Event Brief

Webinar: Theory of Change Workshop 1

September 19, 2022

A recording, slide deck, and glossary of terms is available

Purpose

Led by Dr. Katie Cook, Evaluation and Research Manager at the KDE Hub, this was the first in a series of three workshops designed to help Mental Health Promotion Innovation Fund (MHP-IF) projects build skills and support one another in developing a theory of change to inform their Phase 2 evaluation plan. This workshop provided an overview of theories of change and engaged participants in discussions that identified gaps and potential challenges they may encounter while creating a theory of change tailored to the needs of their project.

Participants

The webinar was attended by 14 MHP-IF project team members, plus Hub Secretariat members.

Meeting structure

- Following brief introductory remarks, Katie gave a presentation on theories of change.

- Participants joined breakout rooms and reflected on the following questions: *What challenges do you anticipate in either developing a theory of change or connecting a theory of change to your evaluation plan? What gaps exist in your project's current theory of change? What do you need to fill these gaps? (stakeholders, resources, processes)*

- Highlights from small group discussions were then shared in plenary.

- Three poll questions were posed at various points during the webinar: *How do you feel when you think about creating a theory of change (and subsequent evaluation plan)? Where are you currently at in your theory of change development process? What type of approach are you taking/do you plan to take with your theory of change development?*

- The webinar closed with an expression of thanks to project teams for participating in the Project Community Survey and a few Hub updates.

What did we learn?

Highlights from the presentation on theories of change

- Theories of change outline and explain the causal pathways between a project's activities and the resulting impacts. Logic models tend to be more descriptive—i.e., "this is what our program looks like" while a theory of change is more explanatory—i.e., "this is how our program works, for whom, and under what circumstances."

- They can be visually depicted in a variety of forms (e.g., linear, dynamic, non-linear, mixed) and often use colours, images and/or diagrams to portray feedback loops, nested components, or complex relationships. A written explanation is an important feature of theories of change because it provides the rationale behind each component and relationships between them.

- Theories of change can help promote collaboration between stakeholders, clarify a project's underlying logic and assumptions, and lay a foundational framework for developing a project's evaluation plan.

- There are many ways to approach program evaluation but all benefit from a clearly defined theory of change. Similarly, there are multiple ways of approaching the development of a theory of change (e.g., top-down, community-driven). Backward mapping (starting with anticipated or desired outcomes in mind) can provide a helpful starting point.

Insights from small group sharing about developing and using theories of change

- Knowledge gaps and challenges anticipated by project team members included: measurement (e.g., finding relevant quantitative measures, choosing measures that are politically neutral and sensitive to diversity); contextualizing a theory of change so that it is relevant to project participants/community; developing a theory of change that meets all stakeholder's needs.

- Suggestions for resources that would help fill knowledge gaps included: a compendium of measures/scales used by other projects; communities of practice to facilitate sharing across projects; more information about constructing feedback loops.

How will learnings from this event be used?

➢ Participant input will inform additional theories of change workshops (scheduled for October 19 and November 16, 2022)
➢ The KDE Hub will continue to curate, develop, and share resources to support project evaluation plans