Thought Model for Building Your Theory of Change

Identifying the Need

**Facilitation Notes:** This section of questions should be used if either a) the group is not clear on what they will be working on together or b) they do not seem to be aligned around a particular effort. These questions can be used in two different ways - sent out in advance to collect the information or rapidly answered live with a facilitated discussion to create alignment.

- **In two or three sentences, what is the scope of the project you want to accomplish through this fellowship?** (This will describe what the work is)

**Facilitator Note -** This question is useful if the group does not seem clear on their objectives or seems more focused on what RFA wants from them than what they want to accomplish. This also provides the facilitator an opportunity to connect what they are selecting as their focus point to one of the 5 levers.

- **What challenge will this project solve?** (This will capture the need that you hope to address)

**Facilitator Note -** This question is useful if the group has lots of different ideas but they seem disconnected or they are presenting interesting ideas but don't seem to address any particular issue. Need is also the first element of the theory of change.
As you consider the project, is it within your sphere of control or strong influence? If not, how might we adjust the focus of this work to something that is within your control/strong influence? (This will help to narrow the focus or phase the work so that you can see short term successes while building to longer term transformation. This doesn't mean that other needs can't be tackled but they may require engaging additional stakeholders)

Facilitator Note - This question is important if the group wants to take on things that could be transformative but for which they don't have control (or buy in from the right people). While these ideas can be exciting, tackling something outside of the group’s control, unless early on they are able to create buy-in with the right decision-makers, can lead to frustration and lack of engagement.

Establishing Your Goals

Facilitation Note: These are intended to get participants thinking about what success means to them and what it will take to get there, with the understanding that some iteration will be needed to finalize their theory of change. These goals will become the foundation of future program evaluation (if the program achieved desired goals) will help to populate. If the group is already clear on the “what” then the conversation can start here.

- If you flash forward to 6 or 12 months from now, what would the work look like? What would you consider success? Write down 3-4 goals statements.
  - What would be different about the experience of the employer?
  - What would be different about the experience of the worker?

Determining Key Inputs and Outputs

Facilitation Notes: These questions will inform the inputs and outputs sections of the theory of change but also provide another opportunity to verify that the right people are at the table to achieve the desired results.

- Keeping that view of “success” 6-12 months out in mind, write down a few steps that you might take to get there.
  - Is there a specific order to the steps? (If so, begin to put them in order)

- To take these steps, who needs to be involved? Is everyone that needs to participate already part of the team? (This informs the team that it will take to do the work) (Put the org/role/individual name next to each step)
To accomplish those goals, what resources are needed? Do you already have access to the necessary resources? (This addresses the time, talent, and physical resources necessary to carry out the work).

Facilitation Notes: This provides an opportunity to verify if the team has, or is in process to obtain, the necessary resources. If securing the resources is a challenge, they may need to again evaluate whether the scope of the work and the goals they have set out are truly within their control.

Identifying Possible Intermediate and Long Term Outcomes

Facilitator Notes: If the group already has a clear set of goals, and just needs to figure out what and how to measure, they can start here.

- Keeping that view of “success” 6-12 months out in mind, what data might help you understand...
  - Your starting point or baseline
  - The changes that have occurred or will occur as a result of your program (at 6 months)
  - The long term effects of the change (at 12 months or beyond)

(This will inform what is tracked as output and outcomes)
● What data do you currently have access to that might help to tell the story? This might include data related to your processes as well as your programmatic efforts.
  ○ If you don’t currently have access to the needed data, are there other government agencies or employer partners that may “own” or have access to the needed data?
  ○ If the data does not currently exist, is there a feasible way to begin collecting it (e.g., representative survey, adding field to enrollment field, etc.)

For example, if in 12 months I want to have a more diverse set of youth providers that are more representative of those that my organization serves, I might start with looking at what data my organization already collects on the organizations we work with and the ways in which we engage with organizations at different stages.

● Given the data available, what indicators might we use to track change? Identify at least one process and one change indicator for each of your goal statements.
  ○ Process Indicators - Counts or % by category or type, dollar amounts, presence or lack of information
  ○ Change Indicators - pre/post comparisons, % or count increase or decrease

Based on the level of focus (internal vs external) and job quality principles (earnings, benefits, etc) we can share relevant sample indicators. Remind the group it is ok to start small, or to work in phases.

Facilitator notes: This is intended to get the group thinking about what they have already that could potentially be used in a different way. This is important because it will be faster to start with data they have internally than new things that need to be collected and may require a good deal of buy-in/approvals/technical shifts to capture.
Determining How to Get Started

- How might we prioritize these indicators?
  Part of the facilitated discussion about tracking outputs and outcomes will likely need to include a dialogue about prioritization, picking a small set of items that are reasonable to enable the team to actually get started.

- How might we collect the data to support these indicators (approach, frequency)?