



A Note About SVP's Philanthropy Curriculum

Social Venture Partners' Philanthropy Curriculum has been designed to be delivered by any experienced facilitator. While a basic understanding of the content and audience will be helpful, the facilitator does not need to have extensive expertise on the topic.

The courses were designed by the instructional design team at [Endurance Learning](#) using best practices based on research about adult learning. They don't rely heavily on presentation, focusing instead on reflection, conversation and simulations to enhance the knowledge and skills of Partners and other participants. Each course was tested by partners and staff from across the network, both in-person and online.

The content is scalable, equally effective if delivered around a table to a group of 3 or 4 or as a more formal workshop with a group of 30 or 40. If you are delivering the content as an e-workshop, we recommend a tool like [zoom.us](#), that includes features such as whiteboards, breakout rooms, chatting and polling.

While the courses were originally designed with new SVP Partners in mind, long-time Partners and staff in the pilots shared their view that all Partners will benefit from the content. In fact, community partners and individual philanthropists of all kinds can benefit, and SVP encourages wide spread dissemination of all the information herein. It is an open source document.

If you have any questions regarding SVP's Philanthropy Development Curriculum, please contact Social Venture Partners International.

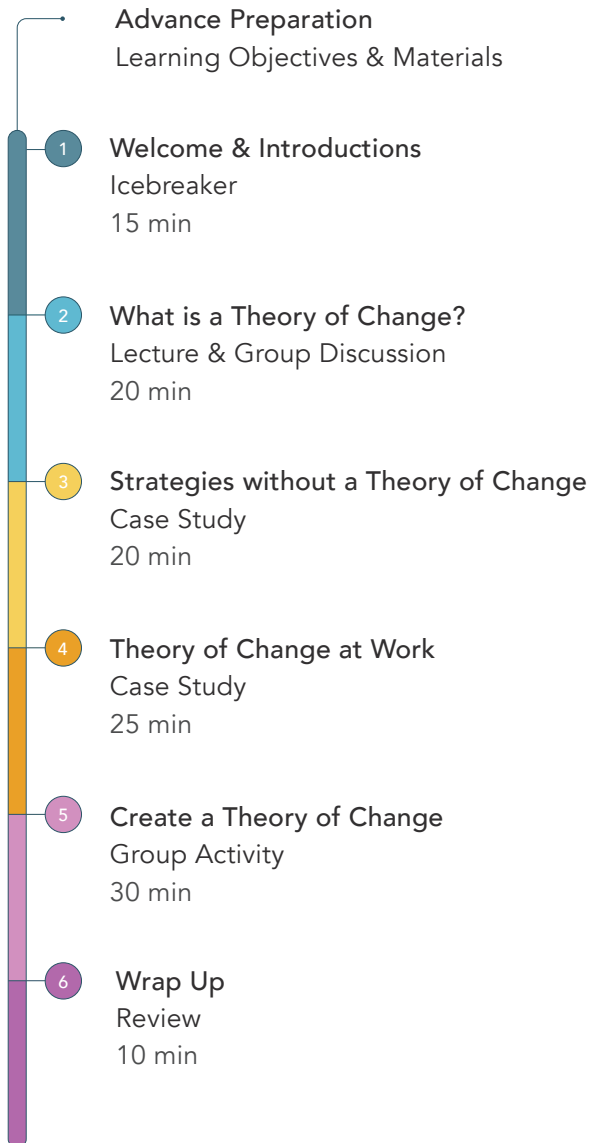


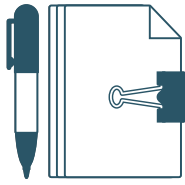


Constructing a Sound Theory of Change

Overview

Course Time: Approx 2 Hours





Advance Preparation

Learning Objectives & Materials

Why this course?

Engaged philanthropists should understand the strategy an organization uses to achieve change in order to assess the impact of their giving or volunteering for that effort.

In the foundation of an organization's strategies can be found in their "Theory of Change," which shows the links between the organization's activities and its outcomes, and intended ultimate impact; essentially, the rationale for why the organization believes their chosen activities are the right ones to move toward their goals. Some organizations are very intentional about establishing a high-level Theory of Change before embarking on activities, while other organizations focus more narrowly on their programs with the belief that they'll achieve their overall goal by doing those programs well. This module helps individuals analyze an organization's Theory of Change, apply a Theory of Change approach to their own philanthropy, and encourage more thoughtful analysis within organizations in order to achieve maximum impact.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, participants will be able to...

1. Define the term Theory of Change
2. Explain the importance of having a Theory of Change
3. Apply Theory of Change practices to engaged philanthropy

Materials



Handouts

- A1. Actions & Outcomes (cut out in advance)
- A2. Change Map (Blank)
- A2. Change Map Guide
- A3. Causal Link Worksheet
- A3. Early Stage Strategy
- A4. Change Map: SVP Connecticut





Advance Preparation: Learning Objectives & Materials

- A5. Traumatic Head Injuries
- A6. Resources



Other Materials

- Slide show
- Index cards
- Markers
- Sticky notes
- Flipchart
- Pens
- Tape for outcomes
- Handouts (one for each participant)



Welcome & Introductions

Technique: Icebreaking Activity

15 Minutes



- A1. Actions & Outcomes (cut out in advance)



Welcome

Before the session, hang one outcome for every expected participant around the room.

As participants enter the room, have them fill out a name tag, assign them an outcome to stand by where they should write their name, and evenly distribute action cards to each person (perhaps 2-5 strips of paper per person). Depending on class size, participants may not have enough to distribute cards to all outcomes, but they should all have an equal amount so they can distribute to at least several of the outcome sheets. The goal is to have each person's assigned outcomes sheet have at least several of the action strips assigned to it by the end of the activity.



Actions & Outcomes

Once you have all (or at least most) of the participants present, welcome the participants and introduce yourself.

Welcome to this workshop where we will talk about Theory of Change. Over the next two hours we will walk through a series of activities and discussions to gain a better understanding of what a Theory of Change is and how it can function to assist you in your philanthropy. This training serves as an introduction to Theory of Change and you will be exposed to content designed to help you:

1. Define the term Theory of Change.
2. Explain the importance of having a Theory of Change.
3. Apply Theory of Change practices to engaged philanthropy.

We have a lot to talk about today. Before we get started, let's take some time to find out who is in the room.





Actions & Outcomes

Once you have all (or at least most) of the participants present, welcome the participants and introduce yourself.

Have any of you played the game Apples to Apples? In that game, one person reads a noun, and game players choose an adjective to match. The best combination wins the round! Similarly, you are standing by an outcome and have a list of actions in your hand. I would like everyone to go around the room and review the outcomes. After you read the outcome, select an action that you feel is most appropriate/funny/clever and place it next to the outcome. If there are not enough actions in your hand to distribute to every outcome, please select as many outcomes as you have actions in your hand. Then we'll come back together and debrief.

Allow a few minutes for everyone to review and distribute their action cards. Once complete, ask everyone to return to their own outcome and select an action they like from the slips of paper others left for them.



Introduce Yourself

As we introduce ourselves, please tell everyone your name, what keeps you busy during the day, read the outcome on your sheet, and tell us the action you selected. I'll start with an example:

My name is _____. I work at SVP ____ as an _____.

Please draw from the actions and outcomes in this guide or use the example below. Then direct the group to introduce themselves.

A sample action and outcome:

I started improv class (action) to realize my dream of being a comedian (outcome).



We just heard a lot of actions and outcomes. Who can say more about what connects their action to their outcome, and why they selected it? What's behind your selected action and outcome that's not already been said or is easily apparent? Is there a link between improv classes and a career in comedy (or whatever your example was)? What about the other items we heard?

Allow for a short discussion. The goal of this is to introduce why it is important for actions, outcomes, and Theory of Change to be aligned by introducing the fundamental ideas of actions and outcomes.



Making the Link

What can happen if an action makes sense at a high level to apply to an outcome but there is no evidence linking the actions and the outcomes?

Allow the group time for discussion. Your goal is to lead them to a point that resembles the following:

If we are not careful, we can busy ourselves doing things that don't actually cause the change we want to see.



What is a Theory of Change?

Technique: Lecture & Group Discussion

20 Minutes



- A2. Change Map (Blank)
- A2.Change Map (Guide)



Theory of Change

You may have your own ideas or definition of Theory of Change, and you may not. For our purposes here together today it will be helpful to have a shared understanding of the definition we are using for this course.

Actions and outcomes often have a clear relationship. But today we are going to talk about the hypothesis that shows how actions and short-term outcomes can lead to long-term impact; Theory of Change. For those of you who have been involved in project management or strategic planning, many of these concepts may seem familiar. Today, we're offering a way to structure strategic thinking for an organization when it comes to outcomes they'd like to achieve, and determining the best way to get there.

Leaders at organizations often think a Theory of Change will benefit their work because they are hearing complaints or feedback around communicating the strategy or proving the value of their work. Questions like, "Why did we choose this next step?" and "How does this take us closer to where we're trying to go?" may precede Theory of Change work.





Key Players

Let's start with the key players in a Theory of Change. The Executive Director (ED) is usually in charge of creating and carrying out a Theory of Change, but it is not completed by one person alone!

Key players are the impacted communities of the work, as well as staff, volunteers, board members, funders, partner organizations and other stakeholders related to the organization and its work. Together, these key players should have enough insight and perspective on the need and the organization to make observations and help construct a Theory of Change that improves upon the status quo. In addition to these key players, it may also be helpful to pull in the people who run areas of the organization that are going extremely well to represent what should remain as the foundation for new or different paths they may take when the Theory of Change is complete.

One of the most challenging elements to navigate in this process can be identifying how to thoughtfully and respectfully listen to and incorporate the insights of impacted communities and people who the outcome is intended for. Too often, organizations and leadership make decisions in a vacuum, assuming their knowledge and expertise is enough. However, often the best information behind a sound Theory of Change is the lived experience of people in the community, and people the work aims to serve. Plan to thoughtfully check in with the communities of intended impact before assuming a Theory of Change is sound. This could mean paying for the time of staff at a community based organization to analyse the Theory of Change and give feedback, or other steps that acknowledge and compensate for the work they are doing to help you out.

Once we have the key players, we need a map to guide us.





Change Map

A change map is what we often see representing a theory of change. Today we will define a change map as a graphic representation of conceptual linkage among an identified issue/problem, intended change, potential strategies, and values that guide the work of an organization.

For this session, this is the definition we are using. What do you think we mean by that definition?

Allow a moment for discussion to make sure everyone is in agreement with the definition provided.



Change Map Image

Great. Now that we have defined Theory of Change, let's take a moment to review the graphic on the screen. This is a change map and on it you will see the theory of change process. There are several ways to depict this graphic, and we will see more than one today. For simplicity, this is the main template we'll use for the day.

Hand out Change Map Blank and Change Map Guide

I am handing around a sheet that defines each term on the change map along with a blank change map. There are a lot of terms on this sheet. Please take a moment to review.

Allow a few minutes to review.



As you see on the sheets, every theory of change starts with an intended change that can be realistically achieved and that everyone involved understands. Once the intended change is determined, we need to establish what conditions must be in place for the goal to be reached. These conditions are the short-term or intermediate outcomes which lead to the theory of change or causal pathway we just discussed. In this pathway we have activities that lead to intermediate outcomes. These activities are linked by causal links that should lead to the intended change.

Ask participants if they have questions about the handouts. Once you have answered questions, transition to the debrief question.



More Than a Vision

Facilitate a large group discussion around this question. Statements may include:

- Helps to identify what change you seek to make.
- Helps to identify your approach to change.
- Helps identify what shapes and informs your work.

Can you tell me how a Theory of Change relates to an organization's mission and vision

Facilitate a large group discussion around this question. Guide the the discussion to narrow in on the idea that mission and vision inform the Theory of Change.

Clarify any confusion or misunderstanding before transitioning to the next section.



Strategies without a Theory of Change

Technique: Case Study

20 Minutes



- A3. Early Stage Strategy
- A3. Causal Link Worksheet



Early Stage Strategy

Let's start by taking a look at an organization that did not use the Theory of Change but wants to draw connections between actions and outcomes. This is an afterschool organization that uses academics, athletics, leadership training, and the arts to help students reach their full potential.

I am handing out the strategy of this organization for your review. Please take a moment to review this sheet.

Hand out Early Stage Strategy and allow participants to review. Once everyone appears to have reviewed, transition to the next section.



Causal Link

Let's take a moment to talk about causal link. Causal link is the connection between a cause (=the reason for something) and an effect (=its consequences). In order to generate a theory of change, we need to generate a causal link.

On the screen, we see the example that as temperature increases, ice cream sales increase. The link is that as the temperature increase causes the ice cream sales to increase.

Is the opposite true? Do ice cream sales cause the temperature to increase? No, that is a correlational link. We do not want correlational links in our strategies.



Hand out Causal Link worksheet.

Now that you have reviewed this strategy, let's take a closer look at the causal link we may see in each strategy. I am passing around a handout to each table. At your table group, please write down what you think the causal link is between each strategy and the expected change as detailed in the issue statement.

Allow five minutes for groups to write down causal links. Then ask each group to share their theories.

Now that you've had a chance to dive into this and share your thoughts, let's take a look at what actually happened:

SVP Partners uncovered that the organization was very opportunistic in its strategies and in doing so was also stretching itself thin or not being intentional about what paths they were following. In other words, their activities were not aligned with their mission and vision.

As they reviewed the strategies they questioned the intention of the youth-led board. What was the short-term goal? What was the long-term goal of that strategy? Was it being created as a new program offering to teach leadership to the organization's student volunteers? Or, was it to create deeper roots in the community with the ultimate outcome being fundraising?

Because this plan was too broad and vague in their intention, this initiative had to be revisited with a narrower scope. Their strategies, especially the one around creating a youth board, had a weak causal pathway to the fundraising issue they were actually trying to resolve.

Although the idea may have contributed positively to another organizational programmatic goal - their youth led board would have been a great experience for their students - approaching it from a fundraising perspective made intentions unclear. This organization had to go back to the drawing board and use SVP's help to create a theory of change, and more clearly define the links between which activities relate to which outcomes. Ultimately, they decided to focus on the connections of their board members,



as this was determined to be the path which led to the most diversification in funding. They decided to wait on creating a youth led board until it was reimagined it with a programmatic lense rather than a fundraising lense.

Many organizations will create a Theory of Change because they are realizing that there is a disconnect between activities and their ultimate goals. This assumes the that their mission and vision are in good enough shape to embark on a Theory of Change exercise. SVP has learned that an organization's mission and vision may not be in good shape and going through a TOC exercise can uncover the need to revisit, realign, refresh, and re-test it. Theory of Change is a great way to throw your mission/vision statements against a wall to see if they're still sticky, and to subsequently rework if necessary. A TOC clarifies the causal pathways between the organization's mission/vision with all of the organization's activities.



Other Strategies

Now that we have more information about outcomes and strategies, what would you suggest as a strategy for this organization to achieve the long-term goal of financial independence?

Allow short group discussion and brainstorming. Once the group has spent a few minutes discussing, transition into the next section where we will look at a few change maps and evaluate the theory of change of the organizations. If time permits, each table could share with the larger group.

To accomplish change, we need a plan that supports strong and sustained strategy execution. Plans need focus with attention to values. Let's take a look at how a real change map looks.



Theory of Change at Work

Technique: Case Study

25 Minutes



- A4. Change Map: SVP Connecticut



Connecticut SVP Current Situation

Social Venture Partners in Connecticut put together a theory of change to address the following situations.

Review the situation on the slide.

With this situation, they worked together to develop a strategy which I will hand out to you now. Please take a look at the change map and then I have a few questions for you.

Hand out Change Map: Social Venture Partners in Connecticut. Allow participants five minutes to review and discuss their overall thoughts and impressions at their tables.



Plausible, Doable, Testable

Now that we have reviewed this change map, let's discuss some of the actions:

1. Is this plan plausible?
2. Is this plan doable?
3. Is this plan testable?
4. Why is it important that plans be plausible, doable, and testable?



After the discussion, hand out Causal Link worksheet.

Now that you have reviewed this strategy, let's take a closer look at the causal link we may see in each strategy. I am passing around a handout to each table. At your table group, please write down what you think the causal link is between each strategy and the expected change as detailed in the issue statement.

Facilitate a large group discussion around these questions. Encourage people to suggest ways they might offer constructive criticism of this map. You should lead them to an answer that resembles:

Plans need to be realistic, have the resources to execute, and strategies need to be tested and evidence supported.

After a few minutes, transition into the next section.

Now that we understand a bit about theory of change, let's practice what we have learned with a sample issue.



Create a Theory of Change

Technique: Case Study

30 Minutes



- A5. Create a Theory of Change



Create a Theory of Change

Hand out A5. Traumatic Head Injuries.

Participants are provided a partially filled in change map. This fill-in-the-blank template is designed to assist in designing their own action plan incorporating the theory of change learning they have gained.

I am handing around a template to build your own theory of change. You will see in your resources that these documents can become quite graphical. Please use a less graphical document before you worry about graphic design of a change map. Content is important to get correct before you build the layout.

Let's practice what we have learned by looking at an issue. In this exercise, you are working with an organization that is seeking to reduce traumatic head injury in bicycle accidents.

In your table groups, please come up with at least one cause, root cause, expected change, and strategy to address this issue.

Allow ten minutes for groups to work through these strategic elements. After the time has expired, ask the groups to share their findings and then debrief. It is likely most people will talk about helmets and speed/vehicle factors.



Now that we have heard from everyone, let's talk about outcomes.

- What are the short-term outcomes of some of the ideas we heard?
- What are the long-term outcomes of some of the ideas we heard?
- What is the causal pathway between the two sets of outcomes?

The change map in front of you is quite verbose. Your change map may not have the level of detail your plan may have. What is important is that you think through all of the strategic elements.



Wrap Up

Technique: Review

10 Minutes



• A6. Resources



Resources

Today we learned how to analyze an organization's Theory of Change, and encourage more thoughtful analysis within organizations in order to achieve their maximum impact.

Engaged philanthropists should understand the strategy an organization uses to achieve change in order to assess the impact of giving or volunteering for that effort. The Theory of Change shows the (often unseen) link between activities and outcomes.

What are some ways you can see this Theory of Change exercise today influencing your work going forward?

Allow the group time for discussion. Try to get a number of people to share about how they see themselves applying our work today in the real world.

Thank you for sharing these great examples.

I want to highlight that organizations are constantly being pressured to add or expand programs, and a Theory of Change is a great filter to help staff and board prioritize and decide which activities will most efficiently and effectively use their resources - financial and human - to get to their vision. It's actually easier for nonprofit leaders to run an organization with a sound Theory of Change, because there is a clear strategy to point to and all the decision makers (EDs, Boards, Managers) are testing their activities and directives against the same map. It also helps tie activities on one side of an organization to the other side of the the organization. Everyone knows where and how their individual work fits into the whole -- a great way to help motivate and direct staff and volunteers.



Please take your resources with you as you leave. If you would like to learn more, we recommend Paul Brest's online course called Philanthropic Strategy that is offered free through Stanford University's online courses at Stanford Lagunita. This course goes deeper identifying the issue, developing a strategy, implementing a strategy, evaluating a strategy, and scaling the program, all with a Theory of Change informing the work. It takes about 5 hours to complete.

Hand out A6. Resources



Thank You!

I am passing around a few resources to take home with you today. On these handouts you can see what several other organizations have done with their change maps as they develop their own Theories of Change. Additionally, I have provided a blank change map for you to fill in as you work on your Theory of Change.

Thank you for spending some time to today in this introduction to Theory of Change. Please take your resources with you as you leave today.

