Point K: Logic Model Builder

• What is a logic model?

A visual representation of how your program works—a "picture" of your program. A Logic Model includes what you put into your program (resources), what you do (activities), and what you plan to achieve (outputs and outcomes). A logic model is a useful tool for program planning and management, accountability and evaluation, and communication and consensus-building. Find our more in our Logic Model Workbook.

• How do I use the Logic Model Builder?

Each tool in the logic model has an instructions page; click here for the Logic Model Builder's instructions page. Throughout the Logic Model Builder you will see help icons. The ? icons link to usability help; the InnoNet "i" icon links to evaluation help. You may also find it helpful to use our Logic Model Workbook.

• How do I use the Presentation View?

The Presentation Veiw It is intended as a high-level, at-a-glance, one-page view of your program. It's a snapshot for someone who is not familiar with your work. Because the Presentation View is only one page, it does not have room for most complete program logic models. Read the specifications for what will fit in the Presentation View. If your logic model does not fit into the Presentation View but you would like to use the one-page graphic, we suggest that you create copy of your logic model and cut it down to the basics to fit it on page.

• Can I use the Logic Model Builder for strategic planning?

Up to a point, yes. If your organization is devoted to a single program, then a logic model can be a valuable strategic planning tool. Also, if your organization needs help looking at its infrastructure or organizational capacity, a logic model can help you examine your non-program activities such as fundraising, governance, and professional development. Just like program activities, these infrastructure activities are supported by resources, and produce outputs and outcomes. A logic model is a helpful organizing tool that identifies what it takes to establish an organization, realistically conveying the significance and time-consuming nature of capacity-building work.

• Who should develop a logic model—program staff? Executive director? Board members?

A logic model is best developed collaboratively. Involve as many people as possible—all levels of staff, your board, partner agencies, the people you serve. Invite your stakeholders to review and comment on your logic model. The more viewpoints you work with, the more complete—and useful—your logic model will be.

• How long does it take to develop a logic model?

That's hard to say. It depends on how complex your program is, how much detail you are looking for, and how many people are involved. The Logic Model Builder is set up to enable you to complete a basic logic model in approximately two to four hours. However, we strongly recommend that you take more time than that, if you can spare it, so you can involve other people and incorporate their feedback. And in some sense, a logic model is never complete: it is a living document that should change to reflect current reality.

• Is there a "right" order to creating a logic model?

The connections between the pieces are more important than the order you complete them in. Make sure your activities are directly linked to outputs and connected to outcomes; check that outcomes and outputs are supported by realistic activities and resources. If you are comfortable with big picture thinking, you might want to start by identifying the outcomes you are trying to achieve before you delve into the details. If you are more comfortable working with details, it might help you to start with resources and activities, and then move onto defining outcomes. Start where you feel most comfortable.

Why don't my Intermediate and Longer-Term Outcomes connect to Activities?

Intermediate and Longer-Term outcomes get listed in their own columns, not connected directly to Activities. This may seem like a technical error, but it's actually an evaluation methodology decision.

Shorter-term Outcomes usually result directly from program activities. They are the outcomes you expect to happen, and that can be attributed directly to your work. For example, a program that teaches seniors about food safety program expects that its workshops will lead to an increase in knowledge of food contamination risks and safe food handling procedures among participating seniors. This is a shorter-term outcome that would connect directly to an activity group called “Workshops”.

Intermediate and Longer-Term Outcomes, in contrast, do not attach directly to Activities.

- Once you get past the short term, outcomes often result from more than one program activity, so making a one-to-one connection is too simplistic.

- The further in time you get from your program activities, the less attribution you can claim. A longer-term outcome is hardly ever the direct result of your program activities alone. Other events (including earlier outcomes), people, and circumstances all have to be in alignment for a longer-term outcome to come about. For example, you can teach me about food safety, but it’s up to me to apply the knowledge and change my behavior. While your program activities certainly contribute to intermediate and longer-term outcomes, the link to a particular program activity is much more tenuous.

Point K: Evaluation Plan Builder

• Why should I make an evaluation plan?

Because every program can improve. Evaluating your program will give you information to help you work more effectively and have a greater impact in the communities you serve. Evaluation results are valuable communication tools—they help you tell your program's story, and show your accountability to your community and funders. And you can share what you learn with the field, so that other nonprofits can benefit from your experience.

• How do I use the Evaluation Plan Builder?

Each Point K tool has its own instructions page. Click here for the Evaluation Plan Builder instructions page. In addition, throughout the Evaluation Plan Builder you will see help icons. The ? icons link to usability help; the InnoNet "i" icon links to evaluation help. You may also find it helpful to use our Evaluation Plan Workbook.

• Is there a Presentation View for the evaluation plan?

Not yet. Let us know if you would find a Presentation View of the Evaluation Plan useful. We rely on your feedback to set development priorities for our online tools.

• Do I need an Evaluation Plan if I am already collecting and reporting evaluation information about my program?

Yes! Here's why: You are probably already collecting information that you could use for evaluation—intake records, case records, program correspondence, even your mailing list. But without a plan, you probably aren't collecting data systematically—and that's the key to useful evaluation results. An evaluation plan will help you see whether there are gaps in your data collection. For example, many nonprofits collect information about their outputs (the number of people served, the number of hours of service provided, the number of trainings held, etc.) but not about outcomes (the changes that occur as a result of the program). In other cases, nonprofits collect specific information required by their funders, but they don't harvest information that their own staff and board can use for program improvement. An evaluation plan will help you make the most of your time and resources.

• Why do I need both implementation and outcome evaluation?

Implementation evaluation tells you what you did—whether you carried out program activities as planned, and if not, why not. Outcomes evaluation tells you what difference you made—it shows the progress you have made toward your long-term goals. An effective evaluation effort should tell you about both.

• Do I need to do implementation planning first, before addressing outcomes?

There's no "wrong" order, so please start wherever you feel more comfortable. We do recommend that you complete a logic model for your program before starting an evaluation plan, but it's not required.

• Who needs to be involved in developing the Evaluation Plan?

Collaboration is best. Multiple perspectives will make your plan stronger. The people who run the program will know what data are feasible to collect, and will have a good sense of what an evaluation should measure—what success should look like for that program. Fundraising and grant-writing staff can tell you what kinds of information funders and donors want out of an evaluation. Your technical staff can help you determine what is feasible for your organization in terms of data collection and analysis. Bringing more people on board during the planning stage also builds buy-in to your evaluation, and makes it more likely that evaluation results will get used for program improvement rather than collecting dust on a shelf.

• How long does it take to develop an Evaluation Plan?

That depends on how complex your program is, and how much detail you are looking for. The Evaluation Plan Builder is set up to help you complete a basic Evaluation Plan online in about two to four hours, if you have already done a logic model for your program. However, we strongly recommend that you gather feedback as you proceed to ensure that you gain multiple perspectives on your program and buy-in to the Evaluation Plan, as this will reduce natural resistance to the evaluation process, and produce information that is useful to a broader range of stakeholders.