

# Uncovering Buried Assumptions

Sometimes, a program is based on assumptions that are “buried” – implied but not stated. For example, consider the following:

**In a nutritional program for youth, the pathway model has this link:**

**Teach proper nutrition ...→... Youth make more healthy food choices**

This seems perfectly logical, and would reflect the program’s intention to act positively to improve kids’ diets. Now, pull out the unstated assumptions:

**#1: youth in the program’s target population lack nutrition knowledge.**

**#2: schools and neighborhood stores offer healthy food choices**

**#3: youth participants have the ability to apply nutrition knowledge (self-discipline, resistance to peer pressure, etc.)**

It can be very important to bring these buried assumptions to light. They can affect your program planning, your evaluation questions, and eventually the interpretation of evaluation results.

**Action Steps:** To check for buried assumptions or presumed conditions, look at the pathway model in the program you are examining and focus on key pathways. Then ask:

- What does this assume about participants’ needs and/or capacities?
- What does this assume about gaps or possibilities in the environment?
- What does this assume about other things that could get in the way?

As you identify buried assumptions, note them on the back of this page.

**Keep in mind:** These un-buried assumptions (and others you may come up with), might be important to evaluate. For the example above, you might ask:

*#1: Do youth in the program’s target population lack nutrition knowledge?*

*#2: Do youth in the program’s target population have healthy food choices available to them?*

*#3: Do youth in the program’s target population have the self-discipline to apply nutrition knowledge?*