

ESRC Centres Competition 2023 - Guidance on Developing a Logic Model or Theory of Change

ESRC has asked applicants to the Centres Competition 2023 to include a logic model or theory of change (ToC) in their case for support. Articulating the outcomes and impacts that a Centre will contribute to in this way helps us to understand how this will be achieved and the difference it will make, and ensure that your proposal is properly supported, resourced and evaluated. This document provides guidance on what ESRC expects, examples of content and additional resources. This is a pilot, and ESRC will evaluate how this requirement works for applicants, reviewers, panels, and ESRC.

Logic models and ToCs set out how a programme or policy is expected to work. They are widely used across UKRI and in government, and can be useful tools in planning programmes, engaging with stakeholders and planning evaluation. They address the following questions:

- What are we trying to change?
- What are we doing to bring about that change?
- How and why do we believe our activities will bring about the change we want to see?

Although ToCs and logic models differ in their content and level of detail, the differences are unimportant and arcane in this context, and a high-level logic model is sufficient. Like a programme plan or a budget, they are planning tools, and their value is as much in the thought and development process as in the resulting document. The choice of tool will depend on many factors including the stage of development and the nature and scale of the expected changes. They should be living documents which can be revised and updated as the Centre develops and will inform ongoing monitoring, evaluation and learning. ESRC does not prescribe a particular format or template, but we would suggest that applicants use the following headings:

- Inputs. What resources will the Centre need? e.g. funding, existing knowledge, data, expertise, networks, partnerships
- Activities. What will the Centre do? e.g. data collection, research, stakeholder engagement
- Outputs. What will the Centre produce or deliver? e.g. new knowledge, publications, data, briefings, events, publicity
- Outcomes. What changes will the Centre contribute to? e.g. citation, policy change, use of methods, public awareness
- Impacts. What will be the wider economic and social effects? e.g. improved productivity, wellbeing, economic/social change

Some generic examples are provided in the table below, but we would expect proposals to include relevant specific detail. It may be helpful to arrange related activities, outputs and outcomes in rows, and to group them by type (e.g. data collection, stakeholder engagement) or by lead or work package.

ESRC Centres should have significant economic and societal impact, but we want to see evidence of thought and realism about how the Centre activities and outputs will contribute to the expected outcomes, and what success will look like. It is not possible to predict or guarantee every impact, but there needs to be clarity about the expected scale and nature of the outcomes, and how and when we will see them. It is helpful to identify outcomes that are likely to be achieved and evidenced during the proposed lifetime of the Centre (e.g. improved evidence or stakeholder knowledge), as well as how these will contribute to wider and/or longer term social and economic impacts.

Outline generic logic model

Inputs What resources are needed? e.g. funding, existing knowledge, data, expertise, networks, partnerships	Activities What will time be spent on? e.g. data collection, research, stakeholder engagement	Outputs What will be produced or delivered? e.g. new knowledge, publications, data, briefings, events, publicity	Outcomes What and who will change? e.g. citation, policy change, use of methods, public awareness	Impacts What will be the wider economic and social effects? e.g. improved productivity, wellbeing, economic/social change
Funding	Collect data	Academic publications	Increased use of data, methods, evidence (by whom?)	Improved policymaking
In kind contributions	Identify evidence gaps & needs	Research agenda	New relationships between research community and others (e.g. policymakers)	Improved services and user outcomes
Existing knowledge & expertise	Engage stakeholders, public, service users	New interdisciplinary partnerships	Increased understanding, confidence, capacity and/or use or evidence by stakeholders (who?)	Welfare benefits
Academic community	Develop comms plan	Reviews & evidence summaries	Improved research evidence of "what works?"	Cost savings
Data & data infrastructure	Deliver events	Blogs, social media etc for public audience	Citation and/or use of evidence in policy & practice	Economic and social change
Policy, practitioner and user communities and networks	Train PhD students	Training activities	Increased engagement of specific stakeholders with academic community	
User skills & knowledge	Develop and agree workplan, comms, engagement, M&E EDI etc plans	Skilled researchers	Increased awareness of and confidence in using academic evidence	
ESRC management & governance	Monitoring, evaluation and learning activities	Engagement between researchers and users/stakeholders	Increase in academic research addressing stakeholder issues/needs	
Project management & governance		New methods	Use of data and/or methods by policymakers and practitioners	
Existing partnerships		Linked datasets	Increased capability and capacity within government to use research evidence	
		Briefings, reports for policy and practitioner audiences	Increase in interdisciplinarity of research	

Additional resources (accessed 4.1.23)

ESRC (2022) Defining impact <https://www.ukri.org/councils/esrc/impact-toolkit-for-economic-and-social-sciences/defining-impact/>

HM Treasury 2022 The Green Book: appraisal and evaluation in central government <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-government> [sic] p17

HM Treasury 2020 The Magenta Book: what to consider when designing an evaluation <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book> p24-6

Public Health England 2018 Guidance: Introduction to logic models <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-in-health-and-well-being-overview/introduction-to-logic-models> (superseded but useful)

Rogers 2017 Using logic models and theories of change better in evaluation <https://www.betterevaluation.org/blog/using-logic-models-theories-change-better-evaluation>

Hills 2010 Logic mapping: hints and tips for better transport evaluations. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/3817/logicmapping.pdf

Brest, P. (2010). The Power of Theories of Change. Available <http://sc4ccm.jsi.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/The-Power-Of-Theories-Of-Change.pdf>

Clark, H and Anderson, A. (November 2004) Theories of Change and Logic Models: Telling Them Apart. Presentation at American Evaluation Association, Atlanta, Georgia. http://www.theoryofchange.org/wp-content/uploads/toco_library/pdf/TOCs_and_Logic_Models_forAEA.pdf

Lamb, B. (February 2011) Campaigning for Change: Learning from the United States. Campaigning Effectiveness, NCVO. https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/practical_support/campaigning/campaigning_for_change_learning_from_the_US.pdf

Mayne, J (2008) Contribution Analysis: An approach to exploring cause and effect, ILAC, https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/resources/guides/contribution_analysis/ilac_brief

Stachowiak, S. (2013) Pathways for Change: 10 Theories to Inform Advocacy and Policy Change Efforts. Seattle, Organizational Research Services <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publication/pathways-for-change-10-theories-to-inform-advocacy-and-policy-change-efforts/>

NCVO (2019) 10 Tips for developing a Theory of Change <https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2019/05/22/10-tips-for-developing-a-theory-of-change/>

NPC (2019) Theory of change in ten steps <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/ten-steps/>