INFOSHEET #3
Evaluating and understanding impact: creating a Theory of Change

This infosheet forms part of a CIfA toolkit and resource created to support greater public engagement with archaeological projects. The guidance materials are designed to support CIfA Standards and guidance. It was created by DigVentures, in partnership with CIfA, and funded by Historic England.

You can find the full resource online at:

https://www.archaeologists.net/toolkits/community-archaeology

Planning for impact

Public engagement in archaeology is the practice of involving the public in the process of doing archaeology, or via dissemination of the results. Engagement activities are designed to increase the impact from archaeological work, and can be achieved at different scales depending on the size of the project. Engagement may involve structured plans which target specific audience groups, or simpler activities designed to serve the interest of local people. Different opportunities will have varied impacts on those who engage with the content or activity, creating a change that happens specifically because of the connection made; measuring and understanding that difference is what makes engagement meaningful.

To tailor engagement activities for achievement of specific aims, the project team should use a Theory of Change to plan impact for their audiences. This infosheet describes how to start the process of planning change and understanding impact using a Theory of Change.

> *Impact: the effect or influence that an action, project, or event has on individuals, communities or the environment. In archaeology, impact refers to the changes, outcomes, or benefits resulting from the archaeological work, such as increased knowledge, preservation of heritage, or public engagement.*

Planning how a project can create change should form the basis of a public engagement plan within the project evaluation process (see Infosheet #4 – Creating a public engagement plan). Developing a Theory of Change provides a simple way to articulate and visualise how an activity programme will achieve the public benefits and social outcomes identified for the project.

What is a Theory of Change?

When we think about what to measure within an engagement programme, it is helpful to divide the project into its composite parts. Thinking of this as a matrix, or table, breaks down different elements of the public engagement work into describable chunks. The result visualises the activities, outputs and outcomes of the engagement alongside and within the context(s) they are planned to happen, such as the targeted audience (or people), the community (or place) and the archaeology itself (or heritage). The result is the *Theory of Change:* a series of actions beginning with planned activities and leading to a set of changes that you hypothesise will happen because of your work. The Theory of Change therefore describes how a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context, and what that change is, and how it will be measured and understood.

Does every project need a Theory of Change?

Any project which involves public engagement can have a Theory of Change. As with all project activities, scale and complexity will influence the extent of planning, documentation and measurement.

Some engagement programmes may just need a simple diagram to illustrate the intended change, so that the plans, results and impact can be appropriately demonstrated. In this case, the Theory of Change can be usefully appended within project planning documentation, such as the WSI, and may not need to be accompanied by a full public engagement plan. The appropriate level of requirement should be clear from the project brief or tender documentation, or from discussion with project stakeholders.

For more complex projects, it will be appropriate to support the Theory of Change with an audience development plan, activity plan and evaluation plan – essentially presenting a detailed project design for the engagement programme. These different elements combine to create a public engagement plan for the project (see Infosheet #4 – Creating a public engagement plan). In all cases, the extent or nature of engagement should be described as part of the WSI or project design process, which means the plan itself can be agreed by those commissioning or monitoring the project alongside other stakeholders. For example, the following descriptions might be provided within the 'public engagement' statement included in the WSI or project design in these three different project examples:

> *Example Project A – No public engagement required. As outlined in the project brief, public engagement activities are not required alongside the proposed mitigation works. In this case, public benefit will be achieved through provision of a full technical report and deposition of the selected archaeological archive.*

The report will be submitted to the HER and the archive deposited with appropriate repositories.

Example Project B – Limited public engagement required. As part of the archaeological works and as outlined in the project brief, a limited public engagement programme will ensure that residents and members of the public are aware of the history of the site and what the investigation recovers. To support this, a description of the activity programme is included (Activities for Example Project B) and supported by a Theory of Change (included as an Appendix). In addition, a full technical report will be compiled, and the selected digital and physical archaeological archive retained for long-term preservation. The report will be submitted to the HER and archive deposited with appropriate repositories.

Example Project C – Multi-strand activity programme with multiple audiences. As part of the archaeological works and as outlined in the project brief, a programme of public engagement intends to reach multiple audience groups. To support this, a detailed public engagement plan has been developed (see Example Project C Engagement team) comprising an audience development plan, Theory of Change, activity programme and evaluation strategy. In addition, a full technical report will be compiled, and the site published in an appropriate format, and the selected digital and physical archaeological archive retained for long-term preservation. The report will be submitted to the HER and the archive deposited with appropriate repositories.

What does a Theory of Change look like?

The simple table below illustrates the core elements of a Theory of Change. Using a matrix or table provides a clear way to visualise the project's intended outcomes. In the example below, there are three rows describing the different contexts where impacts from the work will happen, and three columns describing the pillars linked to this Theory of Change. More detailed versions can add in the project inputs or resources, as well as linking outcomes to organisational/project values. The basic table below includes four key terms, and our example below will help define what they mean. In short:

- Context – not deposits in this case! Describes where the intended change will take place
- Planned activities – the things you will be doing
- Project outputs – the things your will create from activities delivered
- Outcomes – the planned change that will happen as a result of the activities

A simple Theory of Change matrix

	Pillar 1: Planned activities	Pillar 2: Project outputs	Pillar 3: Outcomes
Context 1: People and individual participants			
Context 2: Place or community			
Context 3: Archaeology or heritage			

Getting to grips with the basics – a quick example

By dividing the work into these building blocks, the delivery team can articulate the changes planned for each context. In the simple table above, these are: people, places or communities, archaeology or heritage. Each pillar then describes the elements and provides a working hypothesis for project results: this is what we plan to do (activities), this is what we will create (outputs), and this is what we think will change as a result (outcomes). Read over the scenario below and think about the contexts and pillars – what information can be added to the table above?

The project brief is to run a community excavation in a small village. Planned activities will include an excavation with participants, engagement events for site visitors and dissemination for local people.

The planned activities might include dig spaces for 50 participants and site tours for 150 visitors from within a 10-mile radius, plus 75 people visiting a local museum to see finds from the dig.

The dig will produce a technical report and site archive, with a poster about the site which will accompany some of the finds in a small museum display.

We'd like to see participants gaining new skills and confidence, and hope that visitors to the site and museum will gain a greater sense of their local place by taking part. Our work will help inform management strategies for the site and contribute new knowledge to the HER. The report will be disseminated widely, and the archive will go to the local museum, with digital data housed at ADS.

The matrix joins up the dots between activities, outputs and outcomes, so there is a working hypothesis that illustrates the change that is intended and who it is intended for. Using a Theory of Change, the project team can clearly illustrate how they:

- expect project participants who get involved in the excavation will learn skills
- intend visitors to the site and to the museum exhibition will gain a stronger sense of the place or feel more connected to archaeology
- will contribute to knowledge which will help heritage to be better explained and managed more effectively

The completed matrix

	Pillar 1: Planned activities	Pillar 2: Project outputs	Pillar 3: Outcomes
Context 1: People and individual participants	Community excavation opportunity – archaeology skills training	50 individual participants took part	A wider variety of people have been involved in heritage. Dig participants have learnt new heritage skills.
Context 2: Place or community	Open day with site tours Finds display at local museum	150 people visited the site for a tour 75 people went on to visit the local museum to see the finds	Visitors to site have learnt about the heritage of the village and feel a greater connection to the place. Those visiting are more likely to visit another archaeological site or heritage attractions.
Context 3: Archaeology or heritage	Archaeological investigation Archaeological archive	Archaeological report Accessible, ordered and stable archive	Heritage has been better explained and the site can be managed more effectively. Finds are with the local museum and the accessible archive provides reusable data which can be incorporated into future research.

Building your own Theory of Change

The Theory of Change can be presented in a variety of different ways and can be adapted to suit any project. Here are two simple steps, followed by further links, to get you started.

Step 1 – Understand your context(s)

To start the process, it is useful to make a simple table like the one above and break down the different context areas, thinking about different audience groups or arenas where change might take place. The table splits this into people, place and heritage – but these could easily be further refined to comprise different audience groups such as young people, heritage professionals, residents, or project arenas such as public green spaces or a local museum. The project aims and objectives for both public engagement and the archaeology should determine the contexts highlighted.

Step 2 – Describe your pillars

The three main pillars described above include:

> *Activities, the processes and tasks undertaken by an organisation. These may be identified in an activity plan and can be separated out to show which activities contribute to outcomes in different contexts, such as for heritage, individuals or communities.*

> *Outputs, the measurable product or service that is produced once the activity is completed. This could be a report or the number of attendees at an event – or even the event itself. Outputs don't prove impact but show that the activities happened.*

> *Outcomes, the observable change or impact within the context described. For individuals, this might be acquiring skills or knowledge, whereas for an archaeological site, it might be an improved level of stewardship. Impact or change is defined as the effect or outcome attributable to the output.*

It might also be helpful to separate the anticipated outcomes for the project into intrinsic heritage outcomes and more instrumental outcomes for people and communities:

> *Outcomes for heritage will be achieved when sites are identified, interpreted and explained so that they are left in an improved condition and a better state to manage.*

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Outcomes for people will be achieved when a wider range of people get involved, learning skills and potentially improving their health and wellbeing (impact depth).

Outcomes for communities will be improved by making the area a better place to visit or more economically resilient (impact breadth).

Step 3 – What next?

The table illustrated above is a very simple version of a Theory of Change. Additional pillars could be added to include project inputs, such as staff, financial resources, required equipment or locations – a useful addition which can also help with project planning. In addition, the organisational or project mission can show how the planned change feeds into the bigger picture. So, four pillars can easily become six. How the matrix is presented can also differ, and the examples below show how projects and organisations use the model to communicate their change.

Once the pillars are populated and the Theory of Change is in place, project plans for delivery can be developed. Depending on the complexity of the project, delivery teams may need to undertake a process of audience consultation and development, and will need to consider how the project can be monitored and evaluated. The Theory of Change can also be elaborated as other project aspects develop. All these elements combine to form a public engagement plan which is appropriate to the size, complexity and ambition of the project (see Infosheet #4 – Creating a public engagement plan). Once in project delivery, the Theory of Change can be treated like a living document, and revisited, revised, updated and amended in discussion with project stakeholders to reflect any changes within the programme or to respond to feedback from evaluation.

Further resources

Creating a Theory of Change

- **NPC**: a think tank and consultancy organisation for the social sector – Web resource

- **Datawise**: resources from a London-based organisation that offers training and advice in data and evaluation – Web resource

- **BetterEvaluation**: resources from an organisation dedicated to improving evaluation – Web resource

- **Sopact**: action based resources from a technology based social enterprise – Web resource

Examples of working and inspirational theories of change

- **DigVentures**: a project-based Theory of Change to support excavations at Pontefract Castle – Journal paper

- **Skateistan**: a global project teaching children to skate in disadvantaged communities – Web based Theory of Change

- **Fiver**: a US-based youth development organisation – PDF Document

- **We Are Purposeful**: an organisation that supports women and girls and has a purposeful Theory of Change to guide their work – PDF document

- **Fairtrade**: the well-known organisation who advocate for fair wages for producers and workers in developing countries – PDF document

- **Roman Road Trust**: community development trust working to revitalise their high street and using a pyramid to visualise their Theory of Change – Web page

- **Historic England**: expressing a Strategy for Wellbeing and Heritage 2022–2025 using a Theory of Change (see p21) – PDF document