

Step 1b

Wider characteristics and context

In brief

Map out the **wider characteristics and context your programme operates in**. This is part of your Theory of Change but worth highlighting separately. Be clear about the need for your intervention, the reasons for taking your approach, who you are trying to reach, and what other programmes are operating in your area that overlap with yours.

Key resources

- Theory of Change template
- Outcomes Frameworks

Why it's important

- ▶ To build up a clear understanding of the context your programme operates in.
- ▶ To explore other factors that may affect delivery.
- ▶ To inform the decisions you make about designing and carrying out your evaluation.

What's involved

As well as understanding how your programme works and what outcomes and goals you expect it to achieve (STEP 1a – Develop a Theory of Change), it is also important to be clear about the wider context that it operates in and about the people you want to engage with. This should be a part of your work to develop a Theory of Change, but it's worth highlighting and exploring in detail.

For example, do the people you want to engage with have specific needs such as low levels of numeracy or literacy? Are there reliable internet connections in the local area and do people have good digital skills? Many factors such as these may present additional barriers or enablers for financial capability for the people accessing your programme.

In addition to the information about your programme and what it aims to achieve, which lies at the heart of your Theory of Change, this contextual material will influence the questions you want your evaluation to answer (STEP 2a – Develop your evaluation questions), the design of your evaluation (STEP 2b – Choose your evaluation approach) and how the findings will be used.

Some of the key issues you should think about are:

- ▶ **The people you aim to reach.**
 - What are the characteristics of the people you are trying to reach?
 - How many are you trying to reach?
 - Where are they and how will you engage them (and keep them engaged)?

▶ **The need for your programme, policy or funding.**

- What is the need for your programme, policy or funding?
- Does this need vary according to different characteristics or factors, such as geography, age group, socio-economic status, etc.?
- What evidence do you have that this need exists?

▶ **The development of your programme.**

- At what stage of development is your programme? Is it something brand new that your organisation has developed and is piloting for the first time? Or are you running and refining an existing programme, perhaps with evaluation or measurement already in place? Or are you adapting a programme from elsewhere?
- What influenced your decisions about programme design? For example, what evidence did you use to inform the design of your own programme, or why did you decide to run a programme that was developed elsewhere?

▶ **Other influences, stakeholders and learning.**

- What other programmes, policies or funding streams operate in your area and overlap with yours, in terms of the people they are trying to reach and/or the outcomes they are trying to achieve?
- Who else, outside of your organisation, might be interested in your programme? This might be other organisations delivering similar programmes; funders; or local, regional or national government.
- What might those other organisations want to learn from your programme, and how can you share that information with them?

These questions are included in the **TEMPLATE – Theory of Change** document to help you bear these issues in mind as you develop your Theory of Change. You might also find it useful to carry out a SWOT analysis, you can find out more about how to do this here: <http://betterevaluation.org/evaluation-options/swotanalysis>.

Further reading (same as STEP 1a: Develop a Theory of Change)

- **Creating your Theory of Change – NPC’s practical guide** (New Philanthropy Capital, 2014) – covers the creation, use and representation of a Theory of Change.
- **Guidance for Developing a Theory of Change for your Programme** (Nesta and TSIP) – a short introduction to creating a Theory of Change in the form of a step-by-step guide alongside an example.