



TOOL 5

Craft a Theory of Change

TIME COMMITMENT

2–4 hours

PEOPLE

- Park organization staff
- Community stakeholders
- Board members
- Nonprofit partners

SUPPLIES

- Craft a Theory of Change worksheet (included in this tool download)
- Horizontal surface (table) or vertical surface (poster board, wall, easel)
- Virtual whiteboard, such as Jamboard, Figma, or Miro (for virtual gatherings)
- Sticky notes
- Pens, pencils, markers

INTRODUCTION

What is your vision for advancing equity?

A concise statement about the impact you want to achieve with your project, a Theory of Change sets a vision for future outcomes, even before defining how to get there.

Many companies and nonprofits use the Theory of Change (ToC) methodology in their general planning, but our version focuses on equitable development. A good ToC will serve as a guiding star for your efforts to produce equitable impacts. These impacts, along with the ToC itself, should be derived from the outreach and research you have done with community members—what is most at stake for the communities you are working with and how can your work support their goals? A ToC is also a reflection of the resources you have available to produce this change, and it may evolve over time.



TOOL 5

Craft a Theory of Change

TIPS FOR USING THIS TOOL

- A good ToC aligns with an organization's vision and mission statements. (See Tool 6 for an example.)
- In crafting the ToC, working group members should reflect on what influences their point of view on equity issues, goals, and solutions. Possibilities include lived experience, research, history, dictionary definitions.
- Once you establish a ToC, you'll need to use Tools 6, 16, and 17 to move your equity work from theory to action.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. On the Craft Your Theory of Change worksheet, write:
 - **Your equity statement** describing how your organization defines equity.
 - **Your organization or project's vision statement** describing the future vision of equity you would like to achieve.
 - **Your organization or project's mission statement** describing what you're doing to promote equity.
 - The above statements are the foundation for your ToC. If you do not have all of these statements, you can work with the group assembled in Step 2 to write them.
2. Assemble a working group of staff, community members, board members, and nonprofit partners, to identify who lacks access to resources and how your organization or project can address core equity challenges in your community. Use the worksheet or sticky notes to respond to the prompts on the Draft a Theory of Change section of the tool.
 - Define the equity issue you are trying to solve. Who experiences this issue and how?
 - The current and historic causes of this equity issue
 - How can you bring about change to address this equity issue?
3. People should keep their responses brief. Encourage participants to write only one idea on each sticky note. If detailed ideas for programs and other activities (tactical level) are suggested, record these details on the last row of the worksheet for future use.
4. Once all rows have been completed, think about what clusters or themes emerge. Try to consolidate the sticky notes per cluster, identifying priorities.
5. Review your completed ToC with others who may need to approve or give feedback on it.



TOOL 5

Craft a Theory of Change

CRAFT A THEORY OF CHANGE WORKSHEET	
Equity Statement	This could be an existing definition that has been adopted by your organization or you can write one based on the information gathered from stakeholders in step 2.
Organization or Project Vision Statement	This statement should describe the future vision of equity that you would like to achieve.
Organization or Project Mission Statement	This statement should describe what you are doing today to promote equity.
Draft a Theory of Change	Write a sentence or two describing some of the neighbors of this project and any issues with equity or fairness you believe they experience regularly.
	Write a sentence or two about the current and historic causes of the issues you have identified.
	Write a sentence or two about what this project can or should do to address these issues given its mission and vision. Try to keep these sentences general or high level. List any specific ideas you may have for activities or programs in the space provided (e.g. partner with other groups, hold a job fair, sponsor a homeownership club, talk to local officials).
	Ideas for activities or programs the project can do to address equity issues experienced by neighbors:

Note to the preparer of this tool: Feel free to expand or add rows as needed to any section. If you print the tool as a paper worksheet, a good option might be to have the notes on one side of the page and the remaining boxes on the other side, leaving lots of space for users to write notes and sentences in the Theory of Change box.



TOOL 5 Craft a Theory of Change

IMAGE CREDITS

Image by: Jiae Azad & Asher Kaplan
Courtesy of Urban Design and the Color Line, Harvard Graduate School of Design

Here are some Theory of Change examples:

THEORY OF CHANGE EXAMPLE 1

Because of the history of exclusion of Black and Brown communities from much of the Region’s growth initiatives, **we’re about Black and Brown community place-making and place-keeping to ensure that the benefits and the power**—culturally, economically and civically—that are derived from our project flow equitably to Black and Brown neighborhoods.

THEORY OF CHANGE EXAMPLE 2

We will elevate the social, economic, and physical well-being of our city and residents. Through thoughtful data analysis, combined with proactive community engagement, our organization **will assess community needs and interests** to establish metrics and prioritize all capital, operating, and programming investments so we can deliver equitable community benefits

THEORY OF CHANGE EXAMPLE 3

In order to ensure our projects are beautiful, safe, welcoming and accessible to all, we need to: **1.) Cultivate long-term relationships with communities** that have historically been disconnected from the river and excluded from city building planning and design; **2.) Adjust planning, design and engagement systems, and process** to make sure community voices are heard and help shape projects; **3.) Develop community ownership of projects and programs;** **4.) Better understand the roles and responsibilities** for both our organization and the city with respect to equity

