Theory of Change for Crime Prevention Projects

### Overview

The purpose of this fact sheet is to help you understand how to use a Theory of Change (TOC) to design an evidence-based crime prevention project.

### What is a Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change (TOC) explains how and why a desired change is expected to happen as a result of a particular project or initiative. A TOC helps you to plan your project and it should explain the problems or issues you want to address, how your project or initiative will address those specific issues, and why you believe the project will work. A TOC will demonstrate to funders how the project will address the problem and ensure all partners agree about the purpose and outcomes of the project. It connects what the project will do and why it will work. A TOC should also identify how outcomes will be measured to demonstrate success or impact.

**How will a Theory of Change support your application?**

A strong TOC will show that your project has:

* a clear purpose or goal
* partners and stakeholders who agree about the project objectives
* an evidence base or previous experience that shows success is likely
* a way of measuring impact or outcomes.

A TOC will also show that your project is achievable and can deliver its objectives with the available resources. A well-considered and evidence-based theory of change will significantly strengthen your application.

### A Theory of Change supports evaluation of your crime prevention projects

A TOC will focus evaluation of your project on what outcomes have been achieved and what measures show this. By consulting all stakeholders in developing the TOC, agreement on what project success look like will be more likely. A good evaluation measures impact or outcomes towards a goal, rather than just that the project activities or outputs have been completed.

### Developing your Theory of Change to support your application

To develop a strong TOC, focus on the problem to be solved. Consider these elements:

**What is the problem you are trying to solve and the change that is required?**

Describe the crime prevention problem, why it is a problem in your location, the extent of the problem, what you want to change and how change is likely to be achieved.

**Ensure your TOC is informed by evidence**

This may include:

* Evidence or data demonstrating the issue you want to address, and the specific context in which the problem is occurring
* Current evidence of effective approaches
* [Evidence of previously successful approaches](https://www.crimeprevention.vic.gov.au/resources/all-resources/resources-for-developing-evidence-based-crime-prevention-initiatives)

**Outcomes**

Working back from the desired change you have identified - what are the short, medium and long-term outcomes you need for that change to occur?

**Activities and Outputs**

What actions and services must be implemented or delivered to achieve the above outcomes?

**Assumptions**

What conditions need to be in place or exist already to make the change happen?

**Measuring**

How will you measure the difference you have made and what data or indicators will be used to demonstrate the impacts achieved?

**There are many resources on the web. Here is one that we’ve found useful**

* [How to build a theory of change — NCVO Knowhow UK (National Council for Voluntary Organisations UK)](https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/how-to/how-to-build-a-theory-of-change)

**Example of a Theory of Change**

**Project: Creating an activated youth space to reduce antisocial behaviour by young people congregating in a local shopping strip**

**The problem and context** –Young people are gathering to socialise outdoors in a local shopping strip. Traders frequently report antisocial behaviour by these young people, including swearing, shouting, damaging property and fighting.

**Evidence** – In addition to reports from local traders, data from an annual community safety survey indicates that the behaviour of these young people is intimidating and deters older people from visiting the shopping strip.

Current design literature identifies that:

* adolescents depend on public spaces to meet their social and physical needs, and
* rather than trying to exclude the young people from the public space, a project addressing boredom and engaging the young people in prosocial activities that encourages connection to community is likely to be more effective .

**The change or solution** – To engage young people and reduce anti-social behaviour, evidence from other successful projects suggests a solution to the problem could be working with young people and other community members to design a more inclusive and welcoming physical environment, and a program of activities to activate the space and encourage community connection.

**The outcome** - The outcome of the proposed solution would be a legitimate inclusion of young people in a public space, along with other community members, to increase connection between people of different ages and support pro-social public behaviour to ensure the space is welcoming and safe for all.

**How it will work and why:**

**Measuring impact** – This example engaged young people in the location and increased feelings of safety of other shoppers. Showing this impact requires collection of data including interviews or surveys with young people, traders and shoppers to determine how they feel about the changes.

It could also include collecting data on complaints or reported offences at the location. Administrative data indicating increased use of the space (rubbish volumes, pedestrian counts, activity attendee numbers, vacancy rates etc) may also be useful for demonstrating impact.