

## CORE GUIDE / 02

# Results Chains & Theory of Change

Map how activities are expected to contribute to outcomes, and make assumptions visible.

**START WITH A DECISION, NOT A FORM.**

Ask what decision the evidence should inform before deciding what to measure.

## The essential idea

A results chain describes a logical pathway from resources and activities to outputs, outcomes and longer-term impact. A Theory of Change goes further by making the **assumptions, context and causal logic** explicit.

**WHY IT MATTERS**

A results chain should show what the programme does, what changes first, and what change it hopes to contribute to over time.

## Use a results chain to clarify the pathway

A results chain should show what the programme does, what changes first, and what change it hopes to contribute to over time.

- Inputs are the resources used.
- Activities are what the programme delivers.
- Outputs are immediate products or reach.
- Outcomes are changes in knowledge, practice, behaviour or conditions.
- Impact is a longer-term change the programme contributes to.

## Make assumptions testable

Assumptions are not footnotes. They are the conditions that must broadly hold for the pathway to work.

- State the assumption plainly.
- Identify what evidence could signal that it is weak.
- Review it when results differ across groups or sites.

## Worked field example

A remedial-learning programme gives facilitators training, assessment tools and structured group sessions.

Programme question	Evidence to use	Decision it can support
What pathway is expected to lead from facilitator support to student learning gains?	Training completion, fidelity observations, student attendance, assessment results and facilitator feedback.	Strengthen training, materials or group design where the pathway breaks.

## Try it in your work

- Draft one outcome sentence beginning with “Participants will...”.
- Work backwards: what must happen immediately before that outcome?
- Write at least three assumptions that could weaken the pathway.

<p><b>Common mistakes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listing activities as if they are outcomes.</li> <li>• Using broad outcomes with no visible change mechanism.</li> <li>• Ignoring context, power and implementation conditions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>A stronger habit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use verbs that describe change.</li> <li>• Mark assumptions in a different colour during team workshops.</li> <li>• Review the chain after the first implementation cycle.</li> </ul>
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<b>REFLECT</b>	What could your team stop collecting because it does not currently support a decision, accountability requirement or learning conversation?
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