Vision Foundation’s

Theory of Change

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# What is a Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change is a planning document that non-profit organisations use to show how they expect their work to make a difference in society. It shows what changes an organisation desires to make for society and what activities or interventions it will deliver in order to achieve these goals.

It does this by first identifying the desired long-term goal (impact) and then works back from here to identify all the conditions (outcomes) that must be in place in order for the impact to be achieved. Once the outcomes are clear, the organisation can then decide what it needs to deliver (outputs) in order to achieve these outcomes.

This document is referred to as a ‘theory’ because it is based on assumptions.

First it assumes that if an organisation delivers ‘x’ intervention (output) then ‘y’ result (outcome) will be achieved. Organisations need to measure what they deliver and what they achieve as a result to test if their theory is correct or not. Or to discover if there is a more effective way of achieving their goals.

Secondly it assumes that if ‘x’ outcome happens, then a longer term ‘y’ outcome happens. For example, is it true that if someone’s physical health is improved that their mental health will improve as a result? Is it true all the time? Is it true only for some groups in society? Is it true regardless of what else happens in someone’s life?

Organisations should always be testing their theories by collecting and analysing data about what they deliver (monitoring and evaluation). The Theory of Change is a document that should evolve as new lessons are learned.

At the Vision Foundation, we have set out our Theory of Change and we will work with our stakeholders to learn and develop this document over months and years. This will be supported by a monitoring and evaluation framework that ensures that the Vision Foundation collects evidence about what is actually happening as a result of our work to inform learning and development and ultimately become more effective at achieving our goals.

# How do you read a Theory of Change?

Whilst a Theory of Change is designed with the end goal (impact) in mind, when reading a Theory of Change you start with the outputs. Vision Foundation’s Theory of Change is read from the bottom to the top.

The outputs (at the bottom of the page) explains what interventions or activities we plan to deliver ourselves.

From here, you are then led to the outcomes. In the document these are shown in the middle under the heading ‘Short, medium and long-term’ outcomes. These explain what changes we expect to occur as a result of our work.

Finally, you are led to the overall impact that all of Vision Foundation’s work intends to contribute to (at the top of the page). Impact is very long-term, ambitious change that everyone in our organisation is working to achieve. It is not something that one organisation can likely achieve by itself and may take years or even decades to achieve on a significant scale.

The focus of any organisation’s work should be on its outcomes: the shorter term difference that the organisation is more directly in control of being able to achieve. This is therefore where most measurement should be taking place too.

# How did the Vision Foundation create our Theory of Change?

The Vision Foundation undertook much consultation with stakeholders and desk-based research as we developed our new five year strategy. Much of the information gained at this stage has also fed into the development of the Theory of Change to ensure it supports the strategy.

A day was held with the Vision Foundation’s staff to create the first outline of the Theory of Change, which included staff members with lived experience of sight loss. From here, we continued to consult with stakeholders to refine the theory and prioritise its outputs and outcomes.

As the Vision Foundation’s intended impact can only be achieved through the work of our members, grantees and partners, the process focused on understanding their role in the theory and how the Vision Foundation can best support them to maximise their own impact.

The process also considered how the Vision Foundation could work with our members and grantees to improve impact reporting. Good measurement will improve our understanding on what change is being achieved for whom and to what extent.

# How will the Vision Foundation use our Theory of Change?

As the Vision Foundation continues to work in partnership with stakeholders, understanding more and collecting more evidence, we will continue to revise our Theory of Change as new lessons are learned.

The reasons for having a Theory of Change in addition to a Strategic Plan are to:

* Make it easy to communicate to stakeholders what the Vision Foundation does and how we plan to affect change
* Help stakeholders understand their role in achieving impact with the Vision Foundation
* Learn how to use resources more effectively so that more change can be achieved from the resources available
* Improve the perception of the organisation as a professionalised workforce dedicated to good impact practice
* Lead the way by ‘walking the walk’ when it comes to supporting members and grantees with their own impact planning
* Ensure that the Vision Foundation is transparent about and accountable for the work we are doing and the results we are achieving

# The Vision Foundation - Theory of Change

## Impact

Transforming the lives of people facing or living with sight loss in London

This statement sets out the Vision Foundation’s ultimate goal. All of our efforts at any level in the organisation are designed to contribute to this one big societal change.

## Short, Medium and Long Term Outcomes

The Vision Foundation has established four long-term outcomes that we believe will all need to be achieved as pre-conditions to having the intended impact of transforming lives.

The four long-term outcomes are set as they relate to different stakeholders. Each heading states which stakeholder the outcome relates to.

1. Improved quality and coverage of services (members and grantees)
2. Improved reach (specialist services)
3. Improved accessibility (London’s infrastructure)
4. Improved inclusion and empowerment (blind and partially sighted people)

Under each of the four long-term outcome headings, further outcomes are set out (short, medium and long-term). All of these outcomes are necessary pre-conditions if the long-term heading outcome is going to be achieved. Shorter term outcomes are at the bottom of the box (last in the lists) and longer-term outcomes are at the top of the box (first in the lists).

### 1. Improved quality and coverage of services (members and grantees)

1. Increased representation of blind and partially sighted people in staffing and leadership
2. Improved organisational infrastructure
3. Improved awareness of relevant sector and political opportunities
4. Organisations increase their resources
5. Improved learning and expertise of volunteers, staff and trustees

These outcomes will be a necessary foundation for achieving all of the other three long-term outcomes. A strong, professional, well-resourced sight loss sector in London is imperative if it is going to improve its reach, improve its influence to make London more accessible, and empower and include.

### 2. Improved reach (specialist services)

1. Improved reach of sight loss sector services to the "invisible blind" and demographic groups facing multiple disadvantage (e.g. BAME or LGBT persons) who live with or are at risk of sight loss
2. Improved reach of specialist services to those at risk of additional challenges due to their sight loss (e.g. homelessness, domestic violence, addiction)
3. Improved and earlier access to medical intervention for those at risk of sight loss

Research shows the particular groups are more at risk of sight loss or, if they are already experiencing sight loss, are more likely to be failing to achieve their desired outcomes because either:

1. they belong to a demographic that is already more marginalised such as BAME or LGBT persons or;
2. because their life situation puts them at a disadvantage such as experiencing domestic violence or being in prison or homeless.

The term “invisible blind” refers to those who are already experiencing sight loss but are marginalised by society to the point where they lack access to specialist support and specialist services are not aware of their existence. Those who have sight loss but who are not registered as sight impaired with their local authority (who make up the vast majority of blind and partially sighted people) may also face this risk.

Specialist services both inside the sight loss sector and in other charity sub-sectors such as homelessness sector or violence against women and girls sector can all play a role in reaching these groups. It is necessary to improve reach of specialist services as accessible to blind and partially sighted people across the charity sector as a pre-condition to achieving the fourth long-term outcome of improving inclusion and empowerment.

### 3. Improved accessibility (London’s infrastructure)

1. London becomes a global exemplar of a city 'open for business' to blind and partially sighted people
2. London employs more blind and partially sighted people
3. Improved accessibility of London to blind and partially sighted people
4. Increased influence on London's private, public and third sector to incorporate the needs and talents of people with or at risk of sight loss
5. Increased profile of sight loss sector and visually impaired individuals

Research shows that blind and partially sighted people face many barriers to being able to participate in community life in all areas from transport to employment to sports and leisure to entertainment.

Even when visually impaired individuals are informed, empowered and willing to access what London has to offer, they are often met with insurmountable barriers. These barriers could be discriminatory attitudes from individuals such as employers; environments being physically inaccessible such as a building that is poorly lit or that lacks clear signage; or systemic failures such as a benefits system that fails to provide someone with the additional monetary support they need to meet the cost of their disability.

Whilst efforts are being made to make community life more accessible to blind and partially sighted people, such as the introduction of the audio announcement system in London buses or the enactment of the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018, there is still room for improvement.

London faces an amazing opportunity to become an exemplar to the rest of the UK and even the world on what a city that is fully accessible to blind and partially sighted people looks like.

### 4. Improved inclusion and empowerment (blind and partially sighted people)

1. Improved health and wellbeing outcomes
2. Greater inclusion in social and community life
3. Improved confidence to self-advocate
4. Improved levels of independent living
5. Improved access to education, training and employment
6. Improved eye health awareness and action among the public, particularly those at heightened risk, thus reducing preventable blindness

The sight loss sector works to support thousands of people to achieve an endless number of positive outcomes in their personal lives. RNIB’s ‘Seeing It My Way’ project revealed the most commonly desired goals for blind and partially sighted. We have summarised these goals to reflect the broader outcomes that are most realistic to be able to achieve through the work of our members and grantees.

It is important to acknowledge that prevention of avoidable sight loss is relevant to both those who are not currently affected by sight and those who are. Many people already living with sight can still be at risk of further sight loss, some of which is preventable. It is important that this outcome is met for both groups.

## Outputs

1. Accessible training and advice on:

* Fundraising
* Governance and leadership
* Impact reporting

The Vision Foundation aims to maximise our impact by being seen as more than just a ‘grant funder’. We believe we can play a role in building the capacity and improving the infrastructure of the sight loss sector beyond simple monetary terms. We have identified three areas where we believes we can provide the most value in sharing expertise and where members have specified what would be most helpful for the Vision Foundation to facilitate: fundraising; governance and leadership; and impact reporting. However, the Theory of Change should not limit potential activities to just these three areas.

If members identify other areas where they need support to improve their expertise or systems such as HR, accounting or safeguarding then the Vision Foundation will look to facilitate something to meet these needs such as bringing in an external facilitator to conduct a training session.

This output supports the achievement of the first long-term outcome:

Improved quality and coverage of services

1. Facilitation of joint working, projects and collaboration:

* Across the Vision Foundation's members, grantees and London's sight loss sector
* With other charity sub-sectors such as homelessness, domestic violence, disability, criminal justice, prison and drug and alcohol support organisations

As the Vision Foundation is not a service delivery organisation, any frontline joint working with other sectors will need to be done through members and grantees. The Vision Foundation’s role is to facilitate introductions to other sectors and organisations or to fund projects that facilitate joint working. We can also provide the logistical support needed for sight loss sector organisations to collaborate more such as setting up events for members to meet each other or sharing learning through our website or emails.

The Vision Foundation is invested in continuing to develop more and stronger personal relationships with staff in charity and sight loss sector organisations in order to maximise the opportunity and willingness for organisations to collaborate.

Joint working might also include the Vision Foundation lending our voice to cross-sector campaigns, for example a disability sector campaign that would inherently advantage people with sight loss.

This output supports the achievement of three long-term outcomes:

Improved reach

Improved accessibility

Improved inclusion and empowerment

1. Sharing resources, skills, contacts and intelligence available

The Vision Foundation has the benefit of access to resources, skills, contacts and intelligence that we have built over the years in order to be an effective organisation. This could be anything from an awareness of the latest developments in the sight loss sector, to relationships with corporate partners, to successful strategies for raising funds.

The Vison Foundation will look to maximise these resources by building, and sharing them with members, particularly where they can gain something that the Vision Foundation cannot. For example, the relationship with corporate partners through fundraising could allow the Vision Foundation to broker introductions to members who could then gain volunteer resources through corporate volunteering. Or members could improve influence on the private sector by facilitating sight loss awareness training.

This output supports the achievement of all four long-term outcomes:

Improved quality and coverage of services

Improved reach

Improved accessibility

Improved inclusion and empowerment

1. Grant funding

The Vision Foundation will continue to grant fund our members and invite applications from other London organisations. This is the activity that the Vision Foundation is most commonly associated with. Whilst we are keen to add value and maximise value by delivering non-monetary based interventions, we acknowledge that grant funding provides with infinite opportunities, particularly when that funding is unrestricted. We are working hard to increase the sum of money available to be distributed in grant funding to the sector.

This output supports the achievement of all four long-term outcomes:

Improved quality and coverage of services

Improved reach

Improved accessibility

Improved inclusion and empowerment

1. Lending the Vision Foundation's voice to campaigns on behalf of blind and partially sighted Londoners

The Vision Foundation acknowledges that there are a number of organisations leading on campaigns for blind and partially sighted people. The Vision Foundation will support these efforts where appropriate by lending our voice and support to these campaigns. We will also lend our voice to campaign for the benefit of sight loss sector organisations.

If the Vision Foundation identifies a gap where blind and partially sighted people’s voices or the sight loss sector are not being represented effectively, we will work to address this gap.

This output supports the achievement of all four long-term outcomes:

Improved quality and coverage of services

Improved reach

Improved accessibility

Improved inclusion and empowerment

# Assumptions

The Vision Foundation is not a frontline delivery organisation. Our work is focused on building the capacity of the sight loss sector; improving its infrastructure and profile; and improving influence on the institutions that people with or at risk of sight loss come into contact with. This means that whilst we can directly affect the first and third long-term outcomes, we will rely on the work of our members, grantees and partners to affect the second and fourth long-term outcomes. Indeed even the first and third outcomes rely on the cooperation with members, grantees and partners. The Vision Foundation cannot achieve any of our outcomes alone. We assume that there will be a continued willingness across the sector to cooperate and that there is enough crossover between each organisation’s desired impact to warrant working together in the first place.

London and the UK faces much political and economic uncertainty at the time of developing this Theory of Change. The Theory of Change assumes the priorities for the sight loss sector and blind and partially sighted people based on research and consultation will be the same in the immediate future. However there is a good possibility that priorities may change very suddenly. The Vision Foundation will continue to monitor the political landscape and the situation for the sight loss sector, sharing new information with our members as it arises. The Vision Foundation will maintain an open dialogue with our stakeholders to ensure that our Theory of Change remains relevant to their needs and the context within which they operate.

The Theory of Change was developed at the time when the Vision Foundation was rebranding from Greater London Fund for the Blind (GLFB) and beginning the implementation of a new five year strategy. The launch of the Vision Foundation marked a considerable departure from the mentality and perception of the historic GLFB. The Theory of Change assumes that the relationship with members, grantees and partners and our status in the sight loss sector and beyond will continue to improve presenting evermore opportunities. However there is a risk with any rebranding exercise that it may take time for stakeholders to become familiar with the new look and new mindset, and this may affect how effectively outcomes can be achieved at least in the short-term. The risk should lessen as more time passes. The opportunities are still set to far outweigh any risks.

# Where to learn more about Theories of Change

NPC ‘Theory of Change’

<https://www.thinknpc.org/themes/build-effective-charitable-organisations/theory-of-change/>

NCVO ‘How to build and Theory of Change’

<https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/how-to/how-to-build-a-theory-of-change>

Nesta ‘Guidance for Developing a Theory of Change for Your Programme’

<https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/theory_of_change_guidance_for_applicants_.pdf>