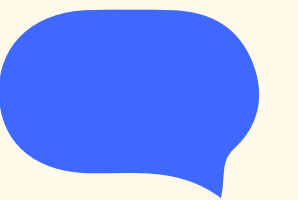


Theory of change

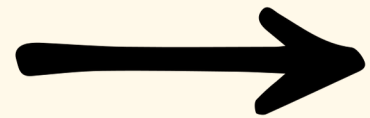


What is the Theory of Change?

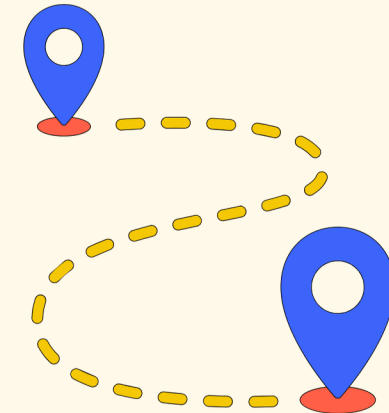
“It is a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context.

*It is focused in particular on mapping out or “filling in” what has been described as the “**missing middle**” between what a program or change initiative does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to desired goals being achieved.”*

Center of Theory of Change

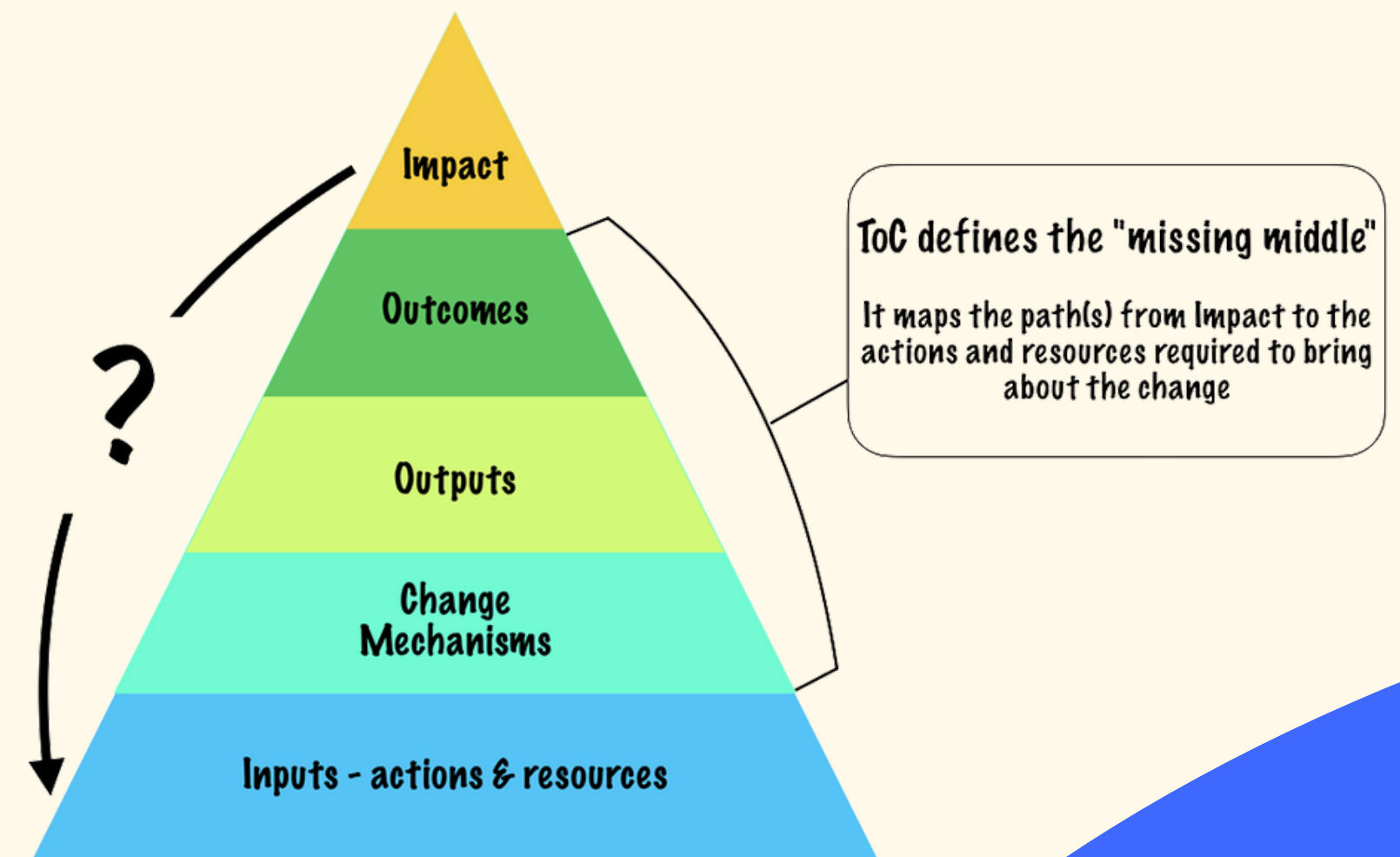


A roadmap that explains how and why you expect your activities to lead to change.



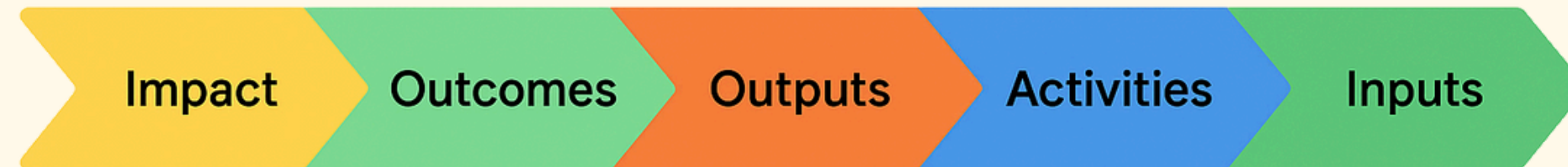
*You are planning a journey. The destination is your **impact**. The stops are **outcomes**. The steps you take are **activities**.*

- It is not just a plan; it shows how and why your activities will lead to change.
- It connects your **vision**, **actions**, and **assumptions**.



Backward timeline

Mapping for Impact



👉 This starts from the **desired impact** and works backwards to identify what needs to happen to achieve it. Ideal for designing a campaign or evaluation.

📝 Working backward will help your organisation to focus on what actually drives the desired change, rather than listing activities without clear direction.

★ Key Tip:

- **Backward = Logic check** → “If this is the change we want, what must happen first?”

Backward timeline

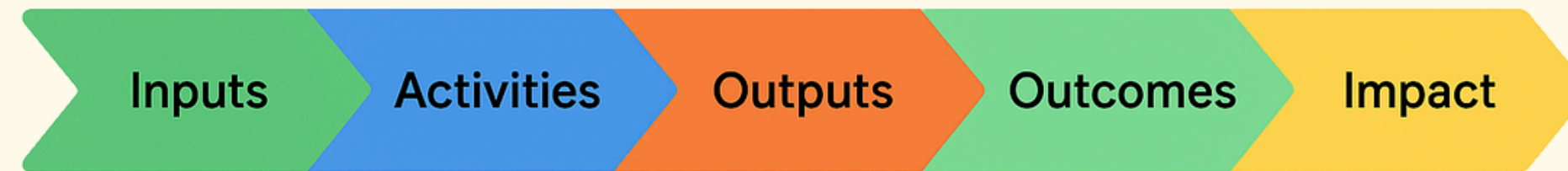
Mapping for Impact



Step	Element	Guiding Question	Example (for Youth NGOs & Civic Space)
1	Impact	What is the long-term change we want to see?	<i>More open, participatory, and resilient democratic societies where youth voices are making decisions.</i>
2	Outcomes	What behaviours or changes are needed to reach that impact?	<i>Youth-led organisations collaborate across sectors; local authorities engage youth in policy dialogue; increased trust between young citizens and institutions.</i>
3	Outputs	What must exist to make those outcomes possible?	<i>Trained youth facilitators, civic dialogue toolkits, policy briefs shared with decision-makers, events showcasing youth initiatives.</i>
4	Activities	What do we need to do to produce those outputs?	<i>Run civic dialogue workshops, co-create advocacy campaigns, train youth delegates in facilitation and storytelling, build alliances with media and institutions.</i>
5	Inputs	What resources will we need to do it?	<i>Funding for events, skilled trainers, safe meeting spaces, partnerships with institutions, communication materials.</i>

Forward timeline

Planning for Change



👉 This shows how activities lead to impact. Ideal for strategic planning.

📝 *Assumptions* are listed under each step; they explain the conditions that must be met for the next step to take place.

★ Key Tip:

- **Forward = Strategy** → “What will we do to get there?”

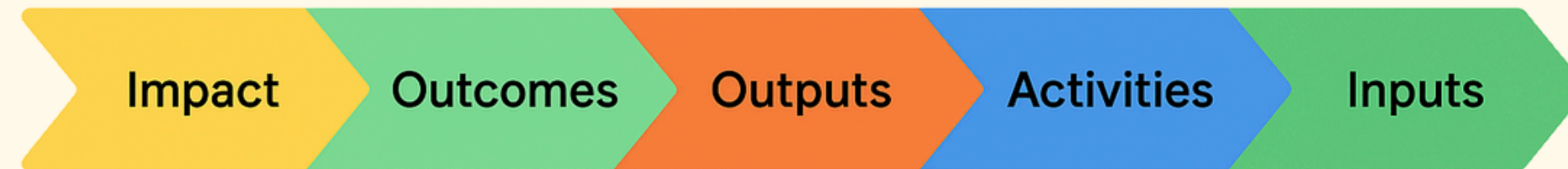
Forward timeline *Planning for Change*



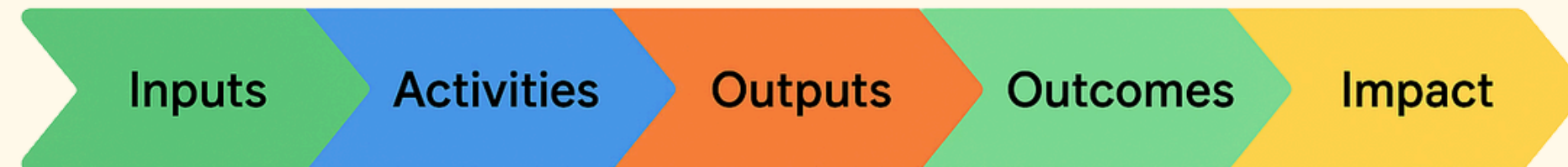
Step	Element	Guiding Question	Example (for Youth NGOs & Civic Space)
1	Inputs	What resources and capacities do we have to create change?	<i>Youth leaders, volunteers, funding, networks, safe meeting spaces</i>
	Activities	What actions will we take to address the problem and promote change?	<i>Host hackathons, training sessions, community dialogues, advocacy campaigns</i>
	Outputs	What will we actually create or deliver through these activities?	<i>Number of workshops held & participants, toolkits created, partnerships formed</i>
	Outcomes	What short- or medium-term changes in behaviour, capacity, or relationships do we expect?	<i>Youth applying democratic practices, new alliances built, more inclusive youth spaces</i>
	Impact	What long-term, sustainable change are we contributing to?	<i>Strengthened democratic values and civic participation, more resilient civil society</i>

A simplified version

Backward Timeline



Forward Timeline



Example of theory of change: Building safer participation for young activists

Impact:

- Young people can participate safely and meaningfully in civic life.

Outcomes:

- Young activists feel confident and protected.
- Youth organisations respond effectively to harassment and pressure.
- Local stakeholders support youth participation.

Outputs:

- Safety protocols developed.
- Staff and volunteers trained.
- Support network established.
- Awareness campaign delivered.

Activities:

- Risk assessment workshops.
- Digital security training.
- Partnership meetings.
- Peer-support sessions.

Inputs:

- Staff time.
- Funding.
- Trainers.
- Partner organisations.

Where assumptions, risks and resilience fit

ASSUMPTIONS

Questions such as:

- Will young people participate
- Will partners cooperate?
- Do decision makers remain receptive?

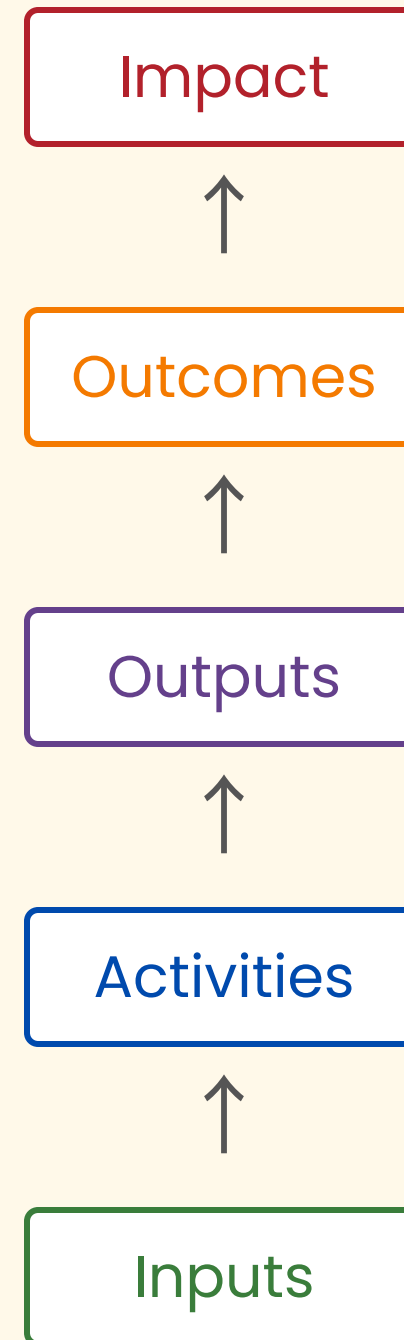
These are things we believe need to be true.

RISKS

Questions such as:

- Funding cuts
- Political restrictions
- Staff turnover
- Online attacks

These are things that could disrupt the pathway.



RESILIENCE RESPONSES

Questions such as:

- Diversify funding
- Build partnerships
- Develop contingency plans
- Strengthen staff wellbeing

These are actions that help us adapt if assumptions fail or risks materialise.

Common mistakes

	✗	✓
Confusing activities with outcomes	We organised 10 workshops.	Young people increased their civic participation skills.
Jumping directly from activities to impact	Training → Inclusive democracy	Training → Increased knowledge → Increased participation → More inclusive democracy
Making assumptions invisible	"If we do this, change will happen."	"This assumes young people want to participate and institutions are willing to listen."
Ignoring external factors	Planning as if context never changes.	Considering political, financial and social risks.
Making the impact too broad	End all discrimination.	Increase participation of marginalised youth in local decision-making.
Treating ToC as permanent	Create once and never revisit.	Review and adapt regularly.

A Theory of Change is a living document. The goal is not perfection, but making your logic, assumptions and choices visible.

Exercise: Build your Theory of Change

Choose:

- An organisational priority
- A programme
- A campaign
- A strategic objective

Then work through these steps:

1. Define the impact you want to achieve.
2. Identify the outcomes required.
3. Define the outputs needed.
4. List the activities you will implement.
5. Identify key assumptions.
6. Identify major risks.
7. Discuss possible resilience measures.

Final check

Ask:

- Does each step logically lead to the next?
- What could prevent success?
- How would we adapt if circumstances change?