

Testing the Strength of Your Theory of Change (Strategy)

This worksheet is designed to help you test whether your strategy is built on a credible and evidence-informed theory of change (TOC). Using a series of reflection questions, it supports you examine the logic behind your proposed strategic pathway. It can help surface the assumptions that need to be true, and identifies where evidence, stakeholder input, or changing conditions may require you to challenge your approach.

Testing the Logic (Strong Foundation)

Sometimes we take actions because they are what we've always done or because they feel like the right thing to do (socially, economically, etc.). They keep us busy, but are they the most effective actions we could take? Are they the best use of our time?

- Are the links we've made between the different steps (outcomes) likely to have the impact we anticipate? For example, does a short-term outcome clearly create the conditions for a medium-term outcome? Are there any missing steps in between?
- Are we targeting the right point of power (e.g. the person or group that can make the change we seek)? What data have we used to assess if we are focusing on the right power centre?
- Is the timeline realistic? Have we allocated enough time for human behavior or systemic habits to change, or are we expecting massive shifts too quickly?
- Are the outcomes within our sphere of influence? Can our activities/tactics reasonably make the changes we seek, or are the changes driven by outside economic or political forces (we may need to build more power if they are)?
- Is the scale proportionate? Is the amount of our intervention (e.g., educating constituents; getting people to write to a government, etc.) strong enough to generate the impact we expect or say we are going to achieve?

Testing the Assumptions (Exposing Gaps)

A lot of times, our TOC is based on long held beliefs that may no longer be accurate, so it's important to truth check our assumptions when anything has changed (e.g., an election, change in global conditions, new corporate players, etc.).

- What research or knowledge are we basing our campaign choices on? How are stakeholders involved in helping us stay on track?
- What must hold true that we cannot control? If a vital partner, policy, or condition shifts tomorrow, does our entire model collapse? What would we need to change to stay in the game?

- Are we misjudging our target audience? Do enough of the communities we work with or plan to mobilize want, value, and have the physical time to engage with the activities in our plan?
- What are the unintended negative consequences? Could our activities accidentally cause harm or exclude vulnerable sub-groups?

Testing the Evidence (Regular Assessment)

To help us know when we need to change course, we need to constantly measure the impact of our actions to see if it is making the change we anticipate.

- What research or evidence are we basing our assessment of impact on? Is it current? We need to track whether one result is actually leading to the next, not just whether activities were completed.
- Where does the data break down? At which stage of the strategic pathway are we unclear?
- What do our indicators of success measure? Are we mistakenly measuring effort instead of change (outcomes)? For example, are we confusing access to a decision-maker with impact?
- Are our assumptions backed by real-world feedback? What has changed to-date as a result of our intervention or due to our tactics/actions so far? Are there strategies that perform well across multiple scenarios (robust) or do they collapse if a single condition shifts (fragile)?
- Consider reverse-stress testing options: assume failure and then work backwards to see what you could do to prevent it, prepare for it, or at least know the early warning signs.

The point of these questions is not to discourage you but to help you decide if you need to pivot or make changes so that you are the most effective you can be. A strong TOC and campaign strategy requires constant evaluation and adjustment. Strong strategy is seldom static.

For tips on building a strong campaign, see [TREC's Campaign Planning Tool](#).

Table: Logic Check

Use this table to quickly test whether your Theory of Change (TOC) still makes sense. Work through each row with your team. If you answer “not sure” or “no,” capture what you need to learn, change, or try next.

Check	Ask	What to note
1. Logic	Do the steps in our pathway clearly lead from one outcome to the next?	Missing steps, weak links, or places where the pathway depends on a big leap.
2. Power	Are we focused on the person, group, or institution that can actually create the change we seek?	Evidence about the right target, decision-maker, pressure point, or power centre.
3. Timing	Is our timeline realistic for the behaviour, policy, or systems change we expect?	Where the plan may be too fast, too slow, or missing key moments.
4. Influence	Are the outcomes within our sphere of influence, or are outside forces driving the change?	Where we may need more power, stronger partners, or a different role.
5. Scale	Is the level of action strong enough to create the impact we expect?	Whether our tactics match the size of the change we are trying to make.
6. Assumptions	What must be true for this strategy to work, especially things we do not control?	Critical assumptions, fragile conditions, and what would need to change if they shift.
7. People	Do the communities or stakeholders we hope to engage want, value, and have time for the activities in our plan?	Feedback from stakeholders, participation barriers, or signs we are misreading the audience.
8. Harm	Could our activities accidentally cause harm, exclusion, backlash, or other negative consequences?	Who could be affected, what safeguards are needed, and what risks require attention.
9. Evidence	What evidence shows that one result is leading to the next, not just that activities were completed?	Current research, feedback, indicators, and where the data is weak or missing.
10. Pivot	If this strategy failed, what would likely explain the failure, and what early warning signs should we watch?	Prevention steps, course corrections, and signals that it is time to adapt.

Decision: Based on this check, what should we do next: continue, adjust, gather more evidence, build more power, or pivot?