

Developing a Logic Model for Your Grant Application

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When applying for large, competitive grants, particularly from federal funders, you will often be asked to submit a logic model. This is especially true for complex programs with many moving parts. Logic models are an important piece to any application because they offer a visual roadmap for funders that allows them to see how the resources you already have will be put into action, what those actions will produce, and how the results will create meaningful change with their investment. In other words, it illustrates the “cause-and-effect” relationship between the work you intend to do and the outcomes you promise.

But logic models are not just for funders. They are also invaluable tools for your own organization. They can guide project planning, help you monitor progress, adapt to challenges, and give project partners a clear picture of how everything will fit together. They can help keep your project moving forward and be used as a reference point for when questions arise. This article will cover the key components of a logic model as well as best practices for creating one that strengthens both your grant application and your project’s success.

COMPONENTS OF A LOGIC MODEL

There is no one “correct” format for a logic model. Some organizations use tables; others prefer flowcharts or diagrams. It all depends on the complexity of the project and the audience. What matters most is that the following core components are represented and organized logically:

1. Problem statement

The problem statement is the challenge that the grant project is trying to address. This should be a targeted statement that highlights the need for your program. A well-written problem statement anchors your entire logic model, ensuring that every resource, activity, and outcome is tied directly to solving that challenge.

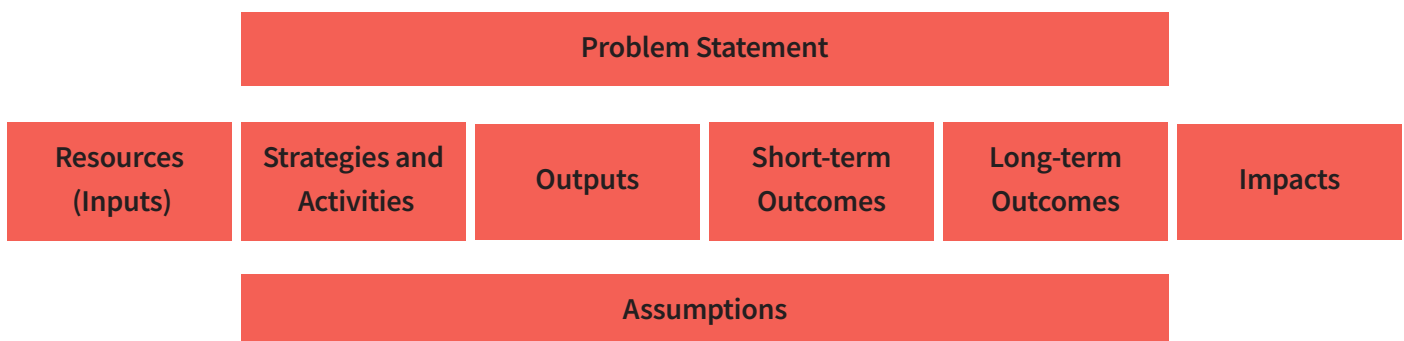
Pro Tip: Consider what is already known about this problem by looking at any available research or evidence on the issue.

2. Inputs

Inputs are the resources you bring to the table. These can include:

- **Nonmaterial items:** such as staff, community support, and specialized knowledge.
- **Tangible resources:** such as facilities, existing materials and equipment, or funding.

Think of inputs as everything you already have at your disposal before new grant dollars are applied.



3. Activities

Activities are the actions or strategies your program will conduct. Because they are action-oriented, they should start with strong verbs (e.g., *conduct* workshops, *develop* curriculum, *provide* training). Keep the statements brief and SMART. It is not necessary to include every step, date, or method here—that level of detail will go in your proposal narrative or work plan.

Remember SMART Goals should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound!

4. Outputs

Outputs are the direct products of your activities. These should be tangible deliverables that can be counted. For example:

- Number of workshops held
- Hours of professional development delivered
- Webinars hosted
- Materials created or distributed

Outputs show what your activities will produce with the grant funding. Unlike inputs, they would not exist without the project.

5. Outcomes

Outcomes demonstrate the change or benefit your program creates. They answer the “so what?” of your work and show why your project matters. Outcomes should also be SMART and are often organized into three levels depending on the complexity of the grant and the length of the project period:

- **Short-term outcomes:** These are the immediate results of a project activity (e.g., knowledge gained, skills improved, attitudes shifted, etc.)
- **Long-term/Intermediate outcomes:** These should represent results that are expected to develop from ongoing participation in a project activity (e.g., behavior changes, adoption of new practices, improved collaboration, etc.) It is important to keep in mind the length of your project, as this will help determine the type of outcome.
- **Outcomes/Impact:** These are the long-term, transformative results from conducting your project’s activities after the life of the grant. They are more aspirational in nature and will depend on long-term implementation and external conditions. (e.g., sustainability, systemic change, improved community well-being, etc.)

The first three components—inputs, activities, outputs—cover the “doing” side of your project. Outcomes should capture the “change” you expect to see.

6. Assumptions and External Factors

These elements often sit outside the main flow of the model but are important to acknowledge:

- **Assumptions** are the conditions you expect to be true for your program to succeed (e.g., participants will attend sessions, staff will remain available, partners will stay engaged).
- **External factors** are influences beyond your control that can affect the success of your project (e.g., policy changes, economic shifts, other community initiatives).

Including these components shows reviewers that you understand your project’s broader context and have thought realistically about what could affect its outcomes.

WHAT MAKES A STRONG LOGIC MODEL?

A high-quality logic model should be clear, concise, and easy to read. Reviewers and stakeholders should be able to grasp the essentials without digging through the rest of your application. That said, the model should not be so detailed that it becomes overwhelming or spills onto multiple pages. Ideally, it can stand alone as a one-page snapshot of your project. Think of it as a “big picture” tool, not a place for every task or timeline detail. Those specifics can live in your project narrative or in a separate work plan.

When discerning between how much detail you should include, double-check each component’s logic through if/then statements. If a project component cannot be answered through an if/then statement, then you will want to check that you are accounting for all inputs, activities, and any barriers. Each activity should clearly answer “why is this necessary to the success of the project?” If it cannot, then it may need to be revised—or left out of the model.

TIPS FOR BUILDING A STRONG LOGIC MODEL

- **Balance detail and clarity:** Provide enough information to show the project's logic but avoid cramming in every detail.
- **Use “if/then” thinking:** Double-check the flow—if we have these inputs, then we can do these activities; if we do these activities, then we will produce these outputs; if we produce these outputs, then we can achieve these outcomes.
- **Engage stakeholders early:** Involve program staff, external partners, and evaluators in the design process. Their input can help establish shared goals, strategies, and metrics, making the model more accurate and practical.
- **Organize purposefully:** Choose a format and sequence that highlights the logical flow. Whether table or diagram, clarity is key.
- **Define your problem and goal:** A clear, well-defined goal statement will guide your entire model and ensure alignment across the various components.

- **Work backwards:** Instead of starting with your inputs, start with your outcomes. Identifying your goal and the change you want to make first can help guide your project planning and the steps you will need to take to achieve those outcomes.
- **Consider program evaluations early on:** While logic models are separate from evaluation planning and design, they can help you decide what to measure, which questions to ask, what indicators to track, and when to gather information.
- **Keep it flexible:** Logic models should be living documents that can be updated and referred to throughout the life of a program.

A logic model is more than just a grant requirement—it is a powerful planning and communication tool. Done well, it can strengthen your proposal, build confidence among funders, and serve as a guide for implementation and evaluation. Whether you are new to grant writing or a seasoned professional, investing time in developing a clear and thoughtful logic model will pay off—both in your application and in the success of your project.



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