

# Sample Theory of Change

(from a nonprofit services organization)

**VISION:** A vibrant social sector that supports our community in having equitable access and opportunity for its residents.

## EQUITY

Our work reflects our commitment to opportunities, access, and advancement for all to thrive and flourish.

## RELEVANCE

Our approach to issues considers context, feasibility, and community-identified need and culture.

## INQUIRY

As individuals and as an effective organization, we engage in reflection and learning that supports skillful action that leads to results and advances our practice.

## INTERDEPENDENCE

We nurture and create partnerships and networks recognizing the importance of shared responsibility and action.

## SERVICE

We recognize and appreciate the power and passion of individuals that work to benefit their community.

## GUIDING VALUES

### ASSUMPTIONS

Organizations that invest in their leadership, management, and network capacity are more likely to sustain impact over time.

Leaders exist at all levels of an organization and can influence decisions regardless of title or tenure.

### PROBLEM ADDRESSED

To realize social change in our community greater connection, collaboration, and collective action is required.

### CONTEXT

Demographic, economic, political shifts and trends locally, regionally, and nationally

Blurring of roles and responsibilities in private, public, social, and philanthropic sectors

Important, yet challenging role of intermediaries in the philanthropic system

Role of, and support for volunteerism as a core component of civil society

### EVIDENCE

What Makes for an Effective Leadership Development Program? Kramer K and Tao K, The Bridgespan Group (2011)

Nonprofit Leadership Development: A model for identifying and growing leaders within the nonprofit sector. L Bonner and J Obergas

Investing in Leadership Volume II: Inspiration and Ideas from Philanthropy's Latest Frontier. Grantmakers for Effective Organizations. Enright, KP. (2006)

### PRIMARY STRATEGIES

**Research, identify, and disseminate** best practices and emerging trends

**Identify, cultivate, and support current and future leaders** from a diverse range of communities and backgrounds

**Design and deliver evidence-based programming**

**Foster** opportunities for **engagement** and **collaboration**

**Celebrate** and elevate the contributions of **individuals** and **organizations** that drive change in their communities

## ANTICIPATED CHANGES/OUTCOMES

Individuals have the knowledge and skills to lead and manage organizations and networks

A healthy, diverse pipeline of people prepared to take on increased leadership responsibility

Nonprofits are better able to deliver on their missions

Individuals discover their power to make a difference

Nonprofit organizations, leaders, and volunteers work together to create an equitable community

## SAMPLE DECISION SCREEN

*(for a nonprofit services organization)*

### Overview and Instructions

The Decision Screen (DS) is a tool designed to support consistent and structured organizational reflection and decision-making for this organization (ORG) at all levels. The DS creates a systematic and shared process of inquiry to support alignment with the Theory of Change. The goal of the Decision Screen is not to get the best answer, but to:

- Objectively and honestly look at partnerships, opportunities, and pending decisions
- Assess if, how, and to what degree it supports the emerging Theory of Change
- Decide how to move forward

The DS can be used in a variety of ways and it is up to ORG to determine how it will use it. But here are ways in which others have used it:

1. Opportunities and/or updates to the Board are framed by elements of the DS
2. As part of an exercise in a staff meeting, all are asked to assess the same program/opportunity and then discuss answers to better understand each other's perspective and build greater unity
3. Multiple members of a team/program/department assess an opportunity/program individually and then come together to discuss and reach agreement
4. Board members use the DS as a checklist to determine the degree to which a new idea they might have aligns with the Theory of Change

<b>Describe the pending opportunity or decision in a sentence or two</b>		
How would you characterize this decision?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Program/Project <input type="checkbox"/> Partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/> Opportunity/Funding <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Organizational Shift <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
Who makes the final decision? (Pick the primary audience)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Board <input type="checkbox"/> Executive Director	<input type="checkbox"/> Directors <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

## Alignment with Theory of Change

*Reflect on the degree to which this decision aligns with or impacts ORG's outcomes.*

<b>OUTCOMES</b>	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
Individuals have the knowledge and skills to lead and manage organizations and networks			
A healthy, diverse pipeline of people prepared to take on increased leadership responsibility			
Nonprofits are better able to deliver on missions			
Individuals discover their power to make a difference			
Nonprofit organizations, leaders, and volunteers work together to create an equitable community			

Share your thinking on how ORGs outcomes are reflected in this decision:

*Reflect on the degree to which this decision aligns with or impacts ORG's strategies.*

<b>STRATEGIES</b>	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
Research/Identify and Disseminate			
Identify/Cultivate/ Support Future and Current Leaders			
Design/Deliver Evidenced-Based Programming			
Foster Engagement and Collaboration			
Celebrate Individuals and Organizations			

Share your thinking about how ORG's strategies are reflected in this decision:

## Alignment with Theory of Change

Reflect on the degree to which this program aligns with ORG's values and guiding principles

Values	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG
<b>Equity</b> - our work reflects our commitment to opportunities, access, and advancement for all to thrive and flourish.			
<b>Relevance</b> - our approach to issues considers context, feasibility, and community- identified need and culture.			
<b>Inquiry</b> - as individuals and as an effective organization, we engage in reflection and learning that supports skillful action that leads to results and advances our practice.			
<b>Interdependence</b> - we nurture and create partnerships and networks recognizing the importance of shared responsibility and action.			
<b>Service</b> - we recognize and appreciate the power and passion of individuals that work to benefit their community.			

Share your thinking about how ORG's values are reflected in this decision:

## Financial Sustainability Analysis

*Reflect on the degree to which this decision supports organizational sustainability*

- What is the expected overall effect on ORG's organizational health/sustainability?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How will this program/opportunity support itself financially? In the short term? In the long term?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- If this program/opportunity doesn't support itself fully:
  - What will subsidize it?
  - What value does this opportunity/program hold that makes it worth subsidizing?

## Additional Criteria Analysis

*For each of ORG's core criteria, listed below, rate each one as to how well it is fulfilled by this situation/opportunity/partnership, etc. You can indicate N/A if the criteria has no bearing on this situation OR if you have don't have sufficient knowledge/experience to rate.*

<b>Criteria</b>	WEAK	MODERATE	STRONG	N/A
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- Expected positive effect on public perception of ORG
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Expected positive effect on ORG's internal culture
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Gut feeling of Board or staff members

Share your thinking:

## Critical Questions & Reflections

*Some of the questions below may not be relevant to the particular situation/opportunity you are deciding about. Answer the questions below in a way that makes sense given the specific context of this decision.*

### General Questions

- What is attractive about this opportunity?
- What potential problems might be associated with it?
- How does this opportunity support the change we want to see in the world?
- If the analysis above shows that there is weak alignment with the Theory of Change, are there ways to increase the alignment?

### Strategic Questions

- How does this decision support growth for ORG as an organization or its staff as individuals?
- What internal or external political factors should be considered?
- What internal or external barriers need to be considered and addressed? How?

### **Resource Questions & Proposed Timeline**

- What new resources or shifts in resources are required to carry out this opportunity/decision (finances, staff time, materials, etc.)? From where will needed resources come?
- Does ORG currently have the capacity to carry out the implementation of this decision/opportunity? And if not, what does it need to be able to do so?
- What is the proposed timeline?

### **Transparency**

- Is transparency needed for this decision? Why?
- What has been/needs to be done to ensure transparency?