
GOLDILOCKS TOOLKIT

Theory of Change: Laying the Foundation for Right-Fit Data Collection



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FEBRUARY 2016

Acknowledgments: The Goldilocks toolkit was authored by Mary Kay Gugerty, Dean Karlan, and Dana Welch, with editing and design by the IPA Communications Team (David Bettscheck, Laura Burke, Jennifer Coover, Heidi McAnally-Lind, Megan McGinnis).



Goldilocks Toolkit: Theory of Change

Theory of Change: Laying the Foundation for Right-Fit Data Collection

The first step in designing a right-fit data collection strategy is to create a solid theory of change. A theory of change is a clear visual map that represents how a program will make an impact on the world. It illustrates what goes into a program, what gets done, and how the world is expected to change as a result.

A theory of change supports right-fit data collection in several ways: by pointing organizations to the elements of the program they need to track to ensure it is operating as planned; by providing a foundation for impact measurement by differentiating the outputs to be tracked from the outcomes to be measured using a credible counterfactual; and by generating credible research questions.

The Goldilocks Initiative does not offer a complete manual on building a theory of change—many resources exist for that—but here we break down the basics of creating a

theory of change and explain how a clear theory, together with the CART principles, can provide the foundation for a strong, right-fit system of data collection.

January 05, 2016