

4 Returns Theory of Change template

If you want to set up your own 4 Returns landscape project, it is wise to sit down with your team and develop a shared and long-term pathway of change for your landscape. This is also known as a Theory of Change. It is a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why the desired change is expected to happen within a particular context. It fills in the “missing middle” between what a program or change initiative does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to desired goals being achieved. It does this by first identifying the desired long-term goals and then working back from these to identify all the conditions (outcomes) that must be in place (and how these relate causally) for the goals to occur.

This template can help you get started and can be used individually or in a workshop setting.

How to use it?

1. Start by noting down which of the **4 losses** occur in your landscape: is there a loss of inspiration, loss of social capital, loss of natural capital, and a loss of financial capital? Specify.
2. In the right-most column, write down the long-term **4 Returns impacts** that you would like to achieve by solving the problems underlying those losses.
3. Now we start working from the 4 losses towards these 4 returns impacts. Write down the **target groups** which are most affected by the issue that you've identified and who you hope to help with your work – this could be a small community group or a large organisation, or both. Then think about where to reach this audience and start your work. There could be a place, a person or a thing that will be your first **entry point**.
4. Try to think of some **interventions** that you can take to make changes – like creating partnerships, showcasing new practices or making tweaks to existing processes. Try to keep these as action-oriented as possible.
5. What are the **measurable impacts** of your work? These could be measurable results that you can show to other people to clarify how your work is making a difference.
6. What will be your **wider benefits**? These could be any other positive change or outcome in the landscape brought about by your activities, that may be harder to measure.
7. As you fill each box in the worksheet, it is critical to also reflect on **key assumptions** (on the bottom) that underpin these steps in your work. This helps you to spot potential risks or connections between the different projects.

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Start by noting down the main problem you want to solve, and also your long term vision on the change you want to accomplish. Then walk through the steps from left to right to clarify your priorities.



What are the current losses in the landscape?

What are your key target groups & how will you reach them?

Which activities are needed to bring about change?

What are the measurable effects of your work?

What are the wider benefits of your work?

What are the long-term impacts?

A vertical panel on the left side of the template, enclosed in a dark red border. It contains four icons stacked vertically: a sunburst at the top, two people with speech bubbles, a leaf with a bug, and a building at the bottom.

An empty vertical panel with a yellow border, intended for notes on target groups and reach.

An empty vertical panel with a yellow border, intended for notes on activities needed for change.

An empty vertical panel with a yellow border, intended for notes on measurable effects.

An empty vertical panel with a yellow border, intended for notes on wider benefits.

A vertical panel on the right side of the template, enclosed in a dark red border. It contains four icons stacked vertically: a sunburst at the top, two people with speech bubbles, a leaf with a bug, and a building at the bottom.



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