Using a Logic Model to Build a Strong Evaluation Plan

Part 3: What Makes a Good Logic Model?

Center to Improve Program & Project Performance (CIPP)
Part 3 Transcript

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[0:00:01-0:01:17]
Welcome to the four-part training series on using a logic model to build a strong evaluation plan. This series is presented by the Center to Improve Program and Project Performance. The purpose of this training is to help participants understand the benefits of using a logic model to create an evaluation plan, develop a strong logic model that shows how inputs and activities are expected to lead to meaningful short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes; with the ultimate purpose in being to align an evaluation plan and analysis to critical components within the logic model.

This is part 3, explaining how to use a logic model to build a strong evaluation plan.

[0:01:17-0:02:51]
Hello, my name is Jennifer Schaff, from the Center to Improve Program and Project Performance and I'm here to present part 3 of our training series on using a logic model to build a strong evaluation plan. In this session, what makes a good logic model, we'll discuss the characteristics and uses of a logic model. Our training objectives for this session are four participants to

- Gain increased understanding of the uses of a logic model,
- The characteristics of a strong logic model, and
- How to select meaningful outcomes for a logic model.

So, let's talk about the purpose of a logic model. A logic model is designed to graphically illustrate project investments, planned activities, and expected outcomes. It illustrates the hypothesized causal flow from inputs and activities, to short, medium and long-term outcomes. It provides a road map for project planning and implementation. It also provides a blueprint for a strong evaluation plan, and a logic model describes the project and results as a linear simple process. This is in comparison to a theory of change or a theory of action that may depict complex relationships and confounding factors.

[0:02:51-0:04:08]
So, what are the key components of a logic model? The logic model includes key components of the project and the expected results of the project. The inputs are what the project invests, including things like staff, time and money. The activities or participation are what the project does, such as develop programs or direct services. The outputs are what the project produces, such as the number of activities or the number of clients reached. The outcomes are the impact that the project expects to have. These include short-term results, such as change is a knowledge or skills, medium-term results, such as changes in practice of policies, or policies and long-term results, like changes in social or environmental conditions. Other elements, such as external factors or the evaluation, may also be represented in the logic model graphic as you can see here at the bottom of this graphic [image: logic model sample]. The logic model components are critical because they will act as a map for the project and for the evaluation plan. Without a good map, you can't tell if you're going the right way.

[0:04:08-0:05:22]
What if you went on a trip but you didn't use a map? Nick is planning a nice vacation Reykjavik, Iceland. He has a plane ticket, a rental car, gas, and a GPS. It seems like he has everything he needs to get where going. He lands at the airport, picks up the rental car, and puts the address for his hotel in the GPS. Then he drives and drives and drives. After a 5.5-hour drive, he arrives at a charming blue house in a small fishing village on the north coast of Iceland. A kindly woman, who answers the door, lets him know the address on his reservation was spelled wrong and he should have arrived at his hotel after a 45-minute drive. Her house is on Lugarvegar street but the hotel back in Reykjavik is on Lugavegar street, with no "r" in the middle. The mistake has caused him to end up in the wrong place, and to waste much of his vacation. Although the lost tourist had many of the things he needed, like a car and a GPS, he needed other markers to make sure he ended up in the right place. He needed to know things like the direction he was headed, the roads to take, the landmarks he should expect to see along the way. He needed to consult his map and select meaningful landmarks on his journey to make sure he would end up in the right place.

[0:05:22-0:06:37]
Similarly, the logic model needs to include meaningful activities, outputs, and short, medium, and long-term outcomes. These important objectives of the project are landmarks on the way to the ultimate project goals. Quality, relevance, and usefulness are necessary for a project to succeed, but they're not sufficient. What if no one uses the high-quality materials or attend the training. Or what if they do so, but then they fail to learn from them, or fail to put their learning into practice. To select the right outcomes in logic model, think about what the project must do and what must happen in the short, medium, and long-term along the way to the project ultimate goals. Think about what must happen to each of the groups that the project works with, including students, providers, schools, families, and any other target populations of the project. A strong logic model must include meaningful objectives for all the target populations.

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What outcomes are meaningful? The logic model won't include every single expected result of the project activities, but it does need to include that address that address important expected results, especially early results that will build upon each other to cause later results. Outcomes should include the essential information that will be needed to inform continuous improvement and to demonstrate project impacts, such as changes and knowledge or skills, changes in attitudes or beliefs, use of practices or technologies, increases in in collaboration, and changes in policies or procedures. This example parent training and information center logic model shows the good example of the type of project outcomes that should be included in a strong logic model. This sample project provides training and individual technical assistance (TA) for parents. The outputs include the number of trainings and the number of parents served. The short-term outcomes include increases in parent knowledge in the areas of the nature of their child disabilities, their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and special education systems. The medium-term outcomes include changes in parents' actions, including increased ability to help their child succeed, navigate special education systems and use a effective modes of collaboration with educators.

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It's clear how these shorter-term outcomes map the way to the expected long-term outcome that parents and educators collaborate to provide improve services to children with disabilities. For example, parents' increased knowledge about the nature of their child's disability is an important landmark and one must be reached before a parent increases in their ability to help their child succeed.

In summary a logic model graphically displays the entire project as a simple linear process and a strong logic model contains critical elements of the project including inputs, activities, outputs, and most importantly, outcomes. A logic model maps the path the project will take to the desired goals.

This has been part 3, explaining how to use a logic model to build a strong evaluation plan.

This series is provided by the Center to Improve Program and Project Performance. For additional information, please visit our website at www.cippsite.org.

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