

2. Project Management Toolkit: Initiate the Project

Key Questions

In the Initiate the Project phase, there are two key questions to be answered:

1. Why are we doing this project?
2. How will we get there?

Key Activities

There are three key activities that provide helpful structures that will serve the project from start to finish. These are:

1. Define the situation
2. Identify the theory of change
3. Generate a logic model

Define the Situation

In order to answer one of the key questions - Why are we doing this project? - we need to first understand the context in which the project is situated.

What Is the Problem?

The first step in formulating a response to the question of “why are we doing this project?” is to define what the problem is that the project seeks to address. Defining the problem lays the foundation for creating a common understanding that is essential for stakeholder buy-in.

Who Is Affected by the Problem?

Who is affected by the problem? These individuals, communities, and populations must be identified at the outset. They hold expertise about the situation itself and hold expertise from lived experience that should inform the solution’s design and implementation.

What Causes the Problem?

Additionally, those who are affected by the problem may have insight into some of the less visible causes of the problem. A critical aspect of defining the situation includes identifying what is causing the problem that is being addressed. An answer to the problem must be in response to the causes of the problem.

What Does Research and Data Tell Us about the Problem?

Leveraging existing research to inform the design and implementation of the project will only improve the likelihood of achieving the intended outcomes. Evidence-based practices increase the effectiveness of civil legal aid. The [Legal Services National Technology Assistance Project](#) and the [National Civil Legal Aid & Defender Association](#) (NLADA) house hundreds of free research reports and technical assistance resources. You can learn more about civil legal aid research database created by NLADA here: <https://www.nlada.org/tools-and-technical-assistance/civil-resources/civil-legal-aid-research>.

Identify the Theory of Change

We recommend thinking through a project’s theory of change (TOC) and developing a project logic model as part of the Project Initiation phase. The project’s TOC describes how and why a project purpose will be achieved in a given context. The associated logic model visually depicts and summarizes the key elements of the TOC. Its visualization of what is needed to achieve the project’s intended outcomes

makes it a great facilitation tool in the Project Initiation and Project Planning phases. Effective project planning leverages a TOC into a project logic model, which helps generate mutual understanding about the project's purpose among all stakeholders.

Theory of Change

Theories of change are important for developing a rigorous plan that seeks to answer how and why an intended change will happen. According to [USAID's How-To Note](#), a project's TOC should include the following five components:

1. The defined context in which the problem to be addressed is situated.
2. If-then outcomes that are needed to achieve the desired change.
3. The deliverables that the project will produce to achieve the if-then outcomes.
4. Foundational assumptions about project efforts and expected results.
5. Key indicators to monitor the progress of the project during implementation.

A starting point to developing a theory of change from the initial idea is to map out a process diagram for the intervention being considered. Watch the video below to learn more.

To support community-based organizations in accessing the benefits that a TOC brings to a program when utilized from the outset, the Aspen Institute's Roundtable on Community Change published the free resource [The Community Builder's Approach to Theory of Change: A Practice Guide to Theory Development](#). Similarly, the Annie E. Casey Foundation created a report to support non-profits in developing a TOC in its report [Theory of Change: A Practical Tool for Action, Results, and Learning](#).

Generate a Logic Model

Logic Model

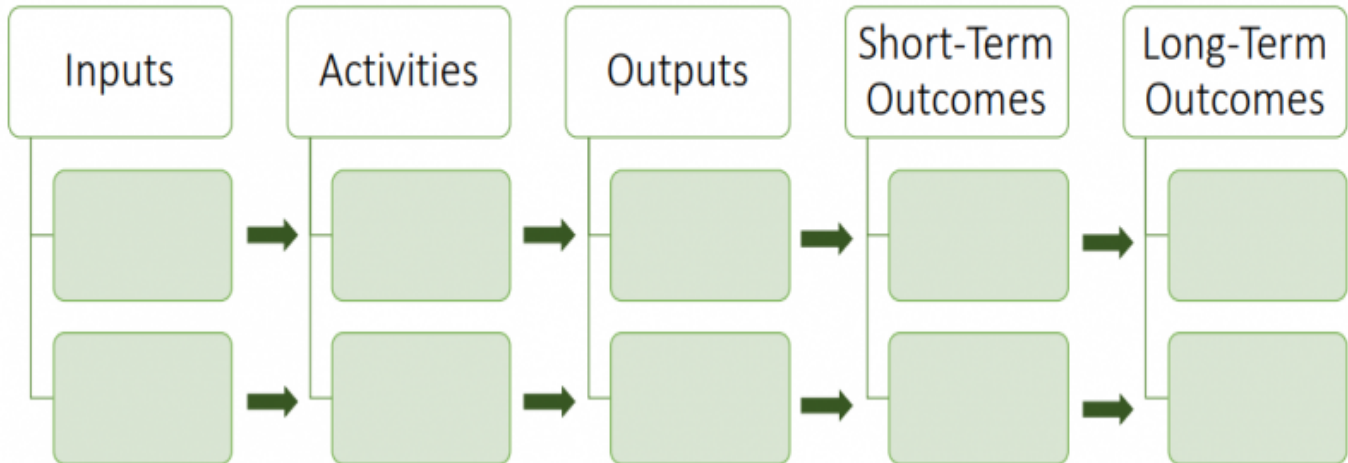
In contrast, logic models are helpful for generating mutual understanding among all stakeholders by leveraging a graphic visualization of the relationships between inputs, outputs, and intended outcome. A logic model breaks down a complicated theory of change into the basic building blocks that lead to the desired change. Thus, the logic model is a snapshot of what the project is about. They not only serve as effective communications tools for stakeholders, but they also provide the project manager with a roadmap and organizing framework for the duration of the project.

The United Way has paved the way for the use of logic models in program development and evaluation. For a detailed treatise that provides detailed guidance on anything related to the development of a logic model, please review its free publication [Measuring Program Outcomes](#). Another great resource to utilize that was created as an online module by the University of Wisconsin is [Enhancing Program Performance with Logic Models](#).

Backwards Design

While it may seem counterintuitive, a logic model is built backwards by starting with the intended outcomes. This is called backwards design. Identifying the intended outcomes at the outset of the project enables better identification of the necessary activities to achieve those outcomes. Once the necessary activities are identified, then it is possible to identify the necessary inputs. Thus, all work and resources on the project are oriented around achieving these outcomes. Ironically, starting project planning at the end eases the cognitive load of planning for a goal line that seems hopelessly far away and difficult to achieve. In fact, starting from the outcome allows the natural milestones for the project to surface more easily.

Here is an example of a logic model template for a legal services project:



To assist you in developing your logic model, use this worksheet here: [Logic Model Worksheet](#)

Identifying Outcomes

After a problem statement has been articulated, the outcomes the project is seeking to achieve need to be identified. Why is the focus on identifying outcomes rather than the project's goals? Goals are part of a dialogue with respect to the vision for a desired change. This vision is often part of a long-term change. Goals are derived from an organization's mission statement, such as to increase access to justice for all. As a result, they are typically not measurable, but speak to the intentions of the program leading the project. In contrast, outcomes are both observable and measurable.

Moreover, identifying outcomes is the first step in the exercise of generating a logic model for your project after the situation has been defined. A logic model illustrates the interconnectedness of your project's outcomes, outputs, activities, and inputs. Emphasizing outcomes, which are both observable and measurable, enables the

project manager to monitor whether the project is achieving the desired results. The visualization of the interconnectedness of the various aspects of the project and how everything is oriented towards accomplishing these outcomes creates a strong foundation for communication with all stakeholders because of the collective understanding.

Another outcome-driven planning method is the Objectives and Key Results framework (OKR) that is used on projects to define measure goals and to then track the outcomes. Watch this video from Simon Rah to learn more about OKR.

How We Will Get There

Once the intended outcomes of the project have been identified, you now have an intended destination for the project. Building out the remainder of the logic model will provide a roadmap for how to achieve the intended outcomes.

Reviewing Similar Projects

To help identify the components of your project's logic model, it is often invaluable to reach out to other programs about their similar projects that are further along in development. Starting these discussions explicitly talking about the project plan, what worked well, and what the program would have changed about the initiation of the project will frame your conversation to address initiation issues. Thus, your project plan will jump the inevitable learning curve of managing this type of project. One tool going into this conversation that flags differences between the projects that may inform differences in design is that you have already identified your project's intended outcomes. Thus, for comparison purposes, it is helpful to learn what other projects' intended outcomes were at the initiation phase of the project.

Understanding the components of a similar project can help provide a starting point for consideration when building out your logic model to identify the outputs, activities, and inputs that will be part of the project.

Outputs

Within the framework of a logic model, outputs are quantifiable products of the work and services that are provided. They are indicators of the effectiveness of the implementation. An example of an output could be: "provided 100 individuals

each month with brief services using the texting legal self-help platform."

Activities

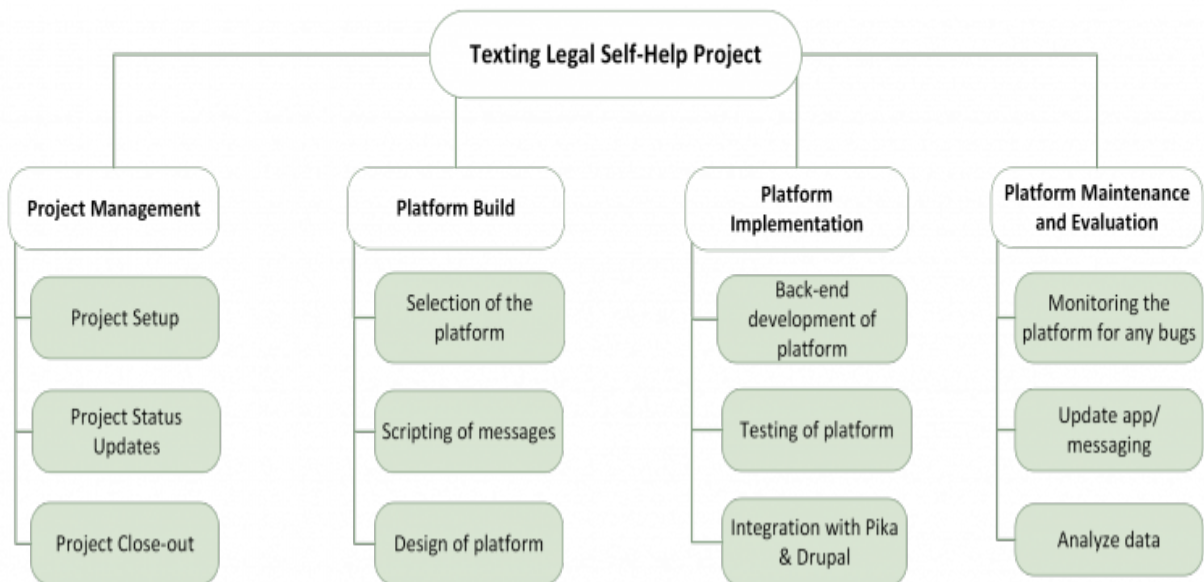
Activities identify the work that needs to be done to generate the outputs, which are the deliverables and services that will be provided. Typically, activities should be broken down into chunks of work that are estimated to take less than eight hours to complete.

Here are some helpful tips for building a list of activities:

- **Work Breakdown Structure:** start by creating a Work Breakdown Structure. This is a visual representation that identifies the different areas of work that must be completed. It then breaks down the umbrella categories into activities. This is an example of a Work Breakdown Structure for the hypothetical Texting Legal Self-Help Project.



Texting Legal Self-Help Project Work Breakdown Structure



- **100% Rule:** the complete list of activities should encapsulate all of the work that is needed to complete the project.

- Clear Delineations: each activity should be separate and distinct from all other activities (i.e., no overlap).

Inputs

After completing the steps discussed above, you are now ready to build a list of all the inputs you will need for the identified outputs to both start the project and to maintain the project once the development is complete. Essentially, inputs are what is invested into the project that could be: staff and staff time, volunteer and volunteer time, partner and partner time, outside consultant time, funding, technology, equipment, and other resources.

Assumptions

Assumptions answer the question what are the conditions or resources that are needed for the success of the project?

External Factors

External factors are background or existing factors in the community that influence the context in which the project takes place and for which you have little control.

Wrapping Up the Project Initiation

For project sustainability purposes, project planning always has the end in mind. As a result, it is essential to have a plan for how you will exit the project. The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) published a pamphlet that provides guidance on how to exit technology projects. While it was developed for court systems, it is also a helpful tool for legal services providers for their technology projects. You can find the pamphlet [here](#).

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Files

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