Constructing a Theory of Change for your Grant Proposal

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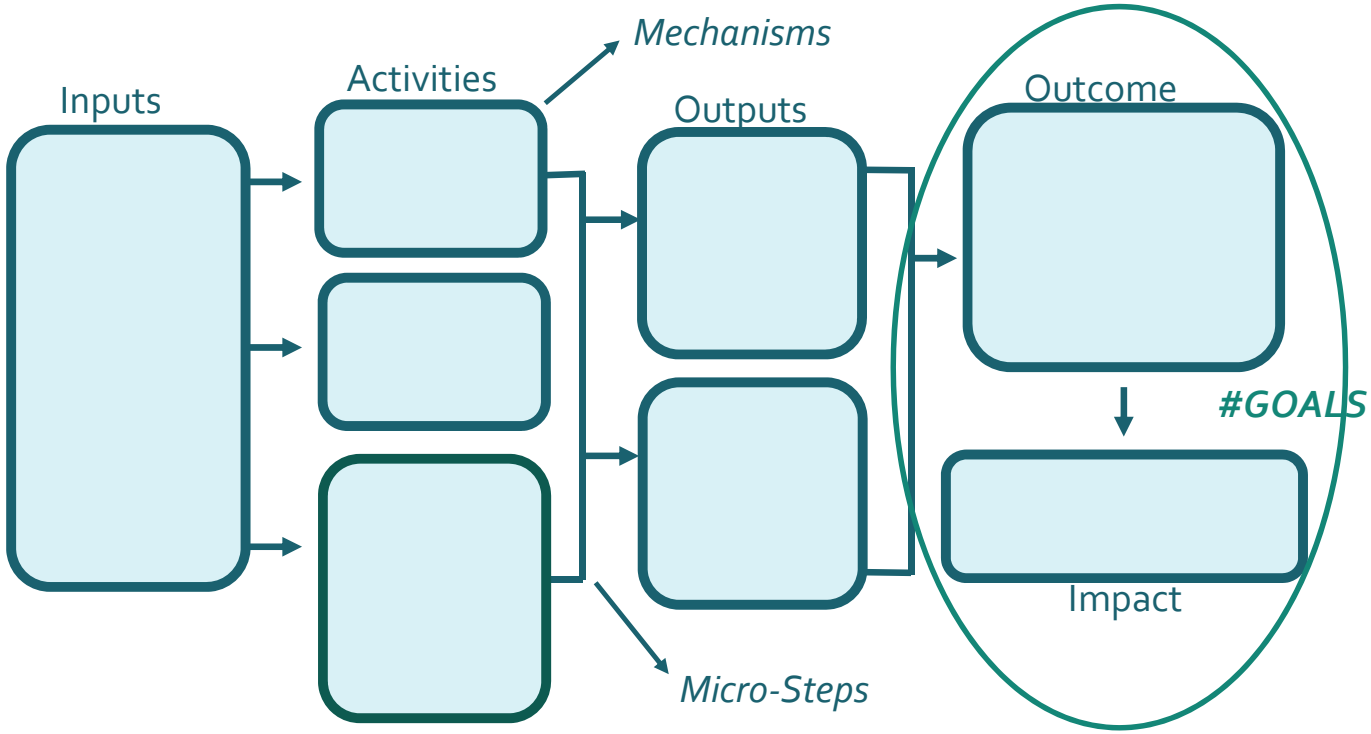
What is a theory of change?

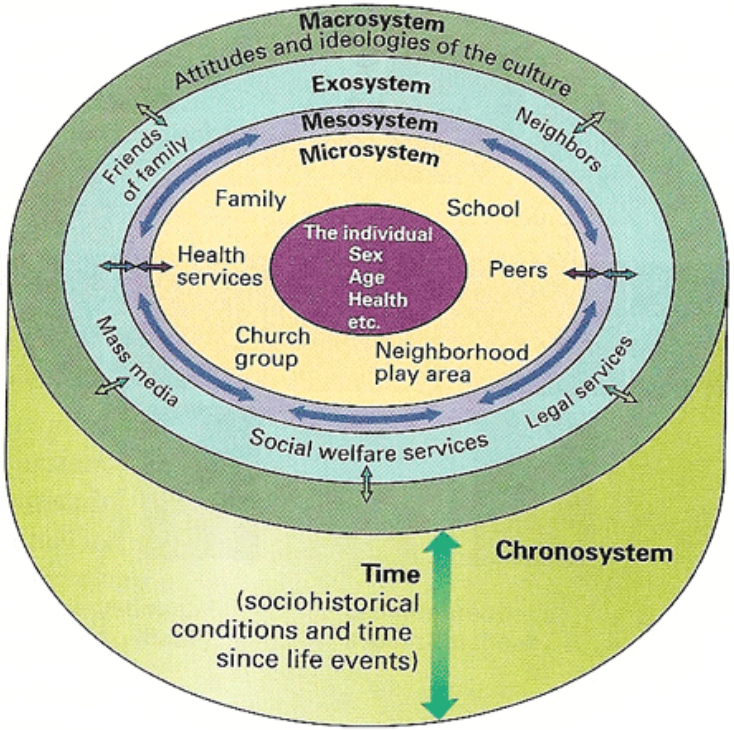
A **Theory of Change** is a framework for thinking about the step-by-step process of an intervention or program necessary to reach a given outcome.



When designing a theory of change, we first identify the **long-term goals** and desired change and work backwards to think about what needs to take place in order for change to occur.

The big picture

The focus is on understanding the **sociocultural factors** and **environmental** context of a given social problem



Model of Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

Source: Pinterest

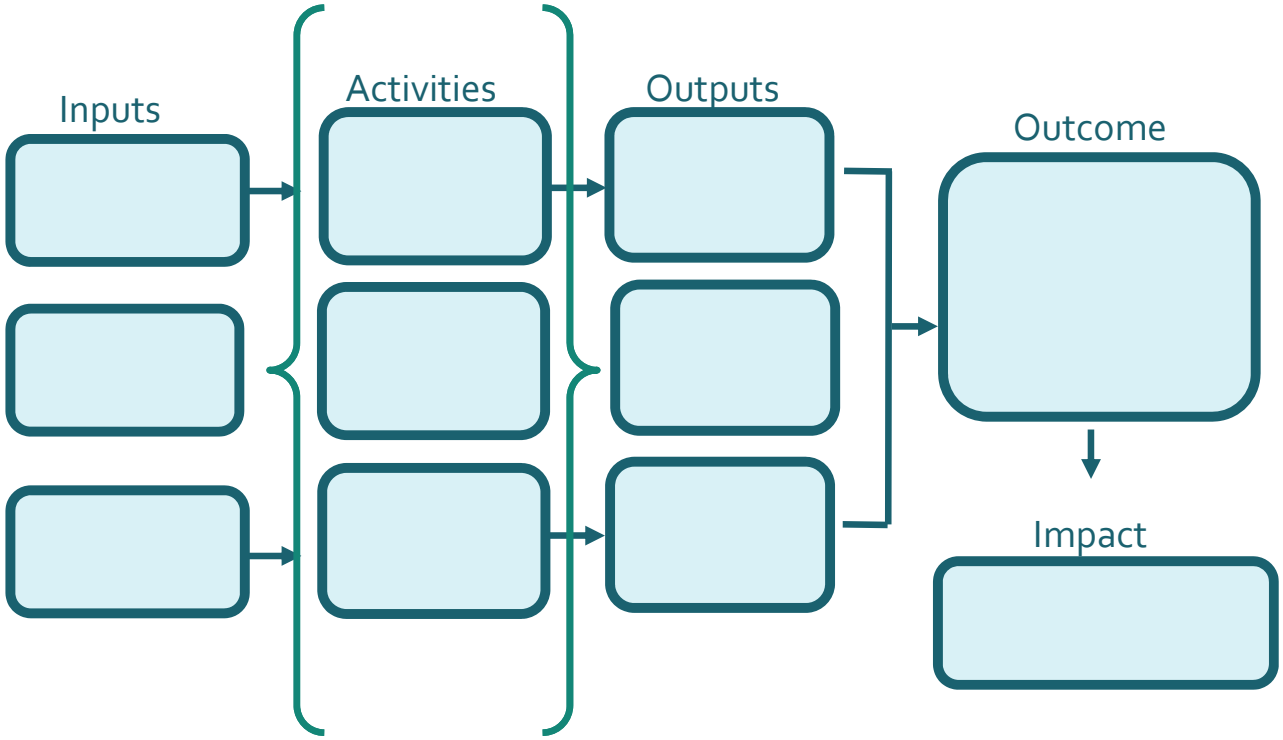
Theory of Change

As a tool, theory of change models engage theory, research, and practice in the planning process of designing an intervention or program.

It provides an opportunity for stakeholders to examine a desired impact through explicitly stated measurable outcomes

"How" & "Why" ?

By constructing a theory of change model, we can provide clear answers to the **how** and **why** an activity will lead to a desired outcome



How will these activities lead to the desired change?
Why will these activities be more effective than other activities?

Let’s define some common terminology by working backwards

Outcomes

- **Outcomes**: how will the intervention or program affect participants attitudes, motivations, skills, behaviors, knowledge, status, or level of functioning? When composing our outcomes, we want to ensure they are "measurable".
- **Goal**: Increase student transfer rates of first-generation and or low income students by 15% over the next five years

measurable?

- **Outcomes***:
  - SRJC will make transfer student success a priority
  - SRJC will create clear programmatic pathways with aligned high-quality instruction
  - SRJC will provide tailored transfer student advising

*Strategies borrowed from "The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges" https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/transfer-playbook-essential-practices.pdf

Outputs

- **Outputs**: the direct **effects** of the program activities on the people you are trying to support/ problem you hope to change.

  Direct v. Indirect Effects
  - Direct effect (students)
  - Indirect effect (course enrollment, faculty, tutoring centers)

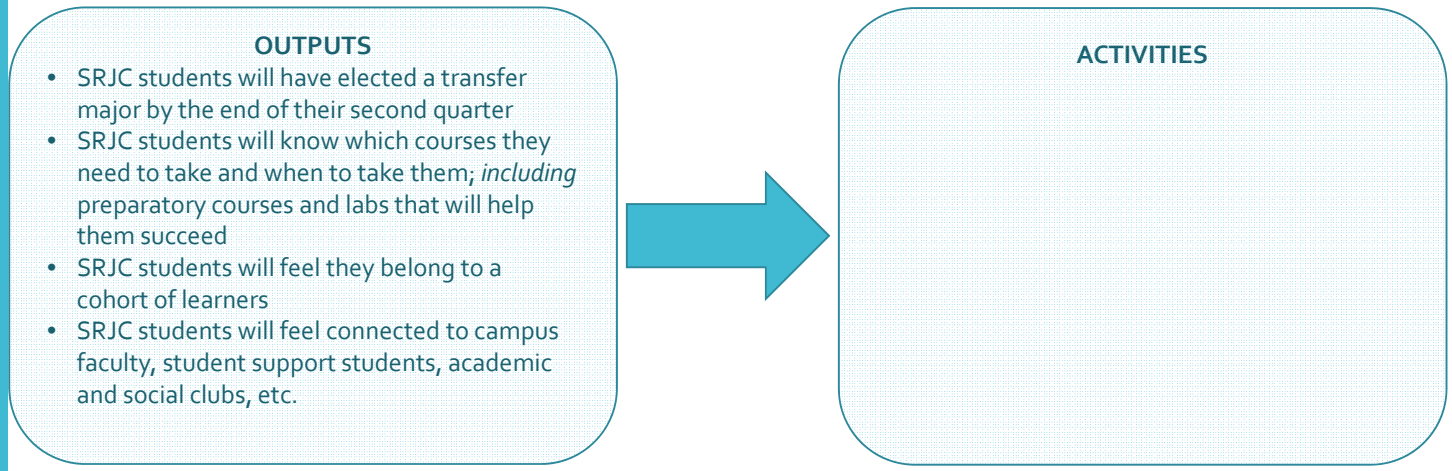
- **Goal**: Increase student transfer rates of first-generation and or low income students by 15% over the next five years

- **Outputs**:
  - SRJC students will have elected a transfer major by the end of their second quarter
  - SRJC students will know which courses they need to take and when to take them; including preparatory courses and labs that will help them succeed
  - SRJC students will feel they belong to a cohort of learners
  - SRJC students will feel connected to campus faculty, student support students, academic and social clubs, etc.

How are these measurable?

Activities

- **Activity**: the specific actions, processes, tools, events, and technologies that are integral to the successful operation of an intervention or program
- **Goal**: Increase student transfer rates of first-generation and or low income students by 15% over the next five years
- What activities need to take place to ensure we meet our outputs?



In your narrative go into detail about each activity, what it is, how it will lead to your given output/outcomes. Be sure to cite research to support each activities. Include a brief overview of how you will measure the effectiveness of each activity.

Activities (step 1)

- Step 1: Identify activities that need to take place to ensure we meet outputs

OUTPUTS

- SRJC students will have elected a transfer major by the end of their second quarter
- SRJC students will know which courses they need to take and when to take them; *including* preparatory courses and labs that will help them succeed
- SRJC students will feel they belong to a cohort of learners
- SRJC students will feel connected to campus faculty, student support students, academic and social clubs, etc.

ACTIVITIES (STEP 1)*

- Work collaboratively with colleagues from partner institutions to create major-specific program maps.
- Provide rigorous instruction and other high-quality academic experiences to prepare students for four-year programs.
- Clearly articulate students' transfer options and help them determine, as early as possible, their field of interest, major, and preferred transfer destination.
- Continuously monitor student progress, provide frequent feedback, and intervene quickly when students are off-track.
- Help students access the financial resources necessary to achieve their goals.
- Assign advisors and clearly communicate essential information to prospective transfer students.
- Replicate elements of the first-year experience for transfer students.

*Strategies and Essential Practices borrowed from "The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges" https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/transfer-playbook-essential-practices.pdf

- Step 2: Flesh out activities into tangible "action" items

ACTIVITIES (STEP 1)

a. Work collaboratively with colleagues from partner institutions to create major-specific program maps.
b. Provide rigorous instruction and other high-quality academic experiences to prepare students for four-year programs.
c. Clearly articulate students' transfer options and help them determine, as early as possible, their field of interest, major, and preferred transfer destination.
d. Continuously monitor student progress, provide frequent feedback, and intervene quickly when students are off-track.
e. Help students access the financial resources necessary to achieve their goals.
f. Assign advisors and clearly communicate essential information to prospective transfer students.
g. Replicate elements of the first-year experience for transfer students.

ACTIVITIES (STEP 2)

a. **Instructional Teams**: Establish regular interdisciplinary teams comprised of faculty, counselors, and administrators to create major-specific programs. These teams will meet monthly to create programs, and will collect data on student enrollment and progress on a quarterly basis.
b. **Professional Development**: Contract professional development training institutes to help faculty to incorporate best practices for working with first generation students. *Include release time/PGI credit opportunities to incentivize attendance.*
c. **Outreach**: Create program maps, hold regular workshops on transferring, have counselor's visit gateway courses, incorporate transfer information into student orientation, discuss transfer options at high school outreach, advertise transfer options within the greater community.
d. **Institutional Research**: Collect data via student focus groups and surveys to learn more about how to support students; Institutionalize intervention teams that can quickly connect with students falling off-track
e. **Financial Aid**: Offer multiple financial literacy workshops; Utilize a digital notification system that will remind students to fill out financial aid/apply for scholarships.
f. **Counseling**: Institutionalize quarterly counseling sessions for students with a consistent counselor; establish transfer progress reports for students to utilize.
g. **Student Services**: Coordinate both formal and informal social events for students to attend, increase financial and support for student clubs, increase funding for lecture series, etc.

Resources/ Inputs

- **Inputs**: the resources that are in place/need to be in place in order to facilitate the activities of an intervention or program.

- What resources need to be in place to ensure the activities will be successful?

  - Human capital: *personnel (do they have the appropriate training & time?)*
  - Financial resources: *district funding, donations, categorical funding*
  - Organizational systems and structures: *buildings and facilities, community partners, complimentary services and programs, media and outreach, administrative leadership and strategic outlook, supportive cultural climate at all levels, etc.*

In your narrative, highlight how you will be building on existing resources.

- What resources are already in place?
- What resources will be developed or need to be acquired using grant funding?

Let’s look at the big picture and the big details

Impact

- **Impact**: on a societal level, how will the intervention or program affect organizational, community, and/or system level changes?

Why is this work important?

- **Goal**: Increase student transfer rates of first-generation and or low income students by 15% over the next five years

- What is the impact?:
- **Low income & first generation students earning bachelor degrees at a greater proportion →**
  - break the cycle of poverty-higher paying jobs;
  - opportunities to engage in critical social, economic, and political discourse;
  - personal empowerment;
  - an educated workforce that will contribute to research and innovation across all industries

Assumptions

- **Assumptions**: the underlying principles that are based on theory, empirical evidence or experience that shape how and why an intervention or program is designed.

Let's brainstorm some assumptions…

Remember there are assumptions at every step of your TOC.

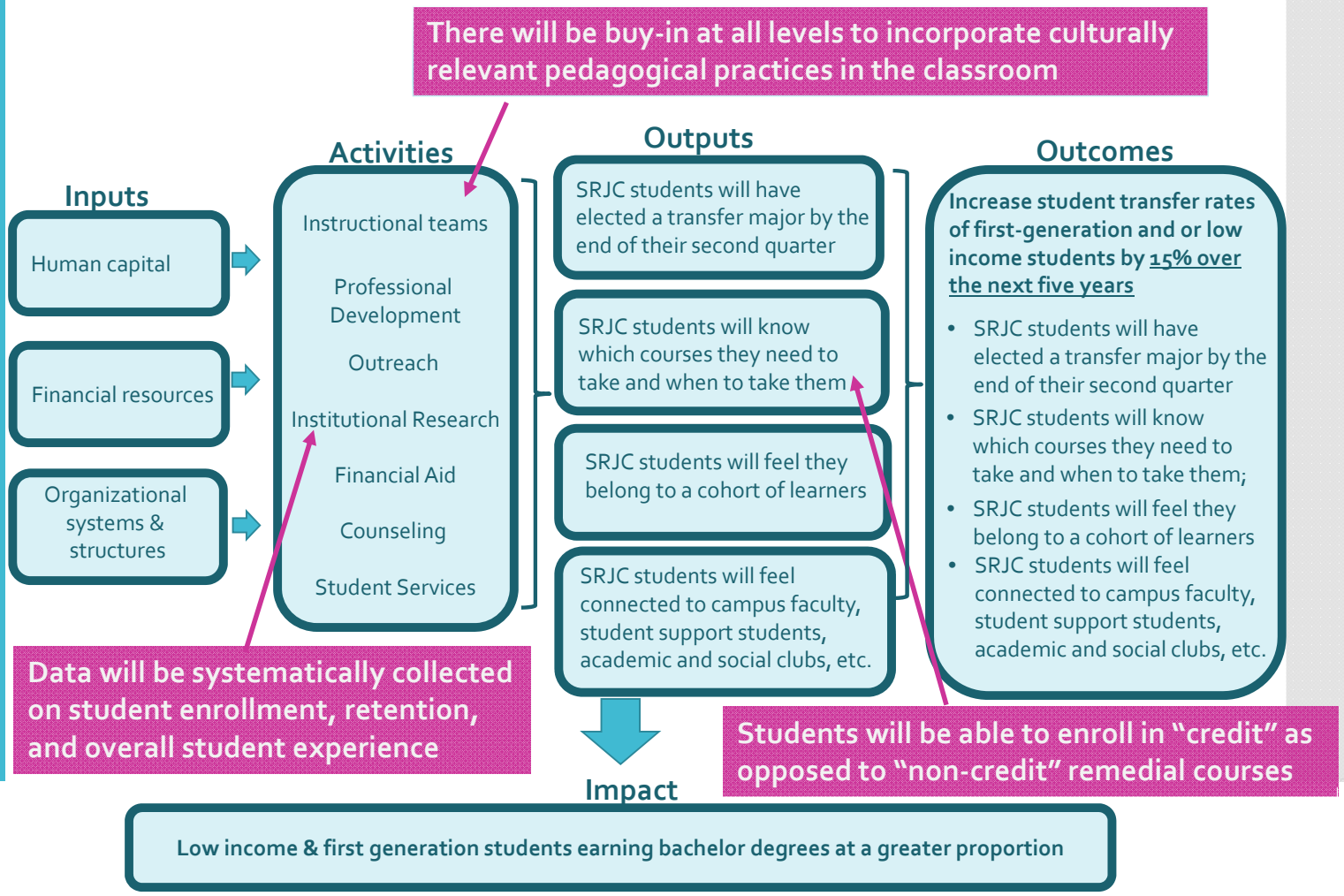
Assumption: There will be buy-in at all levels (administrative, faculty, staff) to create clear programmatic pathways and to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy into high quality academic instruction

Assumption: Students will have increased opportunities to enroll in "credit" courses as opposed to non-credit "remedial" courses that may be discouraging

Assumption: Data will be systematically collected on student enrollment, retention, and the greater student experience. Data will be consulted to improve existing programs.

Overview

By using a **Theory of Change** model, we are able to visually link assumptions, activities, and outcomes to measurable short-term outcomes and long-term impact



References

- Harvard Graduate School of Education_ H331 Theory of Change Presentation (section) 10.21.14
- https://www.wickedproblems.com/5_theory_of_change.php
- Strategies and Essential Practices borrowed from "The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges" https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/transfer-playbook-essential-practices.pdf