

Logic Model Basics

PURPOSE

This guide is designed to help nonprofit and social impact organizations understand what a logic model is, why it matters, and how to build one. It provides a practical framework for planning programs, communicating how your work creates change, and building the foundation for tracking and evaluation.

Use Case

- ▶ You need to build a logic model for a grant application and are not sure where to start.
- ▶ You have a logic model, but are not confident it accurately reflects how your program works.
- ▶ You want to help your team get on the same page about what your program does and what it is trying to change.
- ▶ You are preparing for a new program, funding cycle, or strategic planning process and want a stronger foundation.
- ▶ You want to understand how a logic model connects to evaluation without having to become an evaluator.



ABOUT BSRI

BSRI was created to support informed and effective decision-making for our partners with tools, resources, and data for action. As we wind down operations, we are creating these resources for the community to continue the work. We use our guiding principles in engaging with partners and communities, putting people first through accountability and reciprocity, communicating transparently, and sharing our knowledge widely.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

BSRI developed this guide based on years of experience facilitating logic model development with nonprofit and social impact organizations. The most common thing we hear when we start this work is some version of: "We do a lot of great work, but we struggle to show the connection between what we do and the change we are trying to make." This guide is designed to help with exactly that.

Throughout this guide, we use a running example -- a community health outreach program -- to illustrate each concept as we go.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

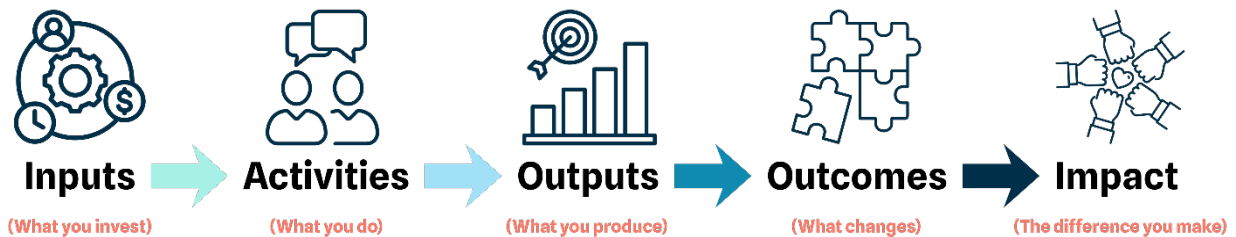
Our organization utilizes artificial intelligence (AI) tools to enhance efficiency, support data analysis, and strengthen evaluation practices. We also encourage our partners and clients to thoughtfully explore AI as a means to build future-ready evaluation capacity. All AI use is governed by strict data privacy and ethical standards. We do not input any personally identifiable information (PII), protected health information (PHI), or other sensitive data into AI systems in a manner that would violate HIPAA or other applicable privacy regulations.

Additionally, we exclusively use licensed AI tools and platforms that explicitly prohibit the use of submitted data for model training or retention beyond the scope of the intended task. This ensures that all information remains confidential, secure, and protected.

WHAT A LOGIC MODEL IS, AND WHY IT MATTERS

Most organizations can describe what they do. Fewer can clearly explain how their work leads to change. That gap -- between activities and impact -- is exactly what a logic model is designed to close.

A logic model is a tool that maps the cause-and-effect chain from what your organization puts in, to what it does, to what changes as a result. It makes your program's reasoning visible: this is what we do, this is what we expect to happen, and this is why we think that.



A well-built logic model helps your organization:

- ▶ Create shared understanding across staff, leadership, and partners about how the program is supposed to work and to what effect
- ▶ Identify gaps in planning before they become problems in implementation
- ▶ Define what you will track and measure. This is the foundation of any evaluation!
- ▶ Communicate your program's logic clearly to funders, board members, and community members

A logic model is not a guarantee. It does not prove your program works. What it does is make your reasoning transparent, enabling learning, evaluation, and improvement.

START HERE: THE THEORY OF CHANGE

Before building a logic model, it helps to step back and ask: **why do we believe this program will work?**

That question is the foundation of a Theory of Change: a statement that connects your actions (programs, etc.) to the impact you are trying to make. At its core, it looks like this:

IF we do these things >> **THEN** we expect this to happen.

This is like in Google Maps where, when we put in our destination, we see the top-level view before we start to see all the different lefts and rights that we'll need to take to get there.

In our experience, the most useful place to start is with the impact. What is the change you are ultimately working toward? If it helps, you can ask yourself: "If I had a magic wand, what difference would I want to make?" Organizations often come to this process with a clear sense of where they want to go but are less sure about the specific path to get there. Starting with impact and working backwards helps clarify that path.



Pro Tip

Many organizations find that their mission statement is a good starting point for identifying impact. If your mission says "to improve health outcomes for underserved communities," that is the kind of big-picture change that belongs in the impact column.

Impact statements are intentionally big. They often cannot be measured by a single program alone, and that is okay. We are naming the change we are working toward, not claiming full responsibility for it. For example, a community health outreach program might name its desired impact as: a community free of stigma around HIV, mental health, and substance use, where people have the knowledge and resources to navigate their own care. With that in place, the team can work backwards: What does the program need to do to achieve that change? They might say: we need to do outreach to get to people in our community, we need to do HIV testing, we need to do education (through community events and social media)

Here is how this looks for our running example. Notice how the impact statements are big and how the actions are specific steps the program will actually take.

Actions	Impact
▶ Go into the community, build trust, and conduct outreach ▶ Provide free HIV and substance use screenings ▶ Connect participants to services through a community resource list ▶ Host community events and workshops ▶ Create inclusive social media campaigns	▶ A community free of stigma around HIV, mental health, and substance use ▶ Individuals who can navigate their own care ▶ A stronger, more equitable local health system
IF we take these action steps >> THEN we work toward this impact	

Once you have your Theory of Change, you're on your way to creating your detailed Logic Model.

THE FIVE COMPONENTS OF A LOGIC MODEL

A logic model takes the IF/THEN logic of the Theory of Change and breaks it into five components, connected left to right. Here's a quick rundown of the IF/THEN statements:

IF we have the resources >> **THEN** we can do these activities.

IF we do these activities >> **THEN** we will produce these outputs.

IF we produce these outputs >> **THEN** we will achieve these outcomes.

IF we achieve these outcomes >> **THEN** we will have this impact.

We deliberately use two of the components of the Theory of Change to create the Logic Model. Returning to our Google Maps example, this helps you go from a zoomed-out view (Theory of Change) to the turn-by-turn directions (Logic Model).

1. Resources

Resources are everything your organization needs to run the program: staff time, funding, materials, technology, space, and community relationships. They are the starting point -- without them, nothing else happens. You can start by thinking through your line-item budget for a given program or for your organization. But do not overlook in-kind or less visible resources. Community trust, cultural knowledge, and existing partnerships are real resources that make programs work -- and they belong in the logic model.



Pro Tip

If a resource you need does not yet exist (a key partnership, a staff training), naming it in the logic model is the first step toward identifying what you need to build or fund.

In our running example: outreach staff, HIV test kits, tablets, transportation, funding for incentives, partner organization relationships, social media accounts, and evaluation support.



Questions to ask yourself

What do we need in place to carry out this work?

2. Activities



Activities are the specific things your team does to deliver the program. They are the services you provide, the events you hold, the outreach you conduct, and the training you run. **These come directly from your Theory of Change**, but in the logic model you provide greater detail.

Be Specific. "Community engagement" is too vague to be useful. "Weekly outreach visits to five identified community locations" is specific enough to track, assign to a staff member, and evaluate.



Pro Tip

Notice how specific the examples below are. Think of the Theory of Change activities as the headings for your activities column, and populate a description under each of them.

In our running example: daily community outreach and recruitment, HIV and substance use screenings, ambassador recruitment and training, resource list development, individual linkage to services, community events and workshops, social media campaigns targeting the populations served.



Questions to ask yourself

What are we actually doing, step by step?

3. Outputs



Outputs are the direct, countable results of your activities. They are typically expressed as a number or percentage and are often what goes into monthly reports and grant deliverables. Outputs can also include tangible products -- a community resource map, a training curriculum, a social media content calendar. Outputs are considered "evidence" that you completed your activities and are useful in monitoring and audits.

Outputs do not tell you whether anything changed as a result -- that is what outcomes measure (see below).

In our running example: # of people screened, # of screenings with positive results, # of events held, # of attendees, # of referrals made, # of training sessions completed, # of social media posts published.



Questions to ask yourself

What can we count or point to as a direct result of our activities?

4. Outcomes



Outcomes are the changes you expect to see as a result of your work. An output is what you produce; an outcome is what changes because of it. Holding ten community events is an output. Participants reporting reduced stigma around seeking care after attending those events is an outcome. Outcomes always involve a verb.

In our running example: more people connected to care, increased knowledge of available services, stronger community partnerships, reduced stigma around seeking services.



Questions to ask yourself

What do we expect to change because of this work? For whom, and by when?

5. Impact



Impact is the long-term, meaningful change your program is working toward -- the reason the program exists. These are often the big, systemic changes that a single program contributes to but does not cause alone. **Pull impact statements from your Theory of Change.** They are the anchor of the logic model.

In our running example: a community free of stigma, individuals who can navigate their own care, a stronger, more equitable local health system.



Questions to ask yourself

What is the long-term change we are part of? What does success look like over time?



A Note on Assumptions

Every logic model is built on assumptions: beliefs about how and why change will happen. These assumptions are often unstated, but they influence whether the logic model holds together in practice.

For example, our community health outreach program assumes that community members will trust outreach staff, attend events, and use the referrals they receive. If these assumptions do not hold, the program may not achieve the outcomes it expects, even if activities are implemented as planned.

Identifying assumptions helps organizations surface important conditions for success. In some cases, assumptions reveal activities, resources, or partnerships that need to be strengthened. For example, if trust is critical to participation, the program may need to invest in relationship-building, community ambassadors, or other trust-building strategies.

As you build your logic model, take time to identify key assumptions and discuss whether they are realistic, supported by evidence, or require additional planning.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Here is the full logic model for our running example. Note that this is intentionally simplified. A real logic model for a program of this scope would be much more detailed, with more resources, more activities, more specific outputs, and a fuller set of outcomes.

Resources	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
What you need to run the program	What your team does to deliver the program	The direct, countable results of your activities	The changes you expect to see as a result	The long-term change you are working toward

Resources	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
Examples				
▶ Outreach staff ▶ HIV test kits ▶ Tablets and data systems ▶ Transportation ▶ Funding for incentives ▶ Partner organization relationships ▶ Social media accounts ▶ Evaluation support	▶ Daily community outreach and recruitment ▶ HIV and substance use screenings ▶ Ambassador recruitment and training ▶ Resource list development ▶ Individual linkage to services ▶ Community events and workshops ▶ Social media campaigns	▶ # of people screened ▶ # of screenings with positive results ▶ # of referrals made ▶ # of events held ▶ # of event attendees ▶ # of training sessions completed ▶ # of social media posts published	▶ More people connected to care ▶ Increased knowledge of available services ▶ Stronger community partnerships ▶ Reduced stigma around seeking services	▶ A community free of stigma around HIV, mental health, and substance use ▶ Individuals who can navigate their own care ▶ A stronger, more equitable local health system
IF resources and activities are in place >> THEN outputs are produced >> THEN outcomes are achieved >> THEN impact is advanced				

Each column connects to the next. If activities are not supported by adequate resources, outputs will fall short. If outputs are not connected to outcomes, change will be hard to demonstrate. The IF/THEN chain has to hold all the way through.



Pro Tip

You may see "inputs" used instead of "resources" and "action steps" instead of "activities" in other frameworks. These mean the same thing. You can also break out your outcomes into short-term (0-2 years), mid-term (2-5 years), and long-term outcomes (generally 5 + years), depending on the level of specificity you are looking to showcase.

HOW TO BUILD A LOGIC MODEL

In our practice, we build logic models in one or two working sessions with the people who design *and* deliver the program. Here is how we approach it.

We start with the Theory of Change. Once we have the activities and impact, we put those into the logic model. Then we build outward in both directions: what resources do those activities require, and what outputs and outcomes do we expect them to produce? Do the outputs allow us to discuss the outcomes?

A few things to keep in mind:

- ▶ **Keep your scope realistic:** Focus on what a specific program can achieve. Be kind to yourself: your impact will probably be MUCH bigger than what your program/outputs/outcomes can achieve... but the alignment should still be clear.
- ▶ **Use plain language:** If someone unfamiliar with the program (e.g., a friend, a spouse) could not read the logic model and understand it, revise it.
- ▶ **Expect to revise:** A first draft is a starting point. Plan to review and refine before “finalizing”. Logic models are often living documents and should be continuously revisited and refined.
- ▶ **Bring others into the process:** A logic model should not live in one person’s head or folder. Involve team members during revisions and introduce it to new staff or partners who join the work, so everyone understands the program’s purpose, how the activities connect to outcomes, and why certain decisions matter.

FROM LOGIC MODEL TO EVALUATION PLAN

A solid logic model helps lead to a solid evaluation plan. The outputs column tells you what to count. The outcomes column tells you what to measure for change. Together, they answer the core questions of any evaluation:

- ▶ What did we do? (Activities/Outputs)
- ▶ What changed because of it? (Outcomes)
- ▶ How/Why does it matter? (Impact)

An evaluation plan adds the functional layer: what data source, how often, who is responsible, and what you will do with what you learn. Build the logic model first -- when it is solid, an evaluation can follow more naturally.



Need additional support with evaluation planning?

For step-by-step guidance on building out your evaluation plan from a logic model foundation, see our Logic Model to Evaluation Plan resource, along with other resources found on our impact hub!

Appendix

BSRI Logic Model Checklist

A quick tool for reviewing whether your logic model is complete and ready to use.



How to use this tool

Read through each item, check what is already strong, and use the notes column to identify what needs to be clarified, added, or revised.

	Checklist Item	Review Question	Reflection Prompt	Notes / Action
	Resources 	Are all necessary resources identified?	What do we need that is not yet listed? Are less visible resources like community trust or partner relationships made explicit?	
	Activities 	Are activities specific enough to track?	Would someone unfamiliar with the program understand exactly what the team does?	
	Outputs 	Are outputs countable and realistic?	Can we collect this data with our current systems? Are the targets achievable?	

	Checklist Item	Review Question	Reflection Prompt	Notes / Action
	Outcomes 	Are outcomes connected to activities?	Is there a clear path from what we do to what we expect to change? Are outcomes realistic for the timeline?	
	Impact 	Is impact consistent with the Theory of Change?	Does the chain of logic hold left to right? Is impact scoped to what this program can contribute?	
	Assumptions 	Do we know of any underlying assumptions named?	Are there conditions that need to be planned for?	
	Language 	Is the logic model in plain language?	Would a community member, new staff person, or board member be able to read and understand this?	
	Scope 	Is the logic model specific to this program?	Have we avoided outcomes that belong to the broader mission rather than this program?	
	Evaluation Readiness 	Are outputs and outcomes trackable?	Do we have, or can we build, a data source for each output and outcome listed?	