Running a theory of change workshop
A quick reference for workshop facilitators

Questions to ask before you begin

- **What** you will be creating a theory of change for – for a group of services (such as early help or reducing parental conflict), or a specific approach or intervention?

- **Who** will be involved in developing your theory of change? Consider a mix of relevant stakeholders who will bring different perspectives: partners, senior leaders, managers, practitioners. We recommend inviting a representative mix of 8–14 of these stakeholders to the workshop.

- **How** you will be conducting the workshop – in person, virtually, or a hybrid of both?

- **How much time** will you need? We suggest scheduling around half a day to work through the six sessions. See the box below for suggestions on splitting the time.

- **Who** will run the workshop? Consider having several facilitators and notetakers.

- **What evidence** you will bring to inform the workshop. See our guide 10 steps for evaluation success, appendix C, for more information.

- **Are you confident** explaining the purpose, importance and terminology of a theory of change? Refer to our handy resources below for key principles and definitions.

Handy preparation resources

For facilitors

- Using workshops to develop a theory of change (blog): https://www.eif.org.uk/blog/using-workshops-to-develop-a-theory-of-change-experiences-and-examples-from-our-work-with-four-local-early-help-teams

- EIF Evaluation Hub: https://evaluationhub.eif.org.uk/

- 10 steps for evaluation success: https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/10-steps-for-evaluation-success

- Theory of change template: https://www.eif.org.uk/files/resources/eif-theory-of-change-template.pdf

- A completed theory of change example: https://www.eif.org.uk/files/pdf/rpc-eval-toc-egs-newborough.pdf

To share with participants in advance

- Developing a good theory of change (introductory video): https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/developing-a-good-theory-of-change

- Creating a theory of change (EIF Evaluation Hub, step 1): https://evaluationhub.eif.org.uk/theory-of-change/

Six suggested sessions

		What % of workshop time?
1.	Introducing a theory of change, facilitators and participants	*10%*
2.	Why is the approach or intervention needed?	*10%*
3.	Who is the approach or intervention for?	*10%*
4.	What outcomes are achieved by the approach or intervention?	*30%*
5.	What are the key activities and how do they link to the outcomes?	*30%*
6.	What are the barriers, enablers and unintended consequences?	*10%*

Tips

- Provide appropriate information and reading on theories of change and the approach or intervention before the workshop.

- Try to ensure a good range of participants with different roles, experiences and expertise. Mix them up throughout the workshop to bring new perspectives to the discussions.

- Split the workshop up into sessions with breaks in between. Use different ways of getting engagement, such as whole group work, smaller groups, paired discussions or post-it notes.

- Have a lead facilitator and assistant for each session, as well as a dedicated notetaker. Switch roles to help mix up the dynamics of each session and keep participants engaged. Consider recording the workshop, with participants' consent.

- If the workshop is online, use breakout rooms to allow all participants to engage and a virtual whiteboard for participants to log their views.

- Developing a theory of change is an ongoing process of revisiting and revising: make sure this is built into future plans.

- To help prepare for future workshops, make sure you ask for feedback during or after the workshop. Use a feedback discussion or questionnaire to ask what worked well, what didn't, and what participants learned.

Recommended session plan

Session 1: Introducing a theory of change, facilitators and participants

- Introduce theories of change and why they are important.
- Agree aims and objectives of the workshop. Allow participants to voice any queries.
- Warm up participants with introductory questions to help them feel confident about contributing their ideas throughout the workshop.

Session 2: Why is the approach or intervention needed?

- Focus on understanding why participants believe the approach is needed in their local context:
  - What is the issue your approach is aiming to tackle? (i.e., what's the problem you're seeking to address?).
  - How does it add value above other approaches delivered previously or currently?
  - What is the evidence to support these assumptions?

Session 3: Who is the approach or intervention for?

- Who is the approach for? (based on why the approach is needed)
- What is the level and nature of need for those the approach is intended for? And what are their characteristics?
  - This is where evidence on who the approach is for can be useful. Consider dividing participants into breakout groups to encourage a mix of views.

Session 4: What outcomes are achieved by the approach or intervention? ✱

This is usually the main session of the workshop. It involves mapping out the intended outcomes for different beneficiaries – this could be children and young people, families and/or practitioners. It should also involve thinking about the sequencing of these outcomes into short, medium and long-term outcomes – these timeframes can vary depending on the type and length of your intervention.

- Get participants to set out the key outcomes in just a few words, and to group outcomes for different beneficiaries (it may be useful to colour-code them).
- Ensure participants distinguish between outcomes and activity outputs, which are not usually included in a theory of change.
- Group together similar outcomes to draw out emerging themes as participants share their views.

Session 5: What are the key activities and how do they link to the outcomes? ✱

This involves first mapping out the core activities of the approach, reflecting on how they work in the local context. This step is about stating what you are doing or plan to do to encourage the stated outcomes to happen. For a theory of change these do not need to be detailed, but could include:

- What are the key features of the activities?
- What do these features look like? How often and for how long do they support the target groups?
- Who delivers these activities?
- How are the target groups recruited, and how do they engage with the activities?

This session then involves detailing how the activities will lead to the intended outcomes. It should focus on the mechanisms of change: what you need beneficiaries to be thinking, feeling or doing while engaging with the activities to lead to the intended outcomes.

Defining mechanisms can be difficult but it is also extremely useful because it gets to the heart of how the approach or intervention is intended to achieve change.

Session 6: What are the barriers, enablers and unintended consequences?

The final session is about exploring the barriers and enablers to achieving outcomes. Consider factors that are both internal to the intervention, such as skill of practitioners, and external, such as policy/legislative changes.

This session should also consider unintended consequences of the approach, both in terms of current and future risks: what could unintentionally happen as a result of your approach, or what could go wrong?

Close the workshop by asking participants to reflect on the theory of change and if there is anything that has been omitted or included without proper consideration.

What next?

- A theory of change is often represented as a visual flowchart, which should be clear and simple.
- Alongside this flowchart, consider writing a 'narrative' theory of change document, which details each element of the theory of change, including the relevant evidence, details on context, assumptions and nuances of the approaches.
- A theory of change is the first step in evaluating your approach. Consider how you will move on to the next steps as set out in our guide **10 steps for evaluation success** and our **Evaluation Hub**.

✱ 3 key terms

- **Activities** are the actions undertaken as part of the approach to encourage or create the outcomes.
- **Outcomes** are the changes that occur as a result of an action. They are often changes in the knowledge and/or skills, attitudes or behaviours in the target group as a result of your activities.
- **Mechanisms** are what you want your target group to be thinking, feeling or doing while they are engaging with your activities to make an outcome more likely. They are how you want your activities to be experienced by your target groups – for example, that families feel their voice is heard, or practitioners feel trusted to make decisions.