Theories of Change and Logic Models

February 17, 2026

Learning Objectives

By the end of the class, you should be able to…

1. Define and distinguish a Theory of Change and a Logic Model

2. Identify and label the core components of a Logic Model

3. Write a clear narrative Theory of Change (1–2 paragraphs)

4. Translate your narrative ToC into a structured Logic Model with specific, observable elements

5. Diagnose weak links and hidden assumptions in your model and articulate at least two testable assumptions to prioritize

Why Do ToCs and Logic Models Matter?

» Good intentions ≠ good theory

» Your venture is a claim about how change happens

» ToC and logic model help you:
  » Clarify assumptions
  » Tighten causality
  » Decide what you should measure

Today's Plan

1. Mini-lecture: ToC vs Logic Model (15)
2. Peer review: Narrative ToC (15)
3. AI-structured logic model and human critique (25)
4. Debrief and exit ticket setup (20)

What is "Social Impact" and Why Should We Care?

Demonstrating results in addressing complex social problems such as poverty and inequality

» Funders care!

» Provides insight into whether you are achieving your mission

Definitions

Theory of Change (ToC)

» Your story of impact ("how and why")

Logic Model

» Your ToC in a structured chain

Both make assumptions visible

Theory of Change

» Based on the understanding of the problem and the vision or mission, what is the theory about which actions will lead to the results the social entrepreneur wants to achieve?

» Offers a clear roadmap to achieving results by identifying the preconditions, pathways, and interventions necessary for an initiative's success

» Is a statement of **causality** – i.e., this intervention will generate this desired outcome

Source: Kickul & Lyons 2020

Example Theories of Change

Habitat for Humanity	Providing families with simple, decent, affordable housing will break the cycle of generational poverty
VisionSpring	Providing affordable corrective eyewear through community-based vision screenings increases adults' ability to work and earn income and improves students' ability to learn, which can raise household well-being over time
KIPP Public Charter Schools	Operating high-support public charter schools that expand family choice and use data-driven instruction can improve student learning outcomes—especially where traditional options are underperforming

What is Hot Bread Kitchen's Theory of Change?

Hot Bread Kitchen increases economic mobility for New Yorkers facing barriers to stable work by using the food industry as a practical pathway to good jobs and viable small businesses. Through culinary and career-readiness training, job placement and employer partnerships, and support for food entrepreneurs—paired with a strong partner ecosystem and member community—HBK helps participants build skills, access opportunities, and overcome barriers. In the near term, members gain job-ready skills and networks; over time, this leads to job placement, wage growth, career advancement, and stronger food businesses—contributing to a more equitable, higher-quality food jobs ecosystem.

Logic Model

Inputs → Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Impacts

Logic Model: Input Examples

Inputs → Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Impacts

» Funds

» Equipment and supplies

» Knowledge and technical expertise

Source: Ebrahim & Rangan 2014

Logic Model: Activities Examples

Inputs → **Activities** → Outputs → Outcomes → Impacts

» Basic needs delivery, such as food and shelter

» Service delivery, such as job training and counseling

» Infrastructure construction, such as transportation

Source: Ebrahim & Rangan 2014

Logic Model: Outputs Examples

Results: Immediate

Inputs → Activities → **Outputs** → Outcomes → Impacts

» People fed, housed, or treated

» People trained or educated

» Roads built and goods transported to market

Source: Ebrahim & Rangan 2014

Logic Model: Outcomes Examples
Results: Medium- and long-term

Inputs → Activities → Outputs → **Outcomes** → Impacts

» Improved quality of life, health, or educational attainment, etc.

» Increased incomes

» **NOTE: Measured for individuals**

Source: Ebrahim & Rangan 2014

Logic Model: Impacts Examples
Results: Effects on root causes, sustained significant change

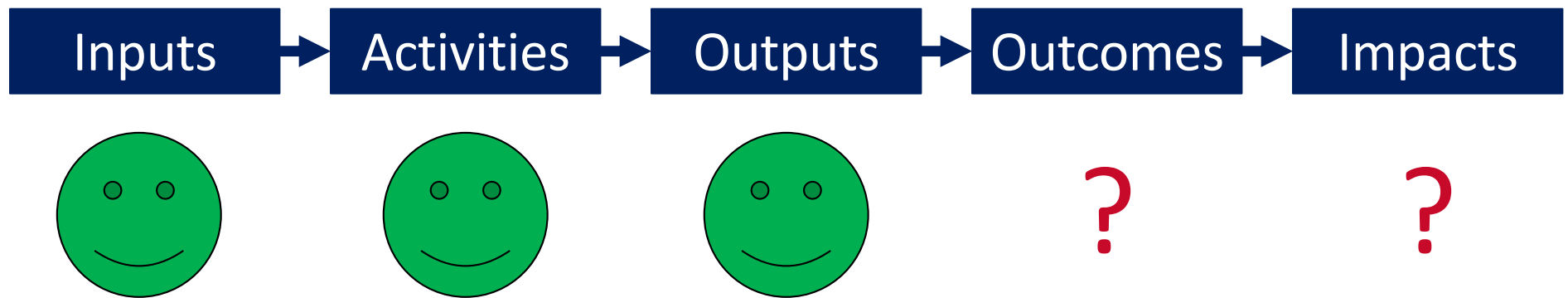| Inputs	→	Activities	→	Outputs	→	Outcomes	→	Impacts

» Sustained drop in poverty, obesity, illiteracy, etc.

» Improvements in human development indicators

» **NOTE: Measured in terms of communities, populations, or ecosystems**

Source: Ebrahim & Rangan 2014

What is Hot Bread Kitchen's Logic Model?

Inputs → Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Impacts

What Should You Measure?

Inputs	→	Activities	→	Outputs	→	Outcomes	→	Impacts

Effectively measuring outcomes (and impacts) requires one of two conditions to hold:

1. The causal link between outputs and outcomes is well established
2. The range of integrated interventions needed to achieve outcomes are under the organization's control

Source: Ebrahim & Rangan 2014

Activity 1A: Draft Your TOC

Individually write a 1–2 paragraph Theory of Change

- » Problem and who experiences it
- » What you will do (activities)
- » How change happens (mechanism: why your activities lead to outcomes)
- » Near outcomes (short/mid-term)
- » Long-term impact
- » 2 key assumptions

Activity 1B: Peer Review the ToC

1. Partner A reads ToC aloud

2. Partner B marks:
   » Core mechanism ("the because")
   » The biggest leap ("magic arrow")
   » 1–2 assumptions that must be true

3. Switch roles

Peer Feedback Checklist

» Is the **target population** specific?

» Are **activities** clear (what exactly will you do)?

» Are outcomes written as **changes**, not tasks?

» Do you see any **"magic arrows"** (unexplained causality)?

» Can you name **2 assumptions** worth testing soon?

Transition: ToC → Logic Model

» Your ToC is the story

» Now we'll convert it into a structured logic model

Goal: Make causal links visible so you can improve them

Activity 2: Human Critique and Refinement

» **Step 1 (3 min, solo):** Use AI to convert your ToC into a draft Logic Model

AI Prompt

» I am working on a social venture focused on: **[observable problem]**

» My narrative Theory of Change is: **[paste]**

» Please structure this into a Logic Model with: **Inputs, Activities, Outputs, Short-Term Outcomes, Mid-Term Outcomes, Long-Term Impact**

» Present your results as bulleted lists and briefly explain the causal links

Activity 2: Human Critique and Refinement

» **Step 1 (3 min, solo):** Use AI to convert your ToC into a draft Logic Model

» **Step 2 (15 min, group audit):** Take turns (5 min each)

  » Identify 2 mislabeled items (output vs outcome)

  » Find 1 "magic arrow" (missing mechanism)

  » Name 1 key assumption

  » Suggest 1 concrete revision (add/remove/reword)

» **Step 3 (4 min, solo):** Revise into V2 and bold your 2 assumptions

Debrief

1. Where did AI "fill in gaps" you didn't intend?

2. What was hardest to separate: outputs vs outcomes?

3. Where is your weakest causal link right now?

4. What's one assumption you now realize you must test first?

Connection to Venture Development

» ToC/Logic Model are living documents

» Field research is how you stress-test the chain

» Your model helps you decide:
   » Who to interview next
   » What to measure
   » What to cut or redesign

Exit Ticket

Due by 11:59PM tonight

Exit Ticket

By 11:59PM tonight (2/17) please submit your **"Exit Ticket" for this class session.** Exit ticket submissions are a significant part of your Process & Engagement (Process Deliverables) grade.

Draft Theory of Change & Logic Model

Overview

This assignment asks you to submit the draft of your Theory of Change (ToC) and the corresponding Logic Model that you developed during our in-class workshop. This is a work-in-progress submission designed to capture your thinking at the end of the session.

Submission Requirements

For this exit ticket, please submit the following two components for your social venture:

1. **Your Narrative Theory of Change:**
   ○ Submit the 1-2 paragraph narrative that explains your venture's story of impact. This is the narrative you prepared for class and may have refined during peer review. It should clearly explain *how* and *why* your venture's activities are expected to lead to positive social change.
2. **Your Draft Logic Model:**
   ○ Submit the structured Logic Model that you created and refined during the in-class AI-enhanced activity. It should be presented as a bulleted list for each of the following categories:
     ▪ **Inputs:** What resources are needed?
     ▪ **Activities:** What will the venture do?
     ▪ **Outputs:** What are the direct, tangible results of the activities?
     ▪ **Short-Term Outcomes:** What are the immediate changes in knowledge, skills, or attitudes?
     ▪ **Mid-Term Outcomes:** What are the subsequent changes in behavior or action?
     ▪ **Long-Term Impact:** What is the ultimate desired social change?

Submission

Please submit your response using text entry or by uploading a PDF or Word document (.doc, .docx).