EXTENSION

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Understanding and building logic models for grants

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A logic model is a visual tool that helps clarify how a program's resources, activities and intended outcomes connect. It provides a concise framework that illustrates the "if-then" relationships that guide program design and implementation. For those applying for grants, a well-crafted logic model shows how a proposed program aligns with the funder's goals and priorities. This document serves as a guide to understanding and creating logic models for grant proposals.

Building a logic model is more than just a grant-writing exercise. Logic models are useful tools for showing how a proposed project will achieve its desired outcomes. They allow reviewers to quickly understand the logic behind a program and assess its feasibility and potential impact. They also help proposal writers organize the various aspects of a program like its goals, resources needed, and intended audiences to ensure all components are aligned.

There is no standard or required format for logic models, but they typically include the following sections:

- **Inputs:** The resources needed to implement the program.
- **Activities:** The actions or strategies to be used.
- **Outputs:** The tangible deliverables or services produced.
- **Outcomes:** The changes or benefits resulting from the program.

Some logic models may also include additional sections such as:

- **Situation:** The problem or context the program addresses.
- **Reach:** Who the program serves.
- **Assumptions:** Beliefs or conditions critical to the program's success.
- **External Factors:** Environmental or contextual elements outside the program's control that may influence outcomes.

Always refer to the specific Request for Proposals (RFP) or Request for Applications (RFA) from the funder for guidance on whether a logic model is required and what template or format, if any, to use. While this guide provides general information, funders may have specific requirements. Adhering to their guidelines is crucial to ensuring the success of a proposal. Including additional sections in a logic model can be useful for planning purposes, even if not required.

What this guide covers

By the end of this guide, you will have the foundational knowledge and examples needed to create a logic model tailored to your grant application needs.

Situation section

The Situation section describes the problem, issue or need a program aims to address. It articulates why a program is necessary. Depending on the template or guidance provided by the funder, the Situation section may also be referred to as:

- **Context:** Focuses on the broader environment or setting in which the program operates.

- **Needs Assessment:** Highlights the evidence and rationale for addressing the issue.
- **Background:** Provides a more general overview of the situation leading to the program.

Regardless of the term used, the goal of this section is to clearly and convincingly explain why a program is necessary and relevant.

The situation section should include a clear and concise problem statement (one-three sentences) describing what a program is trying to address. This can include statistics, relevant research findings or community feedback to support the rational for a program. This section may also identify the specific audience or target population a program is trying to serve and any relevant details about the social, economic or environmental conditions that contribute to the need for a program.

Examples of situations:

- Ex 1: A decline in pollinator populations in State Z threatens agricultural productivity and ecosystem health.
- Ex 2: Limited access to healthy food options and physical activity programs have resulted in high obesity rates in youth ages 12-18 in County X.

Inputs section

The Inputs section of a logic model identifies the resources needed to implement a program. This section shows to funders that a program is well planned and adequately resourced, and that the proposal team has the resource capacity to deliver on the program's activities and outcomes.

The inputs section could include a list of the human resources needed for a program including staff, volunteers, consultants and partners. Additionally, list any partnerships with organizations, institutions or community groups that would support the program's success. This section also includes financial and funding resources such as grants, donations and other contributions that will support the program. Finally, identify the tangible resources like facilities, technology, equipment or supplies needed to execute the program.

Be specific and realistic about the resources the program has or will obtain. Inputs need to connect conceptually to the program activities they support to show how those inputs will enable the program's success. If there are gaps in resources, be sure to address that and outline strategies for addressing them in the proposal.

Examples of inputs:

- A project team including two program coordinators, one data analyst and three community volunteers.
- A $50,000 grant from Funder X to support program operations.
- Access to a local community center for hosting workshops.
- Collaboration with a university for data collection and analysis.

Activities section

The Activities section outlines the core actions your program will implement using the resources listed in the Inputs section to address the problem or need identified in the Situation section. This section connects the resources to the expected outcomes by detailing what the program will do to achieve its goals (i.e., what the program will do).

The Activities section should include a clearly defined list of key tasks, actions or interventions the program will undertake. The items in this section need to directly align with the program goals and outcomes. This section may also include the timeline or sequence of when activities will occur.

Use action oriented, verb language to describe program activities such as "conduct," "organize" or "facilitate." Activities need to be specific, measurable and provide enough detail for funders to understand their feasibility. Avoid using vague or general language to describe activities and be careful not to overload the Activities section with too many actions, as this can make the program seem unrealistic or overly complex. In other words, avoid overpromising. Finally, ensure there is a clear conceptual connection between the situation or problem, the inputs required, the program's activities, and the outputs and outcomes expected.

Examples of activities:

- Ex 1: Develop and distribute educational materials about pollinator-friendly gardening.
- Ex 1: Facilitate a field day for farmers on creating pollinator-friendly habitats (e.g., hedgerows, wildflower strips and cover crops), while promoting pollinator-safe pest management practices".
- Ex 2: Conduct weekly workshops for parents on nutrition and meal planning.
- Ex 2: Facilitate the implementation of structured after-school physical activity programs, such as walking clubs, sports leagues, and dance or fitness classes tailored for teens, in collaboration with schools, parks and recreation centers.

Outputs section

The Outputs section of a logic model identifies the tangible and measurable products or services that result directly from the activities of a program. Outputs are the immediate deliverables that show a program's progress and provide evidence that activities will be implemented as planned. Outputs are critical for tracking the implementation and progress of a program and provide funders with evidence that their investment will be used effectively and that the program will achieve its intended outcomes. Clearly defining and quantifying outputs shows accountability in a grant application. *While outputs show what your program will produce, they are different from outcomes, which focus on the changes that result from your program.*

The outputs section will include quantifiable deliverables such as the number, type and frequency of products, services or activities completed. Outputs focus on the direct and immediate results of program activities, not the changes those activities aim to create. If a project team has the inputs listed and conducts the activities as outlined, the direct result is the outputs. There should be a logical connection between a program's activities and the expected outputs reported.

Examples of outputs:

- Ex 1: 200 educational brochures on pollinator-friendly gardening distributed.
- Ex 1: 50 toolkits on pollinators distributed to local schools.
- Ex 1: 20 webinars for farmers on cover crops and hedgerows conducted.
- Ex 1: 200 farmers reached through educational webinars.
- Ex 2: 52 nutrition and meal planning workshops conducted.
- Ex 2: 150 parents reached through weekly meal planning workshops.
- Ex 2: 25 after-school physical activity programs implemented with partners.

Reach section

The Reach section describes who your program is designed to engage or serve. This includes the individuals, groups, organizations or systems expected to participate in, or be affected by, program activities. Depending on the template or guidance provided by the funder, the Reach section may also be referred to as:

- **Target Population:** Specific group the program is designed to serve, defined by traits like age, location or need.
- **Audience:** Groups the program aims to reach with its activities, services or information.
- **Participants:** People who directly take part in the program's activities.
- **Beneficiaries:** Those who benefit from the program's activities or outcomes, directly or indirectly.
- **End Users:** Final recipients of the program's services, products or results.

Regardless of the term used, the goal of this section is to help funders understand the intended scope of the program. This section can also be helpful for planning outreach and recruitment strategies, guiding evaluation and encouraging the development of inclusive programs.

This section may include:

- **Primary Participants/Audience:** The main audience who will directly participate.
- **Secondary Participants/Audience:** People or groups indirectly affected by the program.
- **Numbers and Demographics:** Estimated numbers of participants and key demographic information such as age ranges, income level, geographic location or other defining and/or recruiting characteristics.
- **Special Populations:** Any priority or underserved groups the program aims to reach.
- **Organizational Partners:** Institutions or partners involved in delivering or those that benefit from, the program.

Examples of reach:

- Ex 1: *Primary Participants* (Direct Reach): Beekeepers and pollinator enthusiasts, landowners or property managers, Extension educators or conservation professionals.
- Ex 1: *Secondary Participants* (Indirect Reach): Crop consumers, local communities and agri-businesses.
- Ex 1: *Special Populations*: Historically underserved farmers, low-income communities, urban gardeners and community garden programs.
- Ex 1: *Organizational Partners*: State and federal agencies, nonprofits and conservation groups, local governments.

- Ex 2: *Primary Participants* (Direct Reach): Youth, parents and guardians, school staff and administrators
- Ex 2: *Secondary Participants* (Indirect Reach): Participant friends and peers, healthcare providers, community members
- Ex 2: *Special Populations*: Low-income families, youth in rural or underserved areas, youth with disabilities or chronic health conditions
- Ex 2: *Organizational Partners*: Schools, school districts, public health departments, parks and recreation departments, non-profits and food banks

Outcomes section

The Outcomes section of a logic model describes the changes or benefits that result from a program. Not to be confused with outputs (products or deliverables), outcomes reflect the impact or changes caused by a program over time. Clearly defining outcomes in a logic model shows to funders a program's potential to create meaningful and lasting change. This section also shows a program's suitability in alignment with the funding priorities of a grant. Funders may request one description of a program's anticipated outcomes or divide this section into short-term, medium-term and long-term outcomes. The short-, medium- and long-term model of describing outcomes can be useful for planning purposes, even if the funder doesn't require it.

- Short-term outcomes are the most immediate effects or changes from a program and can focus on changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, awareness, opinions or beliefs.
- Medium-term outcomes build upon short-term outcomes and reflect changes in behaviors, practices or decision-making over time as aided by new knowledge or a change in belief.
- Long-term outcomes build on medium-term outcomes and represent the impact of your program to society, systems change, environmental change, or collective impact to participants.
- Short-term outcomes are generally the easiest for program teams to measure.

When articulating outcomes, be specific about what success looks like for each outcome using measurable terms. Avoid overpromising things a program can't reasonably do within the time frame of the grant or with the program's activities. (Some longer-term outcomes may not occur within the timeframe of the program). This section is to align activities and outputs with resulting changes. Thus, be sure outcomes logically follow the actual activities and outputs of the program. A reviewer should be able to see a clear logical line between what a program will do and the changes that will happen because of those efforts. Using the short-, medium- and long-term framework allows the program team to show a progression of impact.

Examples of outcomes:

Short-term outcomes:
- Ex 1: Community members will gain awareness of the importance of pollinators for the ecosystem.
- Ex 1: Farmers will gain an understanding of the use of hedgerows to support pollinators.
- Ex 2: Parents will increase their knowledge of healthy eating habits after attending a nutrition workshop.
- Ex 2: Youth will identify additional opportunities for physical activity.

Medium-term outcomes:
- Ex 1: Community members will reduce or eliminate practices that are damaging to pollinators.
- Ex 1: Farmers will plant pollinator-friendly plants to support biodiversity.
- Ex 2: Families will incorporate more fruits and vegetables into their meals regularly.
- Ex 2: Youth will engage in physical activity initiatives.

Long-term outcomes:
- Ex 1: Enhanced ecosystem health and increased pollinator populations in the region.
- Ex 2: Reduction in youth obesity rates over five years in the area.

Assumptions section

The Assumptions section of a logic model explains the factors or ideas a program team considers to be true about their program, participants, environment and resources as related to a program's success. Assumptions are beliefs about how and why a program will work. Explicitly stating these assumptions provides clarity about the foundation of the logic model and acknowledges factors that could influence a program's outcomes. Identifying factors that could impact the program's success in advance also helps a program team anticipate challenges and plan for contingencies.

The Assumptions section may include beliefs about resources and available support, such as sufficient funding or staff expertise, expectations about participant behavior or engagement, understanding about environmental or external factors such as the political climate, and theories about the connection between activities, outputs and outcomes.

When articulating assumptions, be specific by clearly stating what is believed to be true and why it matters to the program's success. Prioritize key or critical assumptions that could impact the program and acknowledge that some assumptions involve risk and may need to be adjusted over time. Finally, link assumptions to other logic model components and explain how various assumptions influence inputs, activities, outputs or outcomes.

Examples of assumptions:

- Participants will attend all sessions of the program.
- Staff will have the capacity and resources to deliver the program as planned.
- Community leaders will support the program and encourage participation.
- Changes in knowledge will lead to behavior change within six months.
- External funding will remain stable throughout the program.

External factors section

The External Factors section of a logic model describes the conditions, influences or events outside your program's control that could affect its success. External factors include anything in the surrounding environment like policies, economic conditions, social trends, or community dynamics that may help or hinder your program. Highlighting external factors shows funders a program team's understanding of the broader environment a program operates within and ensures the logic model reflects both opportunities and constraints. Similarly, this section can help a team anticipate challenges and create contingency plans, while also being transparent with funders and building trust in the team's ability to consider external risks. Being realistic about external factors shows a program team's ability to anticipate challenges and adapt accordingly.

Depending on the template or guidance provided by the funder, the External Factors section may also be referred to as:

- **Contextual Factors:** Refers to the broader context in which the program operates.
- **Environmental Factors:** Highlights external conditions, such as economic, social or political influences.
- **Influencing Factors:** Focuses on elements that may impact the program's implementation or outcomes.
- **Barriers and Enablers:** Describes external challenges and support affecting the program.
- **Constraints and Opportunities:** Emphasizes limitations and advantages arising from the external environment.
- **Surrounding Conditions:** Captures the external environment impacting the program.

The external factors section will include contextual factors beyond the program team's direct influence. These factors can impact every stage of the logic model and may include community context such as levels of community support, existing attitudes, or cultural norms or the economic environment, including available funding, economic stability or employment rates. This section may also highlight relevant policy and regulations or the natural environment including climate conditions, disasters and environmental health. Finally, this section could include descriptions of unpredictable events like political changes, pandemics or other unexpected disruptions.

When articulating external factors, identify those most relevant to the program's success and be specific about how each factor might positively or negatively impact the program. Explain how the factor identified would interact with the various pieces of the logic model. If external factors are not explicitly mentioned in a template, consider incorporating these concepts into the narrative or related sections of your proposal.

Examples of external factors:

- *Community context*: (example: A community's willingness to participate in a new initiative).
- *Policy and regulatory environment*: (example: A change in school policies affecting student access to after-school programs).
- *Infrastructure and transportation:* (example: Limited public transportation in rural areas that reduces access or participation).
- *Economic environment:* (example: A strong local economy that supports employment-focused programs).
- *Public health environment:* (example: A global pandemic that disrupts planned activities or timelines).

- **Problem Statement:** Emphasizes defining the issue or need.

Conclusion

Building a logic model is a valuable process for planning, implementing and evaluating a program, particularly when applying for grants. Clearly outlining a program's logic and components creates a roadmap that communicates its vision and strategy to funders and other interest holders. A well-crafted logic model not only strengthens your grant application but also enhances your ability to track progress, adapt to challenges, and achieve meaningful results. While there is no standardized template for a logic model, it's important to always tailor the model to meet the specific requirements outlined by the funder.

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