How to Use the Theory of Change & Your Plan

Quick start

🎯 Goal: Help youth plan for real change by thinking backwards from impact
🕒 Time: 45–60 mins
👥 Best for: Groups planning a campaign, project, or change initiative
📍 Use when: After exploring an issue or opportunity
🧰 You'll need: Theory of Change template, markers or post-its, a clear goal

What is Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change is like your roadmap for change. It helps you figure out what steps to take—and in what order—to reach your goal.

You start with the change you want to see. Then you work backwards to figure out:
- What needs to change first?
- What can we do to help that happen?
- What are we assuming will work?

Why use it?

Most groups jump straight into planning activities. But without a clear goal and strategy, those activities might not lead anywhere meaningful.

This tool helps youth:
- Think long-term and big-picture
- Focus on impact—not just action
- Get clear on how their work creates change

Who it's for

- Youth-led project teams
- Changemakers and peer leaders
- Any young people planning an action with purpose

When to use it?

- After identifying an issue or opportunity
- When planning a project, campaign, or workshop series
- To reflect on whether your current activities match your goals

Example: Theory of Change – Youth Confidence Project

Goal: Young people feel more confident to speak up in their community

Outcomes:
- Youth understand their rights
- Youth have role models
- They practise public speaking

Activities:
- Host storytelling workshops
- Create videos of local youth voices
- Partner with youth councils

Assumptions:
- If youth get practice and support, they will speak up more
- If youth speak up, adults will start to listen

How to use it (Step-by-step)

1. Define your big goal - What is the change you want to see in the world, your community, or your lives?

2. Ask: What needs to happen for that to be true? List 2–4 key outcomes that need to happen before you reach your goal.

3. Plan the activities - What can you do as a group to make those outcomes happen? Be specific.

4. Check your assumptions - Ask yourselves: What are we expecting? What needs to be true for this to work?

5. Test it with your team - Does the plan make sense? Can you explain how your activities lead to the goal? What's missing?

6. Use the blank template - Now build your own plan using the Theory of Change layout. Start with your goal, and build backwards.