



TOOL 6

Craft a Theory of Action

TIME COMMITMENT

3–6 hours

PEOPLE

- Park organization staff
- Park board of directors
- Community stakeholders
- Nonprofit partners

SUPPLIES

- Craft a Theory of Action 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 actions will you take to advance equity?

A Theory of Action (ToA) outlines the steps you'll take to achieve the vision in your Theory of Change.

Your ToA will guide internal actions to make your organization more equitable; programming decisions (to achieve positive and equitable results); and actions and advocacy (to align public policies and attitudes with equity goals). A ToA can grow along with capacity (for example, if you hire more staff, or secure additional funding).



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TIPS FOR USING THIS TOOL

- Have your Theory of Change worksheet handy.
- A ToA is not a work plan.
- The precise content of your initial ToA does not matter as much as ensuring that it is grounded in your ToC.

INSTRUCTIONS

SESSION 1

1. This tool will require conversations with diverse stakeholders—staff, community members, nonprofit partners. Create a working group to develop your ToA drawing upon people who can address the actions needed to implement your ToC.
2. In a one-hour workshop, the group should identify key themes in your ToC and enter them into the Action Themes row of the worksheet. (For example, grow small businesses; provide out-of-school youth programming; help residents save money.)
3. Assign one or more members to research each action theme using the questions in the Research rows of the worksheet. Members should conduct research on their own. Ask them to save their notes.

SESSION 2

4. Reconvene the group.
5. Discuss takeaways and actions needed to achieve the equity changes described in your ToC.
6. In the Draft a Theory of Action rows of the worksheet, write initial statements describing how specific actions will achieve your equity goals. Consider who should be responsible for these actions, a time frame, and what results will be achieved.
7. Review your ToA draft with others. This can include organization leadership and board, other partners, and community members.

8. Your ToC and ToA should align with your organization’s vision and mission statements. For example:
 - **Vision:** We envision a city where everyone has what they need to enjoy optimal physical and mental health.
 - **Mission:** Our mission is to transform [specific infrastructure or land] into a public space that delivers health benefits to everyone in [defined area].
 - **Theory of Change:** Social and economic discrimination has taken a disproportionate toll on the health of the people of color who live in communities adjacent to [specific infrastructure or land]. We seek to close these disparities by working closely with our neighbors and other partners to identify and address the structural roots of poor health outcomes, as well as to provide culturally appropriate programs for healthy living.
 - **Theory of Action:** Because social and economic factors have profound effects on the health and well-being of the neighbors of color surrounding [our project], our actions will cut across the five social determinants of health (health access and care, education, economic stability, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context). We will prioritize health and fitness programming based on suggestions from residents in nearby neighborhoods where there are major disparities in mental health, diabetes, and heart disease. In partnership with our neighbors, we will ally with advocacy partners who build public awareness and push for systemic and structural change across the five determinants.



Craft a Theory of Action

CRAFT A THEORY OF ACTION WORKSHEET	
Action Themes	Identify and list key themes from your Theory of Change statement, like “grow small businesses,” “hire residents to work on the project,” “provide out-of-school time programming for youth,” or “help residents save money.”
Research	What strategies and types of partnerships are most effective for producing equity around these themes at a systemic or structural level?
	What strategies and partnerships are most effective for producing equity around these themes at a programmatic level?
	What strategies and types of partnerships are most effective for producing equity around these themes at the level of your organization or project?
Draft a Theory of Action	Write a sentence or two describing the type of actions and partnerships the organization can or should take internally to act on its Theory of Change.
	Write a sentence or two about the types of programming the organization might offer directly or via partners to act on its Theory of Change.
	Write a sentence or two about ways the organization can foster positive structural and systemic change.

Annotations: List source material or data that supports the types of actions and partnerships recommended in each section of the Theory of Action.