

Assignment 3: A Theory-Based Policy Strategy to Address Your PIN

You may work on this individually or as a small group with a maximum four members, preferably three. If you work individually, I strongly encourage you to partner with someone to review your work on this assignment.

Your Objectives in This Assignment

Your objective in this assignment is to demonstrate your ability to apply **ONE social theory to develop a policy-based strategy for addressing your PIN at the community level**. Key words to keep always in mind as you prepare your submission are (1) social theory, (2) a strategy based on policy (not project, not intervention), and (3) a strategy for the community as a whole, not just some population within the community. The core of your solution is a theory-based strategy to achieve policies that can be implemented by communities (towns, cities, counties, provinces, parishes, etc.) and policies that affect the entire community, like a local minimum wage policy that affects everyone and every organization of any type who pays people to do anything. It will affect *everyone in the community*, from the poorest person who will be glad to get a pay raise to the biggest business in the community who will face increased labor costs. You will make one poster that shows the key features of your strategy, deliver a five-minute oral presentation of your strategy (recorded on zoom), and create a two page (single spaced, maximum) document that clearly explains the logic of your strategy and the potential benefits and potential risks or disadvantages that the strategy will have on the community as a whole.

The Setting

You have identified a PIN in a community that you and others want to address (your PIN). You have assumed a leadership position in a small group of activists who have developed a theory-based strategy for addressing the PIN. The immediate objective is to get a larger number of citizens, representing the community as a whole, to become involved in your effort to convince community leaders, especially elected officials, to bring specific policies to vote in the local governing bodies, such as the city council or county board of commissioners. Your opening appeal to the public is a one-half day workshop where you will present your overall strategy for addressing the PIN and engage citizens in a robust discussion of the implications of your strategy (both benefits and potential negatives) and get citizens to commit to starting a systematic effort to convince local elected representatives and leaders, including leaders in the private sector, to develop and support specific policy alternatives that are consistent with your strategy. You will not make the specific policies – that is the job of the citizenry who get involved and the elected officials. Your focus is on the theory-based strategy that will inform those policies. You have good publicity for a community workshop where you will present your strategy to the citizens who attend. You are expecting 50-75 participants. You have tried to secure involvement from public and private agencies, but your major concern has been to mobilize a base of community residents representing the community as a whole, not just sub-sets of the community. You will lead and facilitate the workshop. You will make the opening presentation, present your long-term goals, and lay out your theory-based strategy for achieving these goals. Ultimately you want to walk out of this event with a core body of citizens who have agreed to work with you by becoming a member of Citizens United to [you fill in the rest].

Important Requirement for this Assignment. Your ToC must address community-level change, not individual level change. That means that the long-term goals you hope to achieve occur at the community level – they will affect individuals, but the accumulated change is such that the undesirable outcomes that you describe in your PIN are reduced for the community as a whole. Many programs include the word “community” in their programs, but have no strategy that will get beyond individual level behavioral change. Many educational programs, for example, focus on individual behavioral change and are based on theories like the theory of planned behavior. That theory *assumes* that

individuals make behavioral decisions “in their own minds” through a rational choice thinking process in which the person weighs the benefits and costs of changing a behavior. That theory cannot be used to understand or plan for community-level change because there is no construct in the theory that leads us to understand the broader environmental constraints that produce and maintain undesirable behaviors. For example, health education programs can tell individuals what to do to be healthier, and can even convince people that they should engage in those behaviors, but they do not offer any mechanism to eliminate the many barriers to healthful behaviors. Those barriers will vary by community. In poor communities, for example, there are apt to be few facilities for exercise and walking or jogging may be unsafe, especially for women and children. Access to health care, especially preventative health care, is almost always very low in poor communities -- few doctor’s offices, few clinics. The quality foods needed to support good health are also unavailable – and so forth as we have discussed all semester. **Do not use an individual or family change theory as the model for your ToC. That is not acceptable. Focus on theory applied at the level of larger social units that are embedded in communities – like schools, medical facilities, economic opportunities, and infrastructure.** In many cases, individual level change *is* a necessary pre-condition for achieving larger scale change. For example, network theory would include increased trust among individual citizens and increased awareness of individual citizens of community-based PINs as precursors to the development of larger scale community change – like development of neighborhood improvement associations or changes in community funding for schools. You need to identify precursors in your ToC, but these are just steps in the process of reaching the goals and are not the focus of this assignment or of community-based development work.

Your Theory of Change (ToC)

- Create a theory of change, presented in graphic form, that identifies
 - The nature and extent of the PIN your ToC will address (taken from Assignment 1)
 - The key community-level outcomes (goals) that the policies you argue for must achieve in order to address the PIN over the intermediate to long-term
 - Key assumptions that underlie the theory and therefore the policy strategy you have selected
 - Indicators (what you could potentially measure) to determine progress toward goals and obstacles due to roadblocks or unanticipated events or conditions
- An informative document, a briefing, written in simple language that the general citizen can understand – something that you can give to people to take home and read. Your briefing must:
 - Explain the logic of your ToC. Put a graphic of the ToC in the document if you want so that you can refer to the specific components of the theory that can create change most readily
 - Summarize the research-based evidence that support your strategic approach
 - Identify both the potential benefits *for the community* and the most salient potential pitfalls or roadblocks *for the community* that could prevent success or even increase risks of detrimental outcomes
- A five-minute (maximum) oral presentation recorded on Zoom that you use to explain your ToC to the citizens present at your meeting.

Theory of Change

You will present a Theory of Change (called a ToC by most of us who use them) to this audience. A ToC is not itself a social theory. It is the application of social theory to a specific problem, issue or need in a specific context. The constructs in a social theory are the key building blocks of the change process envisioned in the ToC -- the *strategy designed to achieve intermediate and long-term change*. You build a theory of change by identifying the desired long-term outcomes. Clear community-level changes are the most critical initial step in developing a ToC. Once you have clear objectives for change, you apply a social theory to identify (1) critical components in the strategy, the (2) key actors in implementing the

strategy, (3) key assumptions that underlie the theory and therefore the strategy you have selected, and (4) the most salient potential pitfalls or roadblocks that could prevent success.

ToCs are almost always presented in graphic form with an accompanying document that explains the causal logic and provides the research-based evidence that the ToC is effective in addressing community-based developmental goals. The graphic for your presentation will be a poster. The graphic for the poster must be focused on change. Do not present a graphic of overlapping circles (like the one often accompanying presentations of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory), starburst types one big circle or square in the middle and many little circles or squares around it feeding into the single big outcome in the middle, or triangles or circles where each construct is connected to two others and the whole model is basically "one endless set of connections." You are using theory to achieve specific goals. Your ToC has to provide a "path" that shows how this will be accomplished. If you do this well, you can explain the key components in your strategy with "if – then" statements, ending with the desired outcome. The three documents linked below all provide good examples of graphic presentations of ToCs (Aspen Institute, USAID, and Evaluation Canada documents). Some of them are very elaborate. Yours can be simpler, but it must include the key components of the ToC listed above.

Examples of Community Level ToCs – Including the Graphic Presentations

This [document from the United States Agency for International Development](#) provides many examples of ToCs used to achieve larger scale change. [This publication from Evaluation Canada](#) also provides some good examples. While specific activities or interventions are needed to implement the strategy and are identified in a completed ToC, I **do not expect that level of detail in this assignment**. I do expect you to identify the *general types of interventions* you would employ in your ToC. These interventions embody the key constructs in the theory and the kind of interventions that are appropriate will differ by social theory. For example, if you adopt network theory as the basis for your ToC, some key *kinds of interventions* would be those that would strengthen networks in the community. Networks have been shown to increase community social control and thereby reduce crime, increase citizens' willingness to become active in preventing victimization, improve employment, improve schools, and enhance community activism. If, on the contrary, you use structural theory – specifically opportunity structure theory – the focus will be on the environment in which people live and how that influences their behavior and ultimately how the combination of environment and behavior affects life for all in the community. The kinds of interventions would be changes in the environment – like increasing access to healthy, affordable food, creating protected spaces for exercise and recreation, bringing employment opportunities to the community by offering incentives to companies to locate in the community. This document [Community Change: Theories, Practice and Evidence by the Aspen Institute](#) provides many examples of the relationships between social theory and theories of change. I do not expect detailed lists of activities, but **you need to show that you understand the nature of the interventions that would be required to make your ToC work, based on the social theory from which it is derived**. Do not get down to the level of "Building more parks or set up a food bank."

The Briefing Paper (maximum 2 pages, single spaced)

ToCs are also usually accompanied by an explanatory document – a briefing paper. It should be in simple language that anyone can understand. It should explain the logic embodied in the ToC -- basically explain in plain language the social theory that you use to develop the ToC. You need to make the causal chain clear. This is a chain of If-Then statement that result from the social theory that underlies the ToC. For example, the theory of social capital the constructs like bridging, bonding, consummatory and instrumental social capital. One could develop a strategy for addressing some community-based ToCs from social capital theory. The overall strategy would be to develop and mobilize social capital to address a PIN. The ToC would have to incorporate these forms of social capital and tie each to an If-Then statement. "IF leaders of civic organizations in the community can develop relationships of trust and mutual reciprocity with leaders in other communities who have more

experience and resources to address the PIN, THEN the community can gain access to resources for development that are not present and cannot be created internally.” I do not ask you to go the next step and say *how* this might occur – specific activities like joining regional organizations where leaders from the community can interact with leaders from other communities. Your document should be brief! This is a document that ordinary people with busy lives should be able to read – easy to read and not so long that they give up. There is a lengthy example [ToC of a narrative available from the Advocacy Initiative](#). This one is long, but it includes all the components clearly labelled. This is a short but useful: [How to write a Theory of Change](#). Think of it as what you would hand people AFTER the presentation. Something for them to go home and read after you have captured their attention. You do NOT hand out the narrative prior to presenting your ideas. That’s why I object so much to the usual PPT presentation – it’s boring because it’s a narrative, not a graphic presentation.

The Narrative (oral, recorded presentation using the graphic of your ToC for reference)

The narrative should “follow” the graphic presentation in terms of logic and order because it is the basis for your public presentation of the ToC. The narrative is your “cheat sheet” for your opening presentation of your ideas. I always use my briefing paper to create literally a set of very succinct “talking points” that I have to make during my presentation. Make sure you make this list of talking points. Five minutes is not much time to speak and you want to give an *overview of the strategy* and a *succinct presentation of why your strategy is a good one*.

Submit four things for this assignment

YourLastName(s)_Poster

YourLastName(s)_Briefing

YourLastName(s)_Narrative

YourLastName(s)_Questions

Questions

1. Critique your choice of a theoretical basis for your ToC. Are you still convinced this is the best theoretical approach for understanding your PIN and developing a strategy to address the PIN? If not, what aspects of the theoretical approach or perspective you chose do you think are weak? (1 page maximum, single spaced)
2. Examine the ToC itself. Do your best to identify the flaws in your application of theory. (1 page maximum, single spaced)

Negative responses to Q3 and Q4 will not affect your grade. It really is one time when you can just say “No.” I use this input to develop this course over time. It has proven invaluable to me over the years.

3. Has this course changed how you view community-based problems and the process of developing solutions to them? If so, please provide some examples of these changes.
4. Has this course changed how you view theory and will approach using theory in your own work and/or in developing your own ideas about the events that happen around us and the social processes you see around you? If possible, please provide some examples.

Criteria	Possible Points	Your Points
Followed all instructions, including use of APA Style	10	
The Poster	40	

<p>Included all required components</p> <p>Was well organized and easy for an observer to follow</p> <p>Used arrows, shading, color contrast and other techniques to highlight the key components in the ToC</p> <p>Good font size, legible from a distance, short summative statements</p>		
<p>The Narrative</p> <p>Uses the graphic presentation of the ToC as the basis for the presentation</p> <p>Elaborates upon the key ideas presented in the graphic</p> <p>Uses examples and focuses attention on community-level outcomes</p> <p>Identifies both potential advantages and key potential disadvantages</p>	40	
<p>The Briefing</p> <p>Written in approximately eighth grade English reading level</p> <p>Clearly organized with headings, bullet points, and other techniques, included supplementary graphics if needed, to support the graphic presentation of the ToC</p> <p>Starts each paragraph with a lead sentence that states the overall point you want to make in the paragraph and organizes the paragraph to extend and provide evidence to support that statement</p> <p>Cites and references all materials used in developing the ToC</p> <p>Makes a compelling case for the ToC by addressing the If-Then logic that you used to create the ToC</p> <p>Robust definitions of the constructs with a focus on community-level processes, institutions and systems and stated the definitions in ways that are easily understood</p> <p>Embeds the ToC in social theory -- ties specific components in the ToC to the theory</p>	60	
<p>Final</p> <p>Chose a social theory well represented in the research literature, although <i>not necessarily previously or widely applied to your specific PIN,</i> that is appropriate for application at the community level (not the Theory of Planned Behavior, for example)</p> <p>Provided a fair and balanced critique of the ToC, calling upon the research literature you have used and your understanding of theory to identify limitations of the ToC and potential barriers to its successful implementation</p> <p>Uses and cites research literature and ideas gleaned from the Think Tanks of choice</p> <p>Questions 3 and 4 (automatic points for any response (20 of the 40 points))</p>	50	
Total	200	