Guide to the Logic Model and Theory of Change Template

A logic model shows, on one page, how your resources and activities lead to results. A theory of change explains why each step should lead to the next. This guide walks through every part of the R03 template, using the standard results-chain terms that funders and evaluators recognize.

USE WITH	TIME NEEDED	RESULT
R03 Logic Model and Theory of Change Template	Two working sessions of about 90 minutes	A one-page logic model, a theory of change statement, and a risk table

What this guide covers

- What a logic model and a theory of change are, and how they differ
- Who should help build them
- A walkthrough of every row, column, and field in the template
- A worked example, common mistakes, and good-practice tips
- How the template links to the other four resources

Purpose and when to use it

Funders use different names, such as logic model, results framework, results chain, or logical framework, but they ask the same thing: what will you do, what will it produce, and what will change as a result? The R03 template uses the results-chain terms found in the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide and in the OECD Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management: inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact.

A logic model is the picture. A theory of change is the reasoning behind it, including the assumptions that must hold for each step to lead to the next. Most proposals need both: the model to show the plan at a glance, and the statement to show that you understand why it should work.

Use it when

- You are designing a new program or redesigning an existing one
- A funder asks for a logic model, theory of change, results framework, or logframe
- You need to agree with partners on what success looks like

Adapt it when

- The funder provides its own logframe. Use R03 to think the logic through, then transfer it, adding the indicators, means of verification, and assumptions columns the funder asks for.

Who should be involved

Role	What they bring
Program lead	The activities as they will really run, and the change staff see
Frontline staff or participants	A reality check on whether each step happens as the model claims
MEL lead	Whether each result can be measured, and what data exists
Partners	Their activities and outputs, and the assumptions they depend on
Proposal writer	The funder's terms and the level of detail it expects

Running the sessions

Session	What to cover	Bring
Session 1: the logic	Problem statement, impact, outcomes, outputs, activities, and inputs, working backward from the change you want	The R02 worksheet answers
Session 2: the reasoning	Assumptions between each level, external factors, risks, and the theory of change statement	The draft model from session 1

Walkthrough: every part of the template

Part of the template	What to write	Tips
Problem statement	The specific condition you want to change, for whom, and where, in one or two sentences.	Use the answer to R02 question 1. Describe a condition, not the absence of your program.
Inputs	The resources you will use: staff, volunteers, partners, money, materials, and facilities.	Every input should appear later in the budget.
Activities	What the program does with the inputs.	Use verbs: train, run, deliver, provide.
Outputs	The direct products of the activities, usually counted.	Outputs are within your control. "240 children attend clubs" is an output.
Short-term outcomes	The first changes for participants, such as knowledge, skills, or attitudes.	Write them as changes in people, not as activities completed.
Medium-term outcomes	Changes in behavior, practice, or conditions that build on the short-term outcomes.	Some funders call these intermediate outcomes. Use the funder's term if it has one.
Impact	The long-term change the program contributes to, alongside others.	Say "contributes to." Few programs cause impact on their own.
Assumptions to the next level	The conditions that must hold for each level to lead to the next.	Write one assumption under each column, so the reasoning is visible link by link.
Theory of change statement	One or two sentences following the "If we, then, which will lead to, because" pattern.	Read it aloud to someone outside the team. If they cannot follow it, simplify.
External factors	The wider context outside your control that can help or hinder results.	Examples include policy changes, the economy, and other programs in the same area.
Risks and responses	Each risk, the link it affects, its likelihood and impact (low, medium, or high), the response, and the owner.	Rate likelihood and impact separately. A rare but severe risk still needs a response.

Part of the template	What to write	Tips
Quality check	Six checks to run before you share the model.	Ask someone who did not build the model to run the check.

Testing the logic

Before you share the model, run five quick tests. Each takes a few minutes and catches most weak links.

Test	How to run it
Read it forward	Read each link aloud as "if this happens, then that follows." Stop wherever the "then" does not clearly follow.
Ask "so what?"	For each output, ask what changes for participants as a result. If there is no answer, the output may not belong.
Ask "how?"	For each outcome, ask what activity makes it happen. An outcome with no activity behind it is a hope, not a plan.
Measurability	For each result, name one way you could measure it. If you cannot, rewrite it before moving to R04.
Outsider test	Ask someone outside the team to explain the model back to you in their own words. Where they hesitate, simplify.

WORKED MINI EXAMPLE

Brightwater Reading Trust builds its logic model

All names, places, and figures in this example are invented for illustration.

Brightwater started with the change it wanted: more children aged 8 to 11 reading at grade level. Working backward, the team asked what children would need to do differently (read more often and with confidence), what would make that happen (regular, small-group reading with trained volunteers), and what that would take (volunteers, books, space in schools, and a coordinator).

Part	What the team wrote
Problem statement	Many children aged 8 to 11 in two partner schools read below grade level, and few have books or reading support at home.
Outputs	Twelve reading clubs a week; 240 children attending at least 70 percent of sessions each term.
Short-term outcome	Children read more fluently and say they enjoy reading.
Medium-term outcome	More children reach the grade-level reading benchmark.
Key assumption	Children attend regularly enough for practice to make a difference.
External factors	School calendar changes, other reading programs in the district, and family income pressures in harvest months.
Main risk	Attendance drops in harvest months: likelihood high, impact high. Response: agree the club calendar with parents.

Theory of change: If we run small reading clubs with trained volunteers for children who read below grade level, then they will read more fluently and with more confidence, which will lead to more children reaching the grade-level benchmark, because regular guided practice builds fluency. Over time, this contributes to better learning across subjects.

Common mistakes and how to avoid them

Mistake	Why it matters	How to avoid it
Listing activities as outcomes	Reviewers see no evidence of change.	Ask "so what changed for whom?" for every outcome.
Jumping from outputs to impact	The middle of the chain, where most risk sits, is missing.	Add short-term and medium-term outcomes and an assumption for each link.
Claiming impact the program cannot reach alone	The model looks unrealistic.	Use "contributes to," and name other factors.
Leaving assumptions blank	The weakest links stay hidden until delivery.	Write one assumption per column, then test it.
Building the model once and filing it	It drifts away from what the program really does.	Review it at least once a year and after major changes.
Using different terms from the funder	Reviewers have to translate your model.	Keep the logic, but use the funder's labels.

Good-practice tips

- **Plan backward, read forward.** Start from the change you want and work back to inputs, then read the model forward to check each "if, then" link. The Kellogg guide describes both directions.
- **Use standard terms.** The OECD glossary gives agreed definitions for outputs, outcomes, impact, and assumptions. Using them avoids confusion with international funders.
- **Keep it to one page.** Detail belongs in the narrative and the MEL table. The model should be readable at a glance.
- **Make it testable.** Every outcome should be something you could measure. If you cannot, rewrite it before moving to R04.
- **Show the model to participants.** Ask whether the steps match their experience. Engaging the people a program serves is a recurring theme in the CDC 2024 framework.

Frequently asked questions

Is a logic model the same as a logframe? Not quite. A logframe is a table that adds indicators, means of verification, and assumptions for each result level. Your logic model provides the results; R04 provides the measurement columns.

How many outcomes should we have? Few enough to measure well. Two or three short-term outcomes and one or two medium-term outcomes are often enough for a single program.

Where do risks go if the funder has no risk table? Summarize the main risks and responses in the narrative, usually under implementation or management.

How it links to the other resources

Resource	How it connects
R01 Bid or No Bid Funding Opportunity Checklist	A clear logic supports a strong mission fit score.
R02 Pre-Proposal Planning Worksheet	Questions 1, 4, 5, and 7 feed the problem statement, logic, assumptions, and outcomes.
R04 Proposal-Stage MEL Starter	Each output and outcome becomes a row in the indicator table.
R05 Proposal Budget Alignment Checklist	Every input and activity must have a budget line, and every budget line must trace to the model.

Want a second pair of eyes before you submit?

Edit Right Advisors is a grant writing and advisory firm. We help nonprofits and NGOs win funding and grow their impact. We can screen an opportunity with you, shape the program logic, build your MEL (monitoring, evaluation, and learning) plan, or review a full draft so that every part holds together.

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The full series: five templates, each with a companion guide

RO1	Bid or No Bid Funding Opportunity Checklist (guide: G01)
RO2	Pre-Proposal Planning Worksheet (guide: G02)
RO3	Logic Model and Theory of Change Template (guide: G03)
RO4	Proposal-Stage MEL Starter Template (guide: G04)
RO5	Proposal Budget Alignment Checklist (guide: G05)

Sources and credits

W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Logic Model Development Guide (updated 2004): https://wkkf.issuelab.org/resource/logic-model-development-guide.html.

OECD (2023), Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management for Sustainable Development, second edition: https://doi.org/10.1787/632da462-en-fr-es.

Kidder DP, Fierro LA, Luna E, et al. CDC Program Evaluation Framework, 2024. MMWR Recommendations and Reports 2024;73(6): https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/rr/rr7306a1.htm. All accessed October 27, 2026.

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