ISSUE 6 APRIL 2006

HOW TO BUILD A LOGIC MODEL

Tips for conducting program evaluation

In the last issue, we talked about what a well-built logic model can do for your program. Here are the four steps to develop a high-quality model.

1. Review and clarify the links between activities and outcomes.

When you developed a program theory (*What's Your Theory?*, October 2005), you spelled out the major services that you provide and the intended benefits of those services. Review this list and make sure the connections between each activity and its outcomes are crystal clear and logical.

Consider the order in which results should occur. What would be the first changes experienced by participants? How would these initial changes promote other, more long-term changes? Hint: Behavior change is rarely the first result. People usually need to change their knowledge, attitudes, or skills before they start to change behavior. Like-wise, moving farther down the line, community change usually cannot occur until enough individuals (or the right individuals) change their behavior or practices.

2. Add inputs and outputs for each activity.

Inputs are the resources and raw materials that go into your program. Consider the resources that you need to operate your program, such as funding, staff, or volunteers. Some programs may require a facility, transportation services, educational materials, and other resources. You do not need to be overly precise in the logic model regarding the amount of each resource that is needed.

Outputs quantify the services you provide. Remember: Outputs are different from outcomes. While outcomes describe the actual impact (the change that results), outputs simply describe the amount of service provided. Outputs are most often expressed in numbers, such as the number of people who participate in an activity or the hours of service received.

3. Construct a draft model.

The model may end up being simple or complicated, but should accurately reflect the complexity of your program. Use arrows to show the connections between your inputs and your activities, between your activities and outputs, and between your outputs and each sequence of outcomes. Remember that one activity could lead to multiple outcomes, or that multiple activities could lead to only one outcome

4. Review and revise.

Answer the following questions. If your answer to any question is "not sure" or "no," go back to the model and consider making revisions. It usually takes multiple revisions of the model before it reaches its final form.

- Does the logic model include all of the program's most important activities or services?
- Do the outcomes represent changes that are important to your program's participants? Likewise, does the model contain the outcomes of greatest interest to your stakeholders, such as staff or funders?
- Are the outcome goals plain enough to be understood by any stakeholders who might review your logic model? Are the goals realistic?
- Are the connections between your inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes realistic? Are they reasonable based on existing research, theory, or other evidence?

Challenges and possible solutions

Challenge: "We've had trouble developing a logic model because our key stakeholders (staff, funders, etc.) cannot agree on the right services or outcomes to include."

- 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 involved with all tasks and they do not need to have sign-off authority. Their role can be as simple as inviting them to review materials or help you think through some of your stickier questions or issues.
- 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. Agencies that work through disagreements about the logic model typically end up with a stronger model that everyone can be satisfied with.

Challenge: "We're not really interested in developing a logic model, but our funder requires it."

- Look for examples of how other organizations have used logic models in meaningful and interesting ways. Many agencies have gone into the process with skepticism or lack of interest, but ultimately found the process valuable.
- Try to focus on the fun and interesting aspects of 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. Focusing on the importance of this discussion—rather than seeing it as just a task to complete—can increase engagement in the process.

Challenge: "I just want to get my logic model finished. I don't want to spend much time on it."

- Logic models that are rushed often end up displaying faulty logic, insufficient evidence, or models copied from other programs that don't quite fit yours. Keep asking yourself "IF-THEN-WHY" questions to make sure that the model is sound. IF you provide a service, THEN what should be the impact for participants? WHY do you think this impact will result? What evidence do you have to support that connection?
- Make it more interesting by seeking a range of evidence. If you already know the published research by heart, look for additional types of evidence, such as theoretical frameworks, unpublished evaluation results, or experiences reported by program participants.
- If possible, recruit a facilitator from outside your agency who is trained and experienced in logic model development.

Challenge: "The goal of my program is to change an entire community, not just to influence the lives of a small group of participants."

- Think through each step that must occur. For instance, how does each activity impact individuals? In what ways does their behavior change? What has to occur in order for these individual changes to result in widespread community change?
- Consider issues or events outside the control of your agency that may promote or impede the change you are seeking. If needed, develop strategies for monitoring or documenting these issues.

Challenge: "My logic model is so complicated that nobody can understand it."

- Focus on the most important activities and outcomes. The model does not need to describe everything that you do; it should show the services and goals that are the most important to you.
- Avoid jargon. Describe your activities and outcomes in 'real life' language that is understood by a wide range of stakeholders. Try it out on someone unfamiliar with your work – a neighbor, a relative.
- Cut back on detail. Be specific enough to clearly explain what will happen as a result of your activities, but without excessive detail.

Challenge: "I'm nervous about developing a logic model because it might make funders hold us more accountable for our results"

- Only include (and subsequently measure) outcomes that are realistic. If you do not want to be held accountable for something, it must not be an essential outcome goal. Outcomes are not hopes or wishes, but reasonable expectations.
- Incorporate time frames into the logic model, to show stakeholders the amount of time it will take to achieve long-term goals. Example: If you have only one or two years to show impact, you should not measure outcomes that may take longer to emerge. Instead, measure the intermediate steps toward those outcomes – the results that your program can reasonably expect to achieve.
- Remember that a logic model should be a dynamic tool that can and should be changed as needed; it is not a rigid framework that imposes restrictions on what you can do.

Benefits of developing logic models

Taking the time to work through the process carefully and thoughtfully can be a very worthwhile endeavor. It can help you:

- Build consensus and clarity among your staff and other stakeholders about your essential program activities and expected outcomes.
- Identify opportunities for program improvements (such as by promoting discussion of best strategies for achieving desired results).
- Spell out the beliefs and assumptions that underlie your choice of activities and intended outcomes.
- Promote evidence-based thinking in program management and evaluation.
- Assess your program's likelihood of success and identify factors that could impact success. For instance, how do the manner, amount, and quality of activities affect the likelihood of achieving the outcomes?
- Increase your understanding of program performance by clarifying the sequence of events from inputs through outputs through outcomes.
- Educate funders regarding realistic expectations.

Quick links to more information

W.K. Kellogg Foundation: Logic model development guide
www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub3669.pdf

Community toolbox: developing a logic model or theory of change
http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_main_1877.htm

In future tip sheets

Prioritizing evaluation questions
Developing data collection plans
Selecting evaluation measures

Find previous tip sheets on the web: www.ojp.state.mn.us/grants/index.htm or www.wilderresearch.org.

April 2006

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