



Equitable Research Partnerships Toolkit

Tool 16: Co-developing a Theory of Equity-related Changes

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A theory of change is a visual representation showing the pathways via which program activities are expected to have an impact. Co-developing a theory of equity-related change involves partners working together, to identify the overarching equity-related goal or impact they wish to achieve. Having identified this goal or impact, they would then work backwards, assessing evidence to determine the actions they need to take in order to achieve these, and the incremental outcomes that will show progress.

Why use the Co-developing a Theory of Equity-related Changes tool?

Co-developing a theory like this in a partnership draws attention to, and starts a discussion about, partnership equity. It explicitly highlights that equity-related changes will not occur spontaneously but must be strategically worked towards. This tool addresses equity by:

1. Ensuring that actions planned, to enhance equity within the partnership, are supported by scientific or experiential evidence.
2. Creating a monitoring and evaluation tool that can foster learning about the actions that work to increase equity in a partnership.

When to use the Co-developing a Theory of Equity-related Changes tool?

Phase	Rating	Descriptions
Planning	•••	A theory of equity-related changes should ideally be developed in the planning stage of the partnership.
Implementing	•	Once a theory of equity-related change had been developed, it can be used to monitor and evaluate equity-related changes during the implementing stage.
Disseminating	•	The theory of change could also be used for monitoring and evaluation in the disseminating stage.
Sustaining	•••	A theory of change could also be developed to make sense of what has happened, in the sustaining phase of a research partnership.

Ratings

••• Designed for this stage | •• Can be used as is in this stage | • Can be adapted for use in this stage



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How long does it take to use the Co-developing a Theory of Equity-related Changes tool?

Rapid approach

- When you need a theory of change rapidly, nominate one person to assess evidence, consult with and/or receive ideas from different partners, and develop the theory of change model. This approach might take the nominated person several hours, or a full day, depending on how many people are consulted and how extensive the theory of change is.

Intensive approach

- Ideally, co-development of a theory of change will occur through a deliberative process. All partners would meet and discuss the important changes they would like to keep track of and highlight how they expect these changes to come about. This might require a half-day workshop.

What other resources do you need to use the Co-developing a Theory of Equity-related Changes tool?

- [Theory of change template](#)
- Face-to-face or virtual meeting space.
- Facilitator and/or notetaker.
- Stationery such as poster papers, marker pens and blue tack/tape or an online whiteboard facility (virtual implementation).

Tips for using the Co-developing a Theory of Equity-related Changes tool

- Use the theory of change, that you create through this activity, for monitoring and evaluation purposes.
- Be aware that research evidence about how to increase equity in research partnerships is currently limited.
- For background reading, you may find it useful to review some sources of scientific evidence, and/or expert opinion, regarding how equity-related change occurs in a partnership.



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- [Four Approaches to Supporting Equitable Research Partnerships](#)
 - [Mapping experiences and perspectives of equity in international health collaborations: a scoping review](#)
 - [Fostering Research Integrity through the promotion of fairness, equity and diversity in research collaborations and contexts: Towards a Cape Town Statement](#)
- You may also wish to look at some theory of change examples that deal with equity in research partnerships or related ethics. For example:
 - National Institutes of Health and Care, Theory of Change for Global Health Research. Available at: <https://www.nih.ac.uk/documents/global-health-research-portfolio-theory-of-change/26036>

How to use the Co-developing a Theory of Equity-related Changes tool?

- Determine the equity-related goal that the theory of change will be developed for.
 - The goal may be equity in the research partnership overall (as in the featured completed example) or equity in a specific aspect of the research partnership.
 - The goal may be determined in advance or decided through discussion in the meeting or workshop.
- Ask participants to suggest activities that could be implemented through the partnership and would contribute to achieving the goal.
- For each suggested activity, ask participants to theorise the pathway through which the activity will effect change, by identifying:
 - Expected outputs (tangible items that will contribute to achieving outcomes)
 - Expected outcomes (impacts or changes), in the short and long-term.
- For each suggested change pathway, ask the participants to identify supporting evidence, including theory, research results and anecdotal evidence (e.g. evidence from their own practical experience).
- Based on the available evidence, ask the participants to decide (e.g. through consensus or a vote), if each suggested pathway should be included in the theory of change.
- Once numerous activities and change pathways have been theorised, group the activities that contribute to related outputs and/or outcomes.



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- Enter the information into the theory of change template, modifying the template layout as required.

Suggested questions to explore when using the Co-developing a Theory of Equity-related Changes tool

Theory and evidence

- What evidence suggests that the planned actions will lead to enhanced equity?
- Is there any evidence to suggest unintended outcomes might occur as a result of the planned actions?

Assumptions

- Does this assumption fully explain how change might occur and what might influence it?
- Is the assumption plausible?
- Should the assumption be challenged or tested?

Risks

- What are the possible risks of taking this action? Social, environmental?

Expected outputs and outcomes from using the Co-developing a Theory of Equity-related Changes tool

Outputs

- Using this tool will produce a theory of change that can be used as a point of reference for monitoring and evaluation.

Outcomes

- Participating in the co-development process will foster understanding of how equity related change occurs, and the efforts needed to work towards or achieve equity in a partnership.



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Completed example of the Co-developing a Theory of Equity-related Changes tool

The [completed example](#) shows three pathways of change that are theorised to increase equity in the research partnership. Each pathway involves several output creating activities that foster short and long-term outcomes. The theory of change assumes a willingness to work towards increased equity and also acknowledges that intellectual and financial resources (inputs) will be required to enable change.

References and further reading for the Co-developing a Theory of Equity-related Changes tool

This tool is informed by:

- Better Evaluation. (Undated). Describe the Theory of Change. Retrieved from <https://www.betterevaluation.org/frameworks-guides/managers-guide-evaluation/scope/describe-theory-change>
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- Horn, L., Alba, S., Blom, F., Faure, M., Flack-Davison, E., Gopalakrishna, G., . . . Masekela, R. (2022). Fostering Research Integrity through the promotion of fairness, equity and diversity in research collaborations and contexts: Towards a Cape Town Statement (pre-conference discussion paper).
- United Nations Development Group. (2017). *Theory of Change*. Retrieved from <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/UNDG-UNDAF-Companion-Pieces-7-Theory-of-Change.pdf>