Theory of Change

Upstream Action Acceleration
Collaborative Learning Meeting
To know whether you are making progress, you must have a sense of what you are trying to accomplish...

Or, in Yogi Berra’s words,

“If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll end up somewhere else.”
What is a Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change helps you an overarching goal for your collaborative, articulate the changes that you hope to achieve (desired outcomes) and link those to the actions and strategies that you will or have already undertaken to reach those outcomes.

It is also a process of articulating and challenging the assumptions that you are making about the ways that you are going to impact change in your communities.

It also helps stakeholders articulate the contextual factors supporting and possibly impeding the work.
Articulating your coalition’s theory of change

Stored in each of us are beliefs or theories that guide our analysis of assets and challenges and the way that we should go about leveraging these to achieve the goals we hope to see.

- Define key assets and problems/issues challenging our communities and constituencies towards improving community health
- Describe the goal of our work and the changes we hope to see (desired outcomes) in our communities through our coalition’s efforts
- Describe how (strategies, actions, interventions) we hope to accomplish those outcomes
The elements of a Theory of Change

- Contextual Analysis
- Goal(s)
- Activities/Actions
- Short Term Outcomes
- Long Term Outcomes

Assumptions
Examining assumptions about what works
While assumptions are often based on experiences from the field, sometimes they are built on intuition. Challenging these assumptions allows organizations to look more closely at their theory and reflect on the choices that they are making.

- As you work on your Theory of Change, think about the assumptions that you are making concerning why a particular intervention might work.

- Surface and discuss differences in assumptions among people in your organization.

- Challenge those assumptions – what experiences or information are they based on?
The elements of a Theory of Change: The way it works

Linking strategies, actions and desired outcomes

In order for a theory of change to be useful, a logical path must be created that connects to reasonable and measurable outcomes. The word “logical” suggests that the strategies, actions and outcomes must link together in a way that makes sense, although we also recognize that this work is not linear. The outcomes offer practitioners a target and a gauge of their accomplishments and movement toward their goals.

- Closely examine the links between our strategies, actions and outcomes and ensure that they are logical, achievable and direct.

- Identify and address gaps in our strategies – paths that might not get us where we want to go.
Setting Outcomes  
Let’s “break it down”
Outcomes are...the observable changes in individuals, institutions, conditions, services, policies, processes and products that come as a result of a program or activity.

Think out loud: What are the observable changes you expect to see as a result of this work?
What makes an outcome logical and reasonable?

✓ There is a logical connection between our activities and the outcome.

✓ Based on our experiences, the context of the community that we are working in, and the resources that we have, it is reasonable to believe that the outcome can be accomplished within the timeframe that we have established.

✓ The information collected to track this outcome will help us to know more about how our partnership might improve this work.

Think to yourself: Are the changes you expect to see logical and reasonable?
## Setting Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Levels</th>
<th>Sample Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Increased understanding of upstream approaches to social determinants of health. Increased knowledge/understanding of upstream policy change priorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships/Coalitions</td>
<td>Partners align and collaborate under shared vision and goals, without deflecting or co-opting by narrow or tangential or personal agendas. Processes, data, norms of working, and structures are used consistently to strengthen partnership.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Shifts in how an issue is viewed/framed – for example through lenses of upstream health, equity, systemic, and multi-sector - by core partners and key community orgs and leaders.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health systems shifts to focus on upstream factors impacting community health (prevention over treatment).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies and Practices</td>
<td>Policies changed to better support healthcare and public health by addressing root causes, social determinants of health, and upstream issues</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased organizational capacity to identify and implement practices/organizational policies that can improve upstream factors impacting community health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Increased knowledge or changed beliefs about the social determinants of health and best practices for among community leaders. Shift in community norms as the community continues to demand resources and support for healthier living. Improvements in population level health outcomes.</td>
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The elements of a Theory of Change

**Goal**
What is/are the ultimate goal(s) for your coalition?

**Actions/Activities**
What strategies/activities are your coalition members taking on to achieve your goal(s)?

**Assumptions**
- Facts or conditions that make us believe this intervention or activity will work

**Contextual Analysis**
Identify the major conditions and reasons for why you are doing the work in your community. What are the assets in your community, where are the opportunities?

**Short-term Outcomes**
What are the shorter-term changes that you hope to see that will tell you that you are heading in the right direction to meeting your goals?

**Assumptions**
- Facts or conditions that make us believe these outcomes will happen

**Long-term Outcomes**
What are the positive changes that you hope to achieve in the long-run, that will indicate to you that you have met or are close to meeting your goals?
An Example Theory of Change: UAA

**Goal**

Build a Peer Learning Network of Coalitions Tackling Upstream Community Health Issues

**Long-term Outcomes**

- Action Acceleration Initiative is recognized as a model for community health and thought leadership.
- Increased cross-sector and cross-field collaboration
- Adoption of common best practices across peer-to-peer networks
- All communities benefit from this initiative and subsequent networking, including non-grantees

**Contextual Analysis**

- Proven community action model, building from the experiences of HPBD and existing community coalitions.
- Shift from prevention toward Upstream Health factors across the country.
- Community coalitions are laying the groundwork for long term systems change efforts
- Partners bring individual expertise as well as successful collaborative history in their respective communities

**Assumptions**

- Coalitions will be willing to engage in and benefit from a community of practice
- Coalitions will have and/or develop the capacity to advocate for and achieve progress towards comprehensive upstream health policies.
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**Short-term Outcomes**

- Increased interaction across coalitions
- Evidence of increased knowledge
- Increased coalition leadership and partner capacity
- Increased visibility of Action Acceleration coalition efforts

**Actions/Activities**

- Ongoing coaching around the process of policy, environmental and systems strategies supporting community change.
- Technical assistance and resources related to the initiative focus areas.
- Financial Assistance (Grants) in support of the work

**Assumptions**

- Coalitions will be willing to engage in and benefit from a community of practice
- Coalitions will have and/or develop the capacity to advocate for and achieve progress towards comprehensive upstream health policies.

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Strategy 1. Support and Elevate Effective Community Partnerships Working to Advance an Upstream Health Agenda

Support 16 existing cross-sector coalitions to adopt and implement “upstream” environmental-, policy- and systems-change strategies, and accelerate their work in areas they have already identified as priorities to improve community health.

Intermediate Outcomes (Years 1-3)

- Overall looking for precursors to systems change:
  - Improved knowledge, beliefs, and momentum in individuals, organizations and communities
- Data and evidence valued and sought among partners
- Processes, data, norms of working, and structures are used consistently to strengthen partnership.
- Increased capacity to access and use data to decide on goals and strategies.
- Increased capacity to make a business case.
- New investments and new sector engagement.
- Enhanced relationships and strategies toward practice, policies, and systems change
- Increased number of champions supporting the work, including community advocates.
- Joined or coordinated with parallel initiatives that support and enhance the partnership’s upstream community health goals.
- Organizations and infrastructure identified as grounds for new aligned policies, practices, training, and collaboration to support upstream health.
- Increased connection to policy makers.
- Increased, braided, or leveraged resources for sustainability for program, practice, policy and built environment changes.

Long-term Outcomes (Years 5+)

- Overall looking for systems level changes and population level outcomes:

  Organizational Shifts in Practice and Policy
  - Core partner Institutions and non-partner organizations effectively move focus from downstream health care and prevention to upstream health issues of the community.
  - New and nontraditional partners from workforce, business, education, community development and other sectors reinforce their impact on upstream social determinants of health.

  Supportive Regulatory/ Legislative Policies and Funding Streams
  - Policies and funding streams support healthcare and public health by addressing root causes, social determinants of health, and upstream issues.

  Sustainability and Scalability Realized
  - Long term funding secured and Upstream, multi-sector collaboration scaled to broaden impact on more communities, residents, and organizations citywide or regionally.

  Improvements in Health
  - Including reductions in: preventable disease and conditions, high utilization of healthcare and public health by addressing root causes, social determinants of health, and upstream issues.

  Improvements in Health Equity
  - across race, ethnicity, income levels, gender, age, immigration status, education level, and sexual identity.
Now it’s your turn...
Now it’s your turn...

**Goal**

**Actions/Activities**

**Short-term Improvements**

**Long-term Improvements**

**Contextual Analysis**

*What are the assets and conditions in your community that you are trying to leverage/address?*

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Now it’s your turn...

Contextual Analysis

Actions/Activities

Short-term Outcomes

Long-term Outcomes

Goal

What is/are the ultimate goal(s) for your coalition?
What is your theory about? What needs to be changed or improved?

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Now it’s your turn…

**Actions/Activities**

*What are your Upstream Action Acceleration project activities?*

**Contextual Analysis**

**Goal**

**Assumptions**

Why do you believe these activities will leverage/address the assets/challenges in your community? Why do you believe these activities can improve public health or the delivery of health care by addressing upstream factors?
Now it’s your turn...

Short-term Outcomes
- Who/what ultimately are you trying to change (the delivery of health care, the public health of a target population)?
- What changes do you hope to see in the short-term (e.g., in one to two years)?

Contextual Analysis
Goal
Actions/Activities

Assumptions
- Why do you believe your activities will achieve these short-term outcomes?
Now it’s your turn...

Contextual Analysis

Goals

Actions/Activities

Short-term Outcomes

Long-term Outcomes

What are the changes you hope to see in the longer-term?

Assumptions

Why do you believe your short-term outcomes will lead to these longer-term outcomes? How do these align with your goal(s)?
Break Out Instructions

- Transition to assigned break out room
- Complete short term and long term outcomes worksheets
- Share out in small groups
- Return to ballroom and hang your worksheets up by your collages for everyone to see (we will take pictures of them!)
- Collect your worksheets at the end of the day and take these back to your community to share your experience!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakout Session Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stonington (Meg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allies in Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly City Development Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Jersey Conservation Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital</td>
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Questions?