed using research and observation (even though you may not have the resources to assess this yourself).[17]

15 Brown. AM., 2019, How to Develop a Theory of Change. Available at: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-develop-theory-change-ann-murray-brown/

16 NCVO, How to build a Theory of Change. Available at: https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/strategy-and-impact/strategy-and-business-planning/theory-of-change/#how-to-build-a-theory-of-change

17 Harries. E., Hodgson. L., and Noble. J., 2014. Creating your Theory of Change, p21. Available at: https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk/documents/Creating-your-theory-of-change1.pdf

2.4 Theory of Change templates

There is a range of software you can use to create a ToC; MS PowerPoint or MS Word are popular as they are widely accessible and available. However, we also recommend Draw.io, which is free online software for creating diagrams. This software is especially helpful if you want to create a more complex ToC including causal links, as it is easier to create pathways between the boxes.

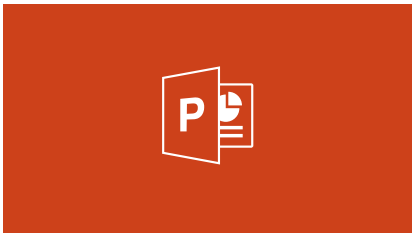
In this toolkit, we have provided a selection of blank ToC templates you can use to form the basis of your own document. These are fully editable – do feel free to delete or add boxes and arrows to fit the context of your project.

To edit the draw.io file simply **click on the icon on the left**.

You can view the ToC templates by opening the attachments pane:

view > show/hide > navigation panes > attachments

and then double click on the relevant template.



Blank simple ToC template

Blank casual ToC template