

Introduction to Theories of Change

Sarah Chappell, Senior Research Officer

TASO Annual Conference 2023

Overview of session

1

What is a Theory of Change and why do you need one

2

TASO's core Theory of Change template

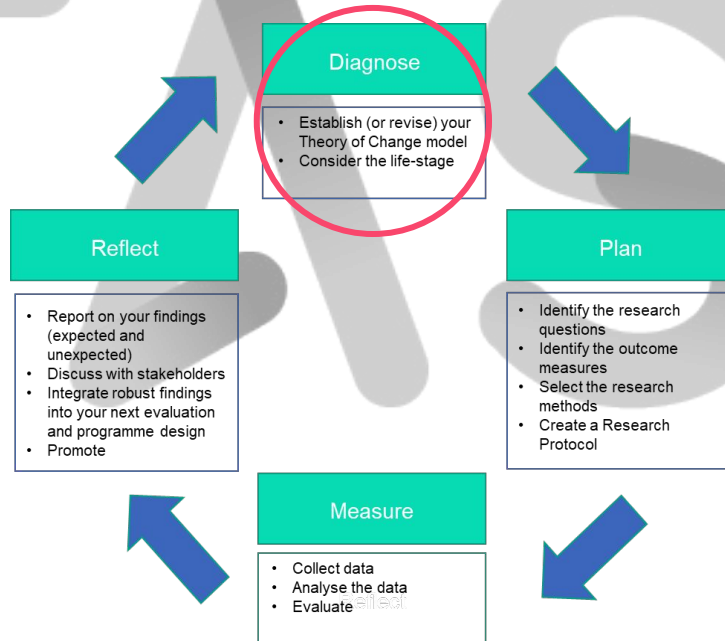
3

Developing your own Theory of Change

4

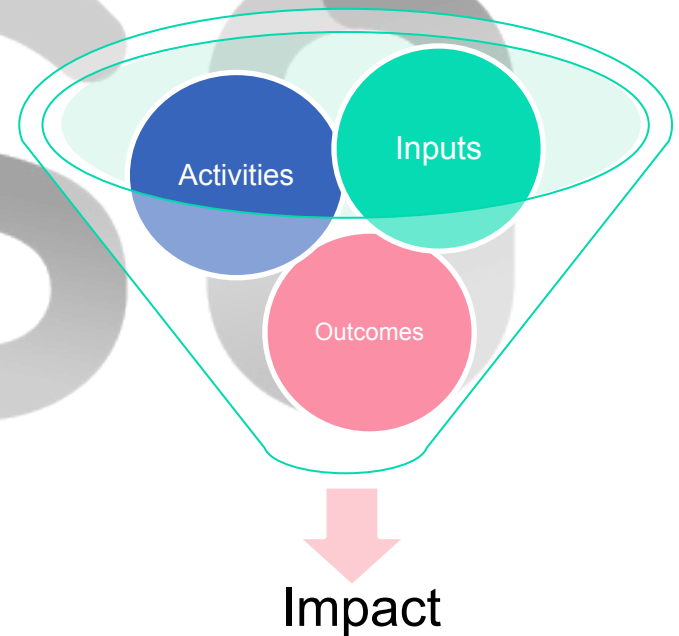
Q&A

The evaluation cycle



What is a Theory of Change?

- A visual representation of an intervention's **inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes** and **underlying causal mechanisms**
- Describes how your intervention will achieve the desired outcomes / impact



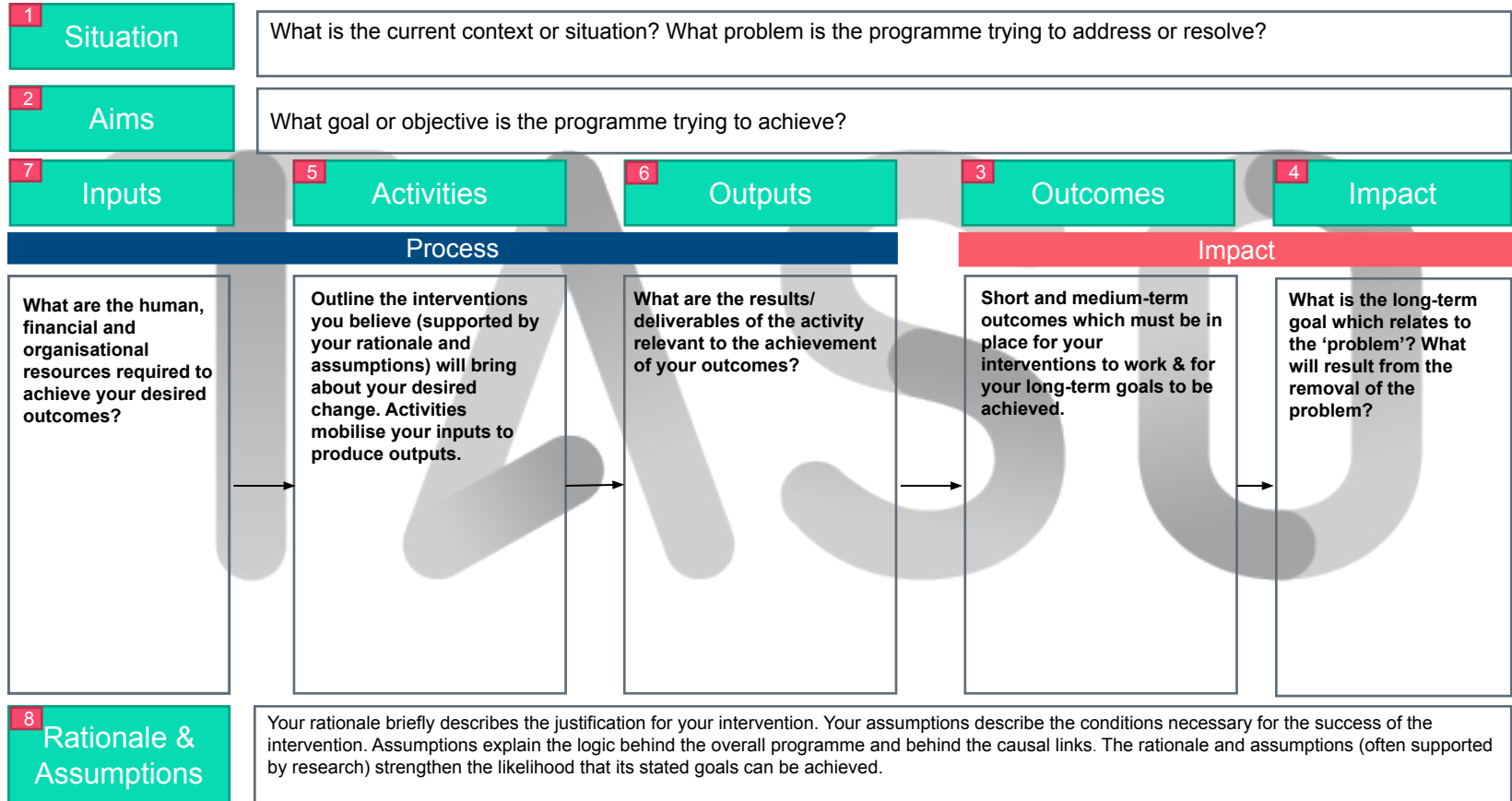
Why do you need a Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change helps you answer the following questions:

- **Is this the right intervention?**
- **Is your intervention achievable?**
- **Is your intervention testable?**

Developing a Theory of Change

Developing a Theory of Change



Situation and aim

- What is the context or situation?
- What issue is your intervention trying to address?
- What objective is your intervention trying to achieve?

Impact / long-term goal

- What is the desired effect of your intervention?
- What are the success criteria of your intervention?
- What is the overall change your intervention is trying to achieve?

Outcomes

- What do you want to happen as a result of your activities?
- What are the short and intermediate-term outcomes which must be in place for your long-term impact to be achieved?
- Think about both attitudinal and behavioural
- Use words like ‘increased’ or ‘improved’

Theory of Change

Outputs vs Outcomes



Output

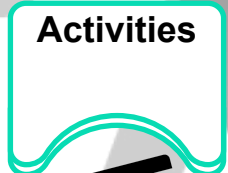


Outcome

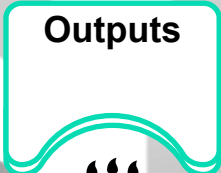


Theory of Change

Activities & Outputs



Actions or activities designed to achieve particular outputs and outcomes



Completely in your control as these are direct deliverables that will follow your activities.

What WILL happen rather than what COULD happen

Outputs

- What are the direct results or deliverables of your activities relevant to achieving your outcomes?
- What will happen (as opposed to what you want to happen)
- Use terms such as ‘students will be exposed to...’ or ‘students will have the opportunity to...’

Activities

- What are the specific activities / elements which make-up your intervention or programme?
- What activities need to be present to result in your outputs and (hopefully) lead to your desired outcomes?

Inputs

- What resources do you need to deliver your intervention and achieve your outcomes – human, financial, organisational?
- Think about tangible and intangible

Assumptions

- What are the conditions necessary for change to occur?
- What are the barriers and enablers?



Example Theory of Change

Theory of Change

1. Situation

Students from disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds are less likely to apply to and enrol in HE than their peers.

2. Aim

To increase access to and participation in HE for disadvantaged and underrepresented student groups.



Theory of Change

3. Outcomes

- Students see HE as a more desirable option
- Students have increased knowledge of subject options available to them in HE.
- Students develop a sense of belonging in a HE setting

4. Impacts

- Students are more likely to apply to HE
- Students are more likely to enrol in HE



Theory of Change

5. Activities

- Residential stay.
- IAG sessions.
- Subject taster sessions.
- Q+A with current university students.

6. Outputs

- Students experience an HE setting.
- Students have the opportunity to learn about applying to HE.
- Students are exposed to different subjects available at HE.



Theory of Change

7. Inputs

- Staff time in organising and running the event.
- Student ambassadors.
- Venue (availability of rooms and accommodation).
- Online platform (for virtual summer schools)
- Promotion materials.
- Data collection systems.
- Reputation.



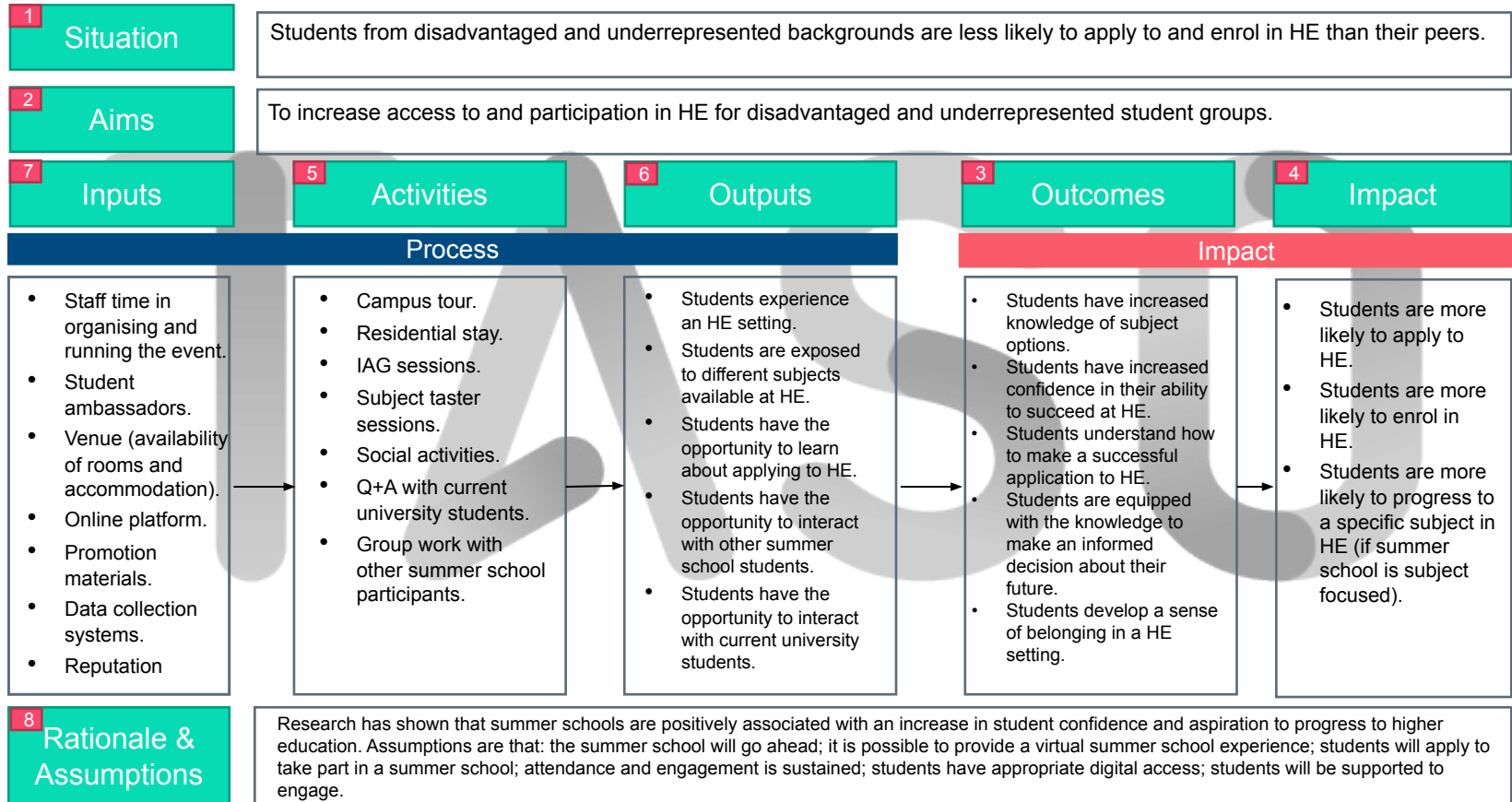
Theory of Change

8. Rationale/assumptions

- Research has shown that summer schools are positively associated with an increase in student confidence and aspiration to progress to higher education.
- Assumptions are that:
 - the summer school will go ahead;
 - students will apply to take part in a summer school;
 - attendance and engagement is sustained;



Summer schools Theory of Change



Measuring if your Theory of Change is working

Setting Indicators of Success

Setting indicators of success will enable you to **measure** programme impact and implementation.

Indicators will help to ensure that you're asking the right questions

- **Outcome indicators**
- **Output indicators**



Indicators of Success - Outputs

Activity	Output	Indicators – Short, Medium and Long-term	Data source/means if verification	When to collect	Who will collect
Subject taster sessions	Students are exposed to different subjects available at HE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of sessions held • Students attend • Positive student feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project records • In-session feedback • Post-session survey • Student focus groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each session • Each session • After session held • At end of summer school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer school staff • Project RA

Indicators of Success - Outcomes

Outcome	Indicators – Short, Medium and Long-term	Data source/means if verification	When to collect	Who will collect
Increased knowledge of subject options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from students • Students progress to study the subject they experienced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student focus groups • Surveys • Tracking data, e.g. HEAT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-, During/post-event • At HE enrolment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme staff • Tracking services
Students see HE as a more desirable option	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students express interest in applying to HE • Students apply to HE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey • Interviews • Tracking data, e.g. HEAT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre and Post-summer school • At HE enrolment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme staff • Tracking services

Questions?





FAQs

What's the difference between a ToC & a logic model?

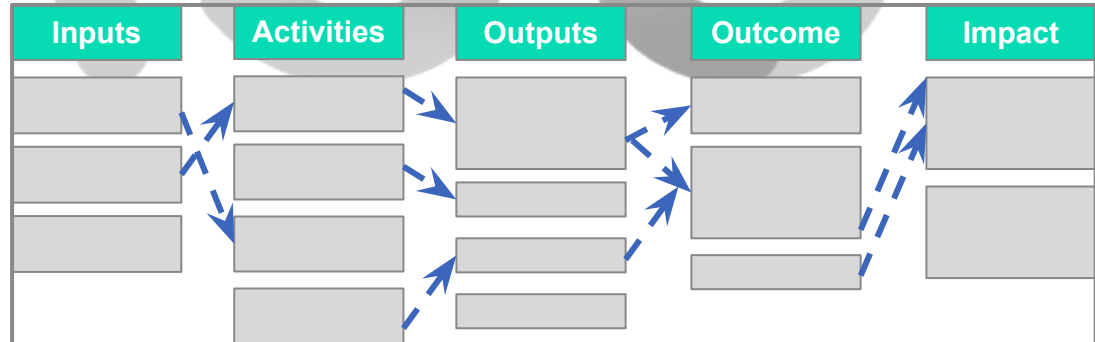
Logic model

- Table mapping key elements
- Identifies *what* we expect to happen
- Programme focused

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact

Theory of change

- Also maps key elements
- Identifies *why* we expect change
- Identifies change mechanisms & links between elements of the programme
- Considers external context as well as the programme



How long should it take to develop a ToC and who should be involved?

Key stakeholders

Practitioners/delivery teams
Evaluators
Senior stakeholders
Consult with service users/
students

Preparation

Workshop

Revisit

My outcome is a long time in the future, what should I do?

