Getting Started with your Logic Model

Introduction:

This document is meant to help you get started on developing your Program Logic Model (LM).

The "Before You Jump In" section walks you through some preliminary questions to help frame your Logic Model. The "Starting to Build" section covers where to start and how to work your way through the various components of the LM. Finally, we offer some general "Tips" in the last section.

Before You Jump In:

1. Use what you have: It may help to review existing material that you already have about the program (written descriptions, marketing materials, annual reports, website content, etc.) If you are following the steps of the Systems Evaluation Protocol, then the Stakeholder Analysis, Program Review, Boundary Analysis, and Program Description will have given you a good base for developing the Logic Model. All of these can be helpful for identifying program activities, outcomes, context, and key assumptions.

2. Find relevant examples: It can be helpful to look at examples of other logic models. Search the Netway for programs that similar to yours and review their logic models to get ideas.

3. Think about "participants": There's no column in a Logic Model where you have to list participants explicitly, but it helps to have a clear idea about who your participants are. Your vision of who your participants are contributes to the Context section, where you will likely need to describe who's in the program and what it's important to know about them. Your vision of your participants also tends to affect the kinds of Outcomes you include, since it is through effects on participants and then the larger community that your program has impact.

   The questions about who your participants are amount to a kind of "program boundary" issue, and it is sometimes not so obvious who should be viewed as a "participant". In a workshop setting it seems clear that "participants" are the people in the room. But if your program consists of workshops plus public events intended to raise awareness, then your program's participants are not just the ones in the room but also the attendees reached in some way at the public event. At a County Fair are you only thinking about the youth who are showing their projects? Or are you thinking about the impact this may be having on youth (or adults) who come to see the displays? If so, then they are "participants" in a sense as well.

4. Think about Timeframe: How much time is involved between the beginning of the Activities and the ultimate Long-Term outcomes that you envision for your program? When you work on the outcomes within your LM you will have to distinguish between Short-, Mid-, and Long-Term.

   - For Short-Term (ST) you should think about where you expect participants to be by the end of your time with them, or within a short time after that. If it's a one-time 3-hour event, then what do you expect them to have gained by the end of the afternoon? What will they be walking away with, or would be showing up within a few weeks? If it's a year-long after-school program then what would you expect to see during and by the end of that year? (That is, it's not really possible to give a calendar-time definition of "Short-Term", because the relevant time horizon varies with the program. The general principle is that Short-Term outcomes arise soon after and as a direct result of an activity.)

- For Mid-Term (MT) you should think about what tends to follow from those ST Outcomes. These might answer the "And then what?" questions following the ST effects. You might expect to see spill-over from direct participants to their family members or colleagues, and you might expect to see some initial behavior change that might follow from the knowledge and skill gains that would have occurred in the Short-Term.

- For Long-Term (LT) you should be thinking more broadly toward the ultimate goals of a Program, so this would tend to show up in terms of how things would unfold for the individual participants over a long time span (years, perhaps), and also of the cumulative effect on a community or group as the effects spread out. That is, if individual participants gain a greater interest in and capacity for science careers, then the community and country will (eventually) have the benefits of having greater numbers of scientists and a populace that is generally more versed in the tools and role of science.

Starting to Build:

There's no single "right" place to start with a Logic Model. Building backwards – starting from Long-Term outcomes – works well if you prefer to go from the big picture and ultimate goals and work back to the "how" part of what you have to do to get there. There's more of a program planning flavor in starting this way, so this may be particularly helpful for programs that are newly-developed or are still in the development phase. But, even for established programs, it may simply suit you to think of the big picture first and then work backwards.

It is also reasonable and may suit you better to start with Activities, since this means focusing first on what you DO as part of a Program. Inputs can be filled in at any time and are usually relatively straightforward. Outcomes follow from thinking through a series of "And then what?" questions. Context and Assumptions can be a bit difficult to bring to the surface and put into words, because although they are very important they are often just implicit or unstated in our minds. So it can sometimes work best to fill those in after the other pieces are written up.

Assumptions help fill in the explanations about why a program is expected to have these series of Outcomes (because, for example, you are assuming that young people who meet real scientists and have fun working with them are more likely to consider a career in that field than if they had never met a real live person who did that kind of work.) Assumptions can also hold a place for things that might or might not actually turn out to be true, but where a change would have serious implications for whether your program is likely to succeed or not. (For example, an assumption that there will continue to be funding for this program for the whole fiscal year, or that the prices of home heating fuels are going to continue to increase, etc.)

Context provides important information about the community being served by this program and the target participants, to give perspective to the Outcomes and Activities. For example, you might find it appropriate to explain that youth in this community have no other access to a safe after-school setting or program, or that language barriers make it important that this program be offered with Spanish-speaking volunteers and leaders, etc. The Context section should paint a picture of the setting within which the program operates, and the environment facing the participants.

Tips:

- Use the "Logic Model Definitions and Guidance" handout – read the guidance and examples for each LM section before filling it in; go through the checklist for each section after filling it in.

- Keep your language as general as possible when naming Inputs, Activities, Outputs, and Outcomes.

  For example: *When naming Activities it is important to choose titles that are neither too broad nor too specific. Consider the following three options:*
  1. *"Health Education Workshop Series at JFK High School in the Bronx on October 25th" (too specific!)*
  2. *"Workshop" (too broad!)*

  Imagine that you will be repeating this activity at different locations on different dates. What name would work for all of them?
  3. *"Health Education Workshop for Teens" (just right…)*

- Be careful about "column drift" e.g. putting activities or outputs in the outcome column, etc. Refer to the definitions in the Logic Model Definitions and Guidance for clarification.

REALLY IMPORTANT:

- Be careful about mixing up "outcomes" and "targets" and "indicators": For the kind of Logic Model we use, and especially for evaluation planning purposes, **outcomes should describe the changes that are expected to occur as a result of the program's activities,** rather than being phrased in terms of goals or indicators of success.

For example*, contrast the following three versions:*

1. *"10% of participants will pass the food safety certification exam"*
2. *"Percentage of participants passing the food safety certification exam"*
3. *"Increased knowledge of food safety principles"*

Version #3 is what we would be looking for. It describes the underlying change that the program seeks, and it describes it in general terms and therefore allows flexibility to evaluate the hoped-for change in different ways. Version #1 would serve well as a target or goal, which could be useful as a benchmark of success for accountability purposes or funding proposals. But it is best viewed as a goal. Version #2 is more general but it is really just identifying an indicator of the underlying outcome that the program is designed to achieve.