Beginning to Shed Light on a Theory of Change
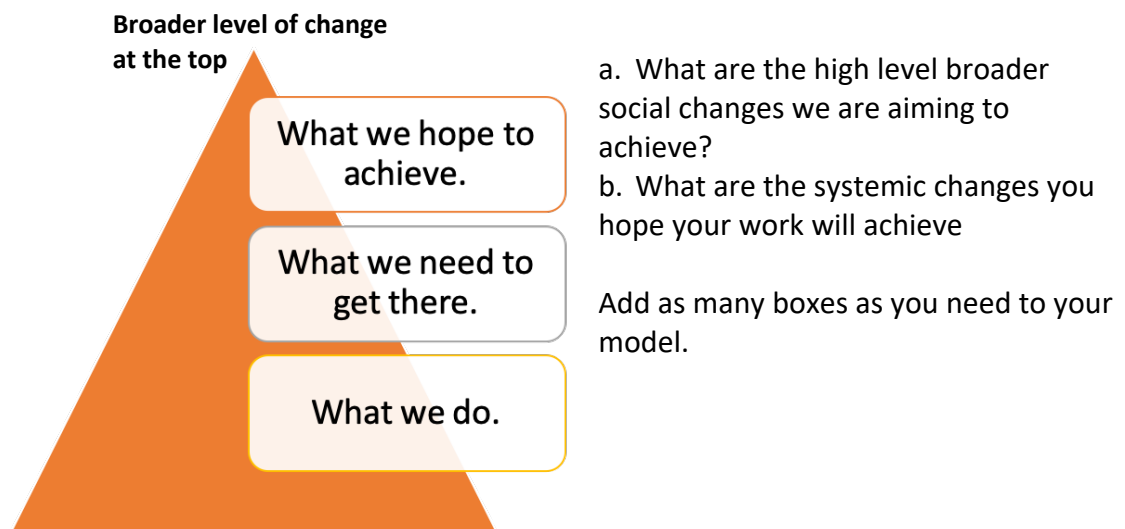
What is a theory of change?
A theory of change is "Theory of Change is essentially a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context" (https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change).
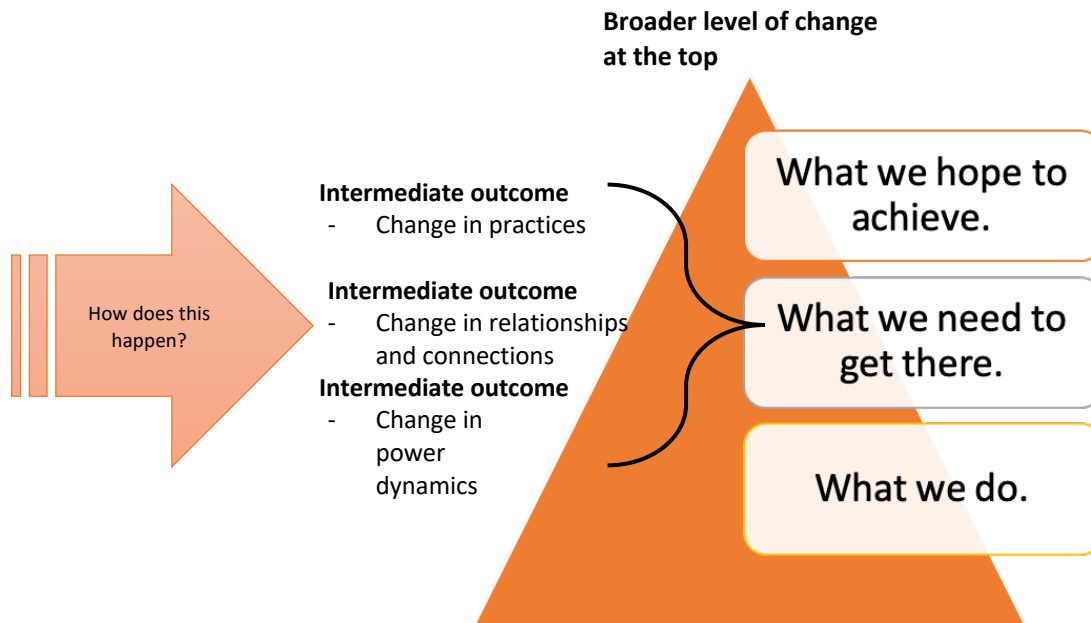
According to Clear Horizon, *"**A theory of change** is useful for understanding how your intervention causes the intended or observed outcomes that you've identified. It's a really helpful way to know if the outcomes identified are measurable, and the 'right' outcomes for what you are trying to know. This includes hypothesized links between (a) the intervention requirements and activities, and (b) the expected outcomes."* (Course materials glossary).

When we start to develop a theory of change, the idea is to begin with a clear vision and agreement about the ultimate level of change your intervention is contributing to. So, this would be the broader goal of the work and ending with a clear understanding of what foundations are required to ground this impact. See blow for a simple theory of change diagram.

Step 1. At first glance these are the components we need to examine.

Broader level of change at the top

What we hope to achieve.

What we need to get there.

What we do.

a. What are the high level broader social changes we are aiming to achieve?
b. What are the systemic changes you hope your work will achieve

Add as many boxes as you need to your model.

Step 2. We need to then begin to identify what are the intermediate outcomes? And how these outcomes are achieved? Identify changes in the areas related to your intervention. Below are some examples. Then also identify how these changes happen as a result of your intervention?
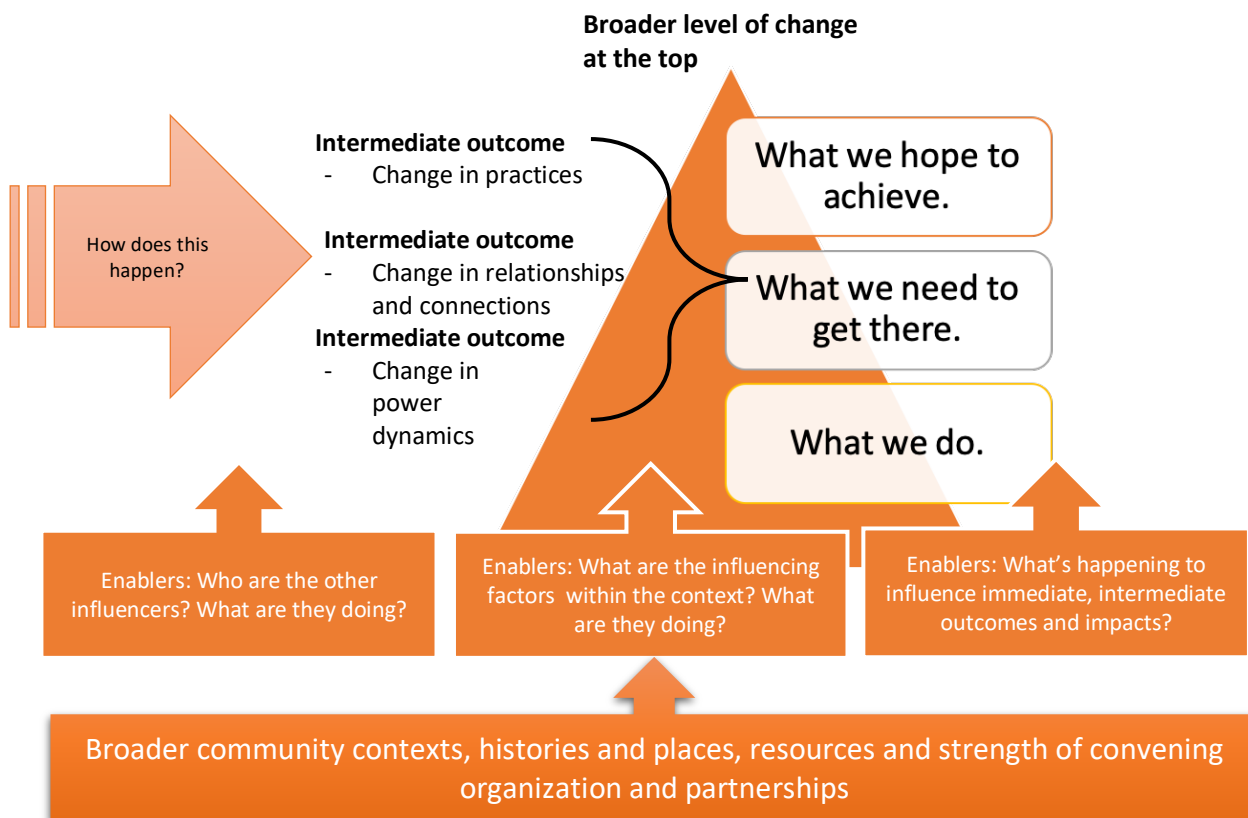
**Broader level of change
at the top**

Intermediate outcome
- Change in practices

Intermediate outcome
- Change in relationships
  and connections

Intermediate outcome
- Change in
  power
  dynamics

How does this
happen?

What we hope to
achieve.

What we need to
get there.

What we do.

Step 3: We then need to contextualize our work within the greater community/social contexts in which these interventions are happening and identify who and what else is having influence on the intermediate outcomes identified? What are the enablers of change, outside of the intervention, as well as supporting the intervention. These can be such enablers as: authentic community engagement, capacity building, transparent and inclusive management and leadership, multisector collaborations, strategic learning culture, participatory practices, openness to diversity and culturally responsive practices, etc. These higher level labels for enablers need to be shared in with descriptive explanations of those relevant to your intervention.

**Broader level of change
at the top**

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  power
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How does this
happen?

What we hope to
achieve.

What we need to
get there.

What we do.

Enablers: Who are the other influencers? What are they doing?

Enablers: What are the influencing factors within the context? What are they doing?

Enablers: What's happening to influence immediate, intermediate outcomes and impacts?

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Step 4: Identifying the overall foundation drivers for change.
These elements are key in understanding where the intervention sits within the broader community context, history and place, resources and strength of convening organization and partnerships for the project and at the community level.
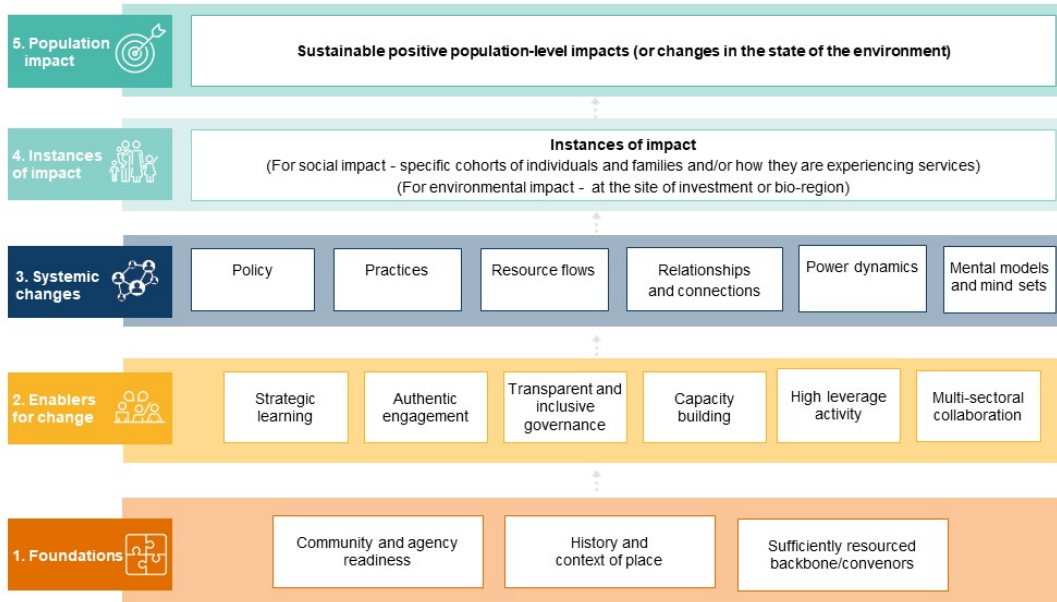
Identify what those foundational drivers are that provide the overall grounding for where these interventions stemmed from and to where they are aimed at contributing change.

Broader level of change at the top

Intermediate outcome
- Change in practices

What we hope to achieve.

Intermediate outcome
- Change in relationships and connections

What we need to get there.

Intermediate outcome
- Change in power dynamics

What we do.

How does this happen?

Enablers: Who are the other influencers? What are they doing?

Enablers: What are the influencing factors within the context? What are they doing?

Enablers: What's happening to influence immediate, intermediate outcomes and impacts?

Broader community contexts, histories and places, resources and strength of convening organization and partnerships

Below is a generic theory of change model. It is a good example of a framework to outline your responses to the above steps to developing a theory of change for your community engagement intervention.

A theory of change will support the next phase of designing an evaluation plan which will focus on identifying the purpose, key areas of inquiry, applying indicators, sources of data and methods and tools.

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Taken from Clear Horizon course materials for Place-Based and Systems Change Evaluation online course.

| 5. Population impact | Sustainable positive population-level impacts (or changes in the state of the environment) | | | | | |

| 4. Instances of impact | Instances of impact (For social impact - specific cohorts of individuals and families and/or how they are experiencing services) (For environmental impact - at the site of investment or bio-region) | | | | | |

| 3. Systemic changes | Policy | Practices | Resource flows | Relationships and connections | Power dynamics | Mental models and mind sets |

| 2. Enablers for change | Strategic learning | Authentic engagement | Transparent and inclusive governance | Capacity building | High leverage activity | Multi-sectoral collaboration |

| 1. Foundations | Community and agency readiness | History and context of place | Sufficiently resourced backbone/convenors | | | |

Your full theory of change
(Adapt as needed based on your previous three slides)

5. Population impact						
4. Instances of impact						
3. Systemic changes						
2. Enablers for change						
1. Foundations						

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