Theory of Change Development:
Creating a Roadmap for Implementation & Evaluation

What It Is   A Theory of Change is a tool to help organizations articulate their social change initiatives. By listing and organizing the building blocks required to achieve a social change initiative's long-term goal, a Theory of Change lays out a roadmap showing the pathways and interventions necessary to reach the intended results.

Our Approach   BTW *informing change* has crafted an approach to the process of Theory of Change development that is productive and engaging. We understand that theory by itself does not deliver results, and we appreciate that organizations are not static institutions, but lively and vibrant organisms. We facilitate an iterative process with key organizational stakeholders in which we collectively define and articulate the problems the organization is setting out to solve, the strategies to be employed, the target constituencies and the desired short- and long-term results.

We have found that our approach accomplishes three objectives: 1) it brings discipline and alignment to practice, ensuring that there is logical coherence to the organization's work and expected results; 2) it serves as the roadmap for an evaluation that is realistic and based on the organization's actual work and aspirations and 3) it builds team spirit among participants, raising awareness of "the whole" and where and how each member contributes to the whole.
In co-creating a Theory of Change with an organization, BTW typically works with a team of approximately eight individuals including staff members, governing board members, community stakeholders and funders.

The Process   The process usually requires three or four facilitated meetings of the team, each approximately three hours in duration. Each meeting builds upon the one before until the group has collectively crafted a Theory of Change that accurately and elegantly describes the organization's work, strategies, tactics and intended outcomes to everyone's satisfaction. For each meeting, BTW prepares graphic depictions and narrative descriptions of the theory as it evolves, and team members are asked to review those documents and complete small periodic "homework assignments" between meetings. Our process gets at the questions of who needs what data and how will they use it, enabling us later to set priorities when developing the evaluation plan.

The Product   The final product is a graphic depiction of the Theory of Change with an accompanying explanatory narrative and a set of priority evaluation questions. An energizing by-product is usually greater clarity about and commitment to the work among those who participated in the process.