TOOL

Logic Model Planning Template

As your group completes the Logic Model Planning Template, review the guidance on the tool. Potential questions and answers about completing the template follow the blank template.

Project/program/initiative	
Inputs	
Activites	
Outputs	
Short-term outcomes	
Medium-term outcomes	
Long-term outcomes	

Context

Assumptions

About the Planning Template

Why do your logic models look different from other versions I've seen?

There are several well-established methods/techniques for creating logic models. A columnar format is common to most versions, although there may be differences in the way the columns are labeled. The definition of what constitutes an "output" is probably the element that varies the most across different versions. Other differences sometimes show up in the context and assumption sections as well. Nevertheless, the diverse formats are all attempting to serve the same purpose: to convey succinctly the essential information about what a program entails, why it exists, and what kinds of outcomes are expected to result. The format we provide here allows us to address all steps; in particular, it is essential for pathway modeling which is unique in articulating the detailed theory of change that underlies a program. Given the common features of most logic models, it is usually not too difficult to adapt a pre-existing one to the format and definitions for other purposes.

What's the difference between a logic model and a pathway model?

A logic model is a representation of the main components of a program and the theory of change underlying that program. Both the columnar model and the pathway model are types of logic models. These two types have a lot in common, but each also has unique features. Both models include activities, outputs, and outcomes. The columnar logic model also includes inputs, context, and assumptions. These components provide important information about what it takes to run this program, what environments it is designed for, etc. This information is useful to others who might want to replicate or learn from this program and may be important aspects to evaluate. A pathway model does not include inputs, context, or assumptions but it has causal arrows between activities and outcomes, creating a graphical representation that highlights the theory of change in a much more specific and detailed way. These arrows make it possible to see and follow the storylines that explain how the program seeks to achieve its goals.

The graphical representation allows for detailed, shared understanding of what the program is and how it works, thereby forming an invaluable foundation for making good evaluation decisions.

Context and Assumptions

Why is it important to identify the program's context?

Just like program assumptions, context helps fill in the entire story of a program. It gives an outside reader a better understanding of the program and helps an evaluation planner determine what is appropriate. For example, if the program participants are third, fourth, and fifth graders, it would be inappropriate to use an evaluation tool that requires a high school reading level. The context section of a logic model helps remind evaluation planners of program realities like this.

Why is it important to identify program assumptions?

Identifying program assumptions is important for several reasons. First, assumptions are a key part of the thinking behind any program. As such, it is important to identify them in order for outsiders to fully understand the program and why it is conducted the way that it is. Second, program assumptions are legitimate and potentially important candidates for evaluation. Providing evidence to support a program assumption helps build the foundation of evidence for the overall logic of the program. Finally, program assumptions can help account for evaluation results. For example, if the results appear to be "negative," the explanation may be that one or more of the assumptions is not accurate.

Inputs and Activities

What should be included in a list of inputs?

Typically the list includes things like % FTE for staff and/or volunteers, budget, and materials. In addition, there may be other inputs that are important to the "story" of your program, such as collaborators, curricula, and so on.

Should I include activities like recruitment, program marketing, training of instructors, or fundraising in my program model?

These background activities are essential for program implementation, yet the question of whether they should be included in your program description (and model) is complicated. In reality, all programs have some kind of administrative effort in the background. The question here is, if you had one minute to describe to someone the essence of your program and how it works, would these be among the activities you would talk about? Most of the time the answer is likely to be "no." There are exceptions, though, which is why there is no hard and fast rule about this. Sometimes an activity that sounds administrative is actually directly related to achieving certain program outcomes. For example, marketing and participant recruitment are often routine (though important!) efforts, but for a program whose success depends on participation by a very specific demographic mix of participants — perhaps including hard-to-reach individuals — the outreach and recruitment effort becomes central to the program in a distinctive way.

Should I list every activity separately for the purpose of the logic model?

It depends. Activities that are lumped together can diminish the ability to pose more specific evaluation questions later on. Imagine a program that consists of many different workshops with different topics and formats. On the logic model, they are lumped together and labeled simply as "workshops." The logic model can now no longer show if and how the hands-on workshops have different outcomes than the online workshops, for example. On the other hand, if this same program lists every workshop as a separate activity, there may be diminishing returns; the model will become cluttered and more difficult to read, and chances are that there will be a lot of repetitive connections to the same outcomes. In order to determine how much to "lump" or "split" activities for the purpose of the program model(s), it is essential to think about their related outcomes. A general guideline is that an activity should be listed separately if it has a unique outcome or set of outcomes compared to other activities.

Outputs

What is the role of outputs in an evaluation?

Outputs play an important role in evaluation. Because outputs are tangible artifacts of activities, connections among activities and outputs can be fertile ground for evaluation questions related to program implementation. For example, in the case of the model airplane program, one might ask, “Did participation in the airplane model-building workshop lead to the production of finished model airplanes by our participants?” This is essentially a question about the connection between an activity and an output. Answering this question would provide foundational evidence, typically for an early life-cycle program, about whether a program activity is working the way it is intended.

What is the difference between an output and an outcome?

An output is a tangible by-product of an activity (think artifact), while an outcome is an effect on a participant, the community, or society. In a logic model, outputs should be labeled as simple nouns (e.g., “photos of participants," “finished model airplanes," “contact list of participants”), whereas outcomes should be understood and written in terms of change (e.g., “participants’ knowledge increases," “farm soil health improves”).

Outcomes

What is the difference between an "indicator" and an "outcome"?

An outcome is the change you are expecting or hoping to see as a result of people's participation in your program. An indicator is how you might be able to tell that the outcome has been achieved. For example, an outcome of a nutrition education program might be "Families increase the variety of vegetables in their diet." An indicator might be the weekly average number of different vegetables consumed at family mealtimes. Another indicator of that same outcome might be the number of different vegetables observed in the family's grocery store purchases. The outcome should be a bout the underlying fundamental change that takes place, and that's what belongs in the logic model. The indicator for a particular outcome might be many different things and is best decided as part of the evaluation and measurement strategy.

Should I include an outcome even if I can't imagine how it could ever be measured?

Yes. The logic model is just that — a model. It is meant to convey a picture of how your program works and to what it is expected to lead or contribute. Just because you can't count up, quantify, or measure a particular part of that picture doesn't mean that it's not an important part of the picture. Even those ill-defined, intangible outcomes can be an important element of the program and can help an outsider better understand the program.

Should I include numbers in my outcome, like "50 farmers will adopt new crop management practices"?

Including numbers would specify a target for your program (and as such is completely appropriate for grant applications or program descriptions if the funder or audience expects that). Yet for purpose of wording outcomes in the logic model, it is important to recognize that the logic model provides the basic logic of how your program works, and outcomes describe the changes you are expecting to see as a result of people's participation in the program. Stating specific numbers detracts from the articulation of the theory of change by suggesting that the program is a mechanistic black box that "always" leads to 50 changes. So depending on your program situation, a more appropriate phrasing for this outcome might be "Farmers adopt new crop management practices" (if you are just looking for them to change) or perhaps more specifically "Farmers adopt recommended best management practices for crop rotation" (if you are aiming for them to adopt a particular new practice).

How do I know if an outcome is short-, medium-, or long-term?

There are no fixed time scale definitions for short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes; rather, the general idea is that short-term outcomes arise soon after and as a direct result of an activity. Long-term outcomes describe the ultimate impacts of the program (within the bounds of the program definition). Medium-term outcomes then are the intervening changes that logically connect those immediate effects (short-term outcomes) to the ultimate impacts (long-term outcomes).

What defines "short-term" when talking about short-term outcomes?

It's not useful to define a standard time interval for short-, medium-, or long-term outcomes in logic modeling because the programs being modeled can be so different. If the program is a one-session workshop lasting three hours, then the time frame for outcomes is likely to be much shorter than it would be for a program with multiple activities that lasts for a semester or a year. "Short-term" is a relative term in a logic model, referring to outcomes that occur by the end of the program or fairly soon thereafter and are the initial changes that have to happen and lay a foundation for all subsequent changes.

How do short-term outcomes connect to other parts of a logic/pathway model?

Short-term outcomes are closely connected to activities and either arise directly from an activity or from another short-term outcome. Short-term outcomes may lead to other short-term outcomes or to medium-term outcomes. (They should not be connected directly to long-term outcomes. If you feel you want to connect a short-term outcome to a long-term outcome, pause and think about what medium-term outcome actually arises in between.)

What defines "medium-term" when talking about medium-term outcomes?

It's not useful to fix a calendar time interval for short-, medium-, or long-term outcomes in logic modeling because the programs being modeled can be so different. If the program is a one-session workshop lasting three hours, then the time frame for outcomes is likely to be much shorter than it would be for a program with multiple activities that lasts for a semester or a year. "Medium-term" covers those outcomes that occur in between immediate or rapid short-term effects and the ultimate long-term changes for which a program is aiming.

How do medium-term outcomes connect to other parts of a logic/pathway model?

Medium-term outcomes tend to answer the "Now what?" questions that take you from short-term outcomes toward the larger and longer-term changes. They fill in the stepping stones of a change process. Medium-term outcomes may capture a deepening of the awareness and knowledge gains as well as changes in behavior on the part of the participants. Medium-term outcomes also tend to include spillover effects — changes in the condition of surrounding people (family members, community members, etc.) as an individual participant's actions and behavior have wider effects.

What defines "long-term" when talking about long-term outcomes?"

It's not useful to fix a calendar time interval for short-, medium-, or long-term outcomes in logic modeling because the programs being modeled can be so different. In calendar time, long-term outcomes might occur within a year or two, or within 20 or even many more years depending on the nature and boundaries of the program being modeled.

How do long-term outcomes connect to other parts of a logic/pathway model?

Long-term outcomes should capture the ultimate goals of a program, both/either in terms of how things would unfold for an individual over a long time span (years, perhaps) and/or in terms of the cumulative effects on a community or society of having more and more participants with these experiences. Long-term outcomes would be ones to which medium-term outcomes (or other long-term outcomes) lead. It is also likely that at least some long-term outcomes would feature in the program description, or possibly in the mission statement, since those ought to provide information about why the program exists and for what it is striving.

Why should I include long-term outcomes that I will not be around to see (things that may emerge 20 years from now, for example)?

A logic model is not supposed to just show things you can see or measure; it is meant to convey information and a vision of how the program works. Having a broad and full vision of what your program is about provides valuable information about what motivates the program, who might want to fund it, and what needs it is addressing. The long-term outcomes are an important part of that picture. Note also that including long-term, distant outcomes in your model does not imply

that you are claiming that your individual program is solely capable of, or responsible for, huge outcomes like community well-being, poverty eradication, scientific breakthroughs, and so on, but you can claim how the program is contributing to broader changes and toward what you are working.