

Theory-based evaluation: Options and choices for practitioners

SRA Online Course

A well designed theory-based evaluation (TBE) helps unpick the often unclear expectations and assumptions which underlie new policy, programmes and initiatives. It goes beyond measuring what comes out of an intervention to better understand what works (and what doesn't), and why, and what may be holding it back from working better. TBE is increasingly seen as well suited to impact evaluation in complex, multi-influence, circumstances.

Although not a new approach, TBE has been held back by confusion about the different TBE approaches, and a lack of practitioner knowledge about how to apply these promising methods. The course is aimed at participants who have some experience of 'traditional' approaches to impact evaluation who want to know more about how and where TBE fits in, options for applying TBE and how to make best use of it. It will help participants to:

- Be aware of the origins of TBE and its relationship to other evaluation approaches
- Understand the use of TBE in complex settings and in unpicking expectations and assumptions underpinning policy, programmes and initiatives
- Be aware of how to make the case for applying TBE in appropriate contexts and by better understanding different causal circumstances behind initiatives
- Understand the necessary structure of a credible, and appropriate *theory of change* (ToC) and how to develop this with appropriate stakeholder input and engagement
- Recognise how to apply the content of the ToC to a fit for purpose TBE design and a range of analytical methods for assessing TBE evidence
- Appreciate how 'counterfactual' evidence can be built into TBE approaches to assess causality of interventions in complex settings.

By the end of the course, participants will have been introduced to the principles and practice of TBE. They will also better understand where TBE can add value to evaluation approaches and the main options and choices for putting these into practice

Course schedule: The course is organised over two intensive 'online' half-days as below.

Theory Based Evaluation (Online): Timetable

Day 1

Time	Activity/session
09.20+	Join Zoom 'waiting room' for Part 1
09.30-10.30	Session 1.1: Welcome and Introductions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction to course• Participants self-introductions (roundtable)• What is TBE; how is it different; where does it 'best' fit
10.30-11.15	Session 1.2: Making the case for TBE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding complexity in evaluation contexts• Unpicking causality
11.15-11.30	SHORT BREAK

11.30-12.15	<p>Session 1.3: Putting together a theory platform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using a layered approach to theory building • Content of a Theory of Change; Setting up a practical 'CEAsR' profile • Q & A; 1st plenary
12.15-13.00	BREAKOUT EXERCISE 1 (12.30-13.00); feedback and discussions (13.00-13.15)
13.00-13.15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing observations from Parts 1.1 to 1.3; • Briefing on Day 2. • CLOSE OF DAY 1

Day 2

Time	Activity/session
09.20+	Join Zoom 'waiting room' for Part 3
09.30 – 09.45	Introduction to part 2; recap and review
09.45-10.30-	<p>Session 2.1 Co-production and engagement in TBE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrating collaborative approaches in TBE • Co-production and engagement; why, how and when; overcoming pitfalls • Q & A; 2nd plenary
10.30-11.15	BREAKOUT EXERCISE 2 (10.30-11.00); feedback and discussions (11.00-11.15)
11.15-11.30	SHORT BREAK
11.30-12.45	<p>Session 2.2: Putting TBE 'theory' into Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combining the conceptual and empirical • From theory to evidence needs (and collection) • Analytical techniques (and scrutiny) for TBE • Q & A; 3rd plenary
12.45-13.00	Session 2.3: Review; Reading and guidance on TBE
13.00	Close of course