Designing With People

A participant-centered approach to program development

University of Minnesota- Humphrey School of Public Affairs

&

Relief International (client)

Final Capstone Report | Spring, 2016

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Executive Summary

Relief International commissioned University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School of Public Affairs Capstone Team to evaluate its program development process, assimilate frameworks and tools that strengthen participatory and evidence-based programming, and recommend cohesive database management systems. This project culminated in multiple frameworks and tools that can be placed in RI’s current program development process.

The first piece of this work suggests usable and tangible tools that can improve the program development and design process. Our main suggestions are to include participatory methods along with frameworks to help build capacity for evidence-based programming.

To increase participatory programming, we suggest using Participatory Action Research (PAR), which is a well-known method in this field. In order to make the program design process even more robust, PAR offers a multitude of methods through which the voice of primary stakeholders can be captured. We would like to emphasize that throughout this report we refer to the program participants as primary stakeholders. The rephrasing of program participants as “primary stakeholders” as opposed to “beneficiaries” is an important step in the right direction of rebalancing current accountability mechanisms that are heavily focused on donor or upward accountability.

In a similar manner, in order to instate evidence-based programming in RI’s program design process, we assimilated relevant frameworks and tools. One of the primary concerns outlined by RI was the need to integrate evidence-based programming in all stages of the program design. We recommend the use of program theory, as it is an efficient and effective way to develop evidence-based programming by using two frameworks: theory of change and theory of action.

With time, RI will also be able to build a wealth of knowledge and collect lessons learned if documents created throughout the program theory process are well documented and easily accessible for future reference. Along with this, we suggest using adaptive management to improve program development processes, as it allows for development of contingency plans at the design phase. This also helps with identifying, analyzing and proactive planning to mitigate internal or external factors that might impede implementation.

We were also tasked with implementing an evaluation of the PD process, procedures and manual. Our team conducted staff interviews and completed an internal document review, along

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with other methods, to better understand the efficiency of the program development process. We find that, overall, the PD process is solid and well-received by the staff. However, we learned that staff would appreciate more reflection in the post-submission phase. To this end, we collated several useful frameworks and tools that enhance reflective practice within the PD team and the greater RI staff.

This report, thus, begins with the object description and methods sections which introduces the readers to the project and the methodology followed. The findings have been recorded in three major sections. Section 1 gives an overview of participatory action research along with laying out several tools that can be used to implement this framework. Section 2 outlines frameworks and tools for evidence-based program design along with tools, followed by a sub-section on adaptive program design and management. Section 3 focuses on the evaluative part of the project and provides tools for reflective practice. All the sections have tools that are linked in text.

**Object Description**

**Organization Introduction**

Relief International (RI) is a humanitarian non-profit organization, based out of both the United States and United Kingdom. Their primary mission is to reduce human suffering by responding to natural disasters, humanitarian emergencies and development related issues like poverty and access to basic services. RI operates as a global team in 19 countries across Asia, Africa and Middle East.

RI strategizes between humanitarian and development issues by responding to short-term relief issues, while steadily working towards establishing long term impact. RI distinguishes its approach in both these situations by emphasizing on local participation, which is also called the ‘RI Way’ within the organization. The ‘RI Way’ involves capturing the real needs of its primary stakeholders, while ensuring long-term commitment through building strategic partnerships. They aim at being facilitators at empowering communities to find, design and implement solutions that work for them.

RI’s area of expertise are in education, health, WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene), and economic opportunity. While each of these areas are well-defined, every country presents a different situation and so most of the work carried on is context-driven.
**Project Stakeholders**

This capstone was a collaborative project between a team of graduate students at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota (UMN) and the Program Development (PD) department at Relief International. While graduate students at Humphrey School came from different degree programs – *Development Practice, Public Policy and Public Affairs*, the common aim of the team was to gain experience and understanding in the area of program development and evaluation. Broadly, this capstone project was an opportunity for the students to apply skills learnt in the respective degree programs.

Relief International’s PD team was interested in gaining inputs to strengthen its process. While the RI Way has been an important hallmark of its work, the department needed some inputs to strengthen its process and facilitate program design with participatory and evidence-based programming.

Therefore, both the stakeholders of this project had coinciding goals.

**Scope of Work**

The evaluation examined the strengths and weaknesses of RI’s current policies and procedures to engage donors and identify program opportunities, develop proposals, and provide program-development related technical support to the organization. The evaluation focused on helping RI identify and improve evidence-based program design; enumerating best practices in program design and proposal process; and increasing and measuring beneficiary participation in the program design process.

The Scope of Work was classified in the following ways:

**A. Current Policy Evaluation:** To examine strengths and weakness of RI's current policies and procedures to engage donors and identify program opportunities, develop proposals.

**B. Efficacy of evidence-based programming:** Improve evidence-based program design; best practices in program design and proposal process and increasing and measuring beneficiary participation in the program design process.

**C. Technical Support:** Evaluate current information management system and recommend potential alternatives that can optimize RI’s information sharing and management among program development team members across three regions.
Methodology

In order to approach the above mentioned scope of work tasks, the UMN team followed a mixed-methods technique, as shown in Figure 1. These variety of methods helped triangulate the information, explore different perspectives and discuss the findings with RI PD team, in order to make the process iterative.

![Figure 1: Methods](image)

Literature Review

The literature review was the first, bird’s eye view attempt at understanding the humanitarian work landscape. This was important to get a sense of the context in which Relief International practices its work. The main themes under the literature review were determined by the scope of Work document that was created in agreement with RI. The UMN team investigated potential new sources of funding, donor best practices, comparable organizations best practices, user-friendly information management system, participatory PD processes, and evidence-based program design. The consolidated memos of this literature review can be found here.

Internal Document Review

To gain understanding of the detailed program processes and practices of RI, an internal document review was conducted. These documents, which give a deeper understanding of the PD departments functioning were shared by the RI PD department. Among the documents that were reviewed were Relief International PD manual, matrix, tools, RI sector strategies and RI organizational chart.

Mapping

One of the main requirements of the project was to evaluate RI’s program development manual and, in turn, its process. In order to develop an accurate understanding of the process the UMN team conducted an interactive workshop which culminated in the development of a visual map. This map served as a tool to demonstrate the UMN team’s understanding of the process and share the knowledge with the RI team. This iterative process was important to maintain the team’s understanding of the process and to minimize errors. During the process of this project we
revisited the map, which helped us create two versions. The initial version is just the representation of the PD manual, while an updated map captures the changes that were suggested through our work. A larger pdf version of both these maps can be found here.
Interviews

The UMN team conducted interviews across RI’s different PD departments to understand the experiences of its staff with respect to navigating the program design process, procedures and the manual. The interviews were valuable to get an inside view of the different ideas and opinions that exist amongst the staff who interact with these processes on a daily basis. Interviews were conducted with 10 staff members, either through a Skype call or through an online survey powered by Qualtrics. The staff members were selected by Jamie Jones, Vice President of the PD team. The UMN team made sure that there were representatives from across geographical areas and departments so that voices from each level in the organizational hierarchy were captured. Some of the interviewees were from Performance Action & Learning (PAL) team, Grants and Contracts, PD Africa, PD Asia, PD Middle East and PD, Headquarters, Washington DC.

Interviews were qualitatively analyzed through thematic coding by the UMN capstone team. These interviews were an important research tool to test the prior findings that had been assimilated using the other methods, and was an important activity that helped determine further areas of research.

Best Practices

The interviews helped the UMN team collate themes that needed further examination, which were used to conduct best practices research. This research was focused on finding frameworks and tools that can be integrated in the current PD process to make it more participatory and evidence-based. The themes included participatory program design for primary stakeholder engagement, integrating PAL in design process, development versus emergency programming, elements of successful proposals and reflective practice.

Technology Exploration

As part of our scope of work, we conducted a brief technology exploration of database management systems that would be most useful to RI’s needs. In doing this, we looked at aspects such as cost, learning curve and system memory to evaluate options. A shortlist of such systems include ASANA, Dropbox and Atlassian.
Section 1: Participatory Action Research

Description

Participatory action research (PAR) and implementation is one of several program improvement methods used by organizations around the world. Funders are constantly looking for ways in which organizations are increasing participatory research and implementation. Some of the aspects of PAR include Human Centered Design. This framework is based solely on the primary stakeholders and the services that Relief International provides to them. It has been noted as one of the more robust ways of involving primary stakeholders as it demands that the organization engage in baseline research to find out what a community needs and then proceed to design the program with primary stakeholders involvement.

Relevance

The relevance of participatory action research has been amplified throughout the decades and has proven to have significant positive effects on programming for primary stakeholders. In March of 2016, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration sent out a letter encouraging organizations to have highly engaged primary stakeholders. This will not only increase the potential funding for organizations as primary stakeholders give more feedback on organizations work, it will also significantly help improve programing when it is fully employed and engaged. Participatory action research should not only be used during the implementation phase of the program development phase but the program design phase as well.

Tools\(^3\)

The table of tools below are categorized into the program design phase as well as primary stakeholder participation during and after program implementation occurs. Three tools and examples according to three of the four Relief International's areas of expertise are listed and the other three are attached in the methods section of the guide to human centered design [here](#).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Program Design Phase</th>
<th>During/Post Implementation Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewing</td>
<td>YES- to ascertain what primary stakeholders need</td>
<td>YES- during the debrief with primary stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion</td>
<td>YES- geographical layout, ascertain how primary stakeholders live</td>
<td>YES- during the program to assess how the program actually working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers observing peers</td>
<td>YES- with primary stakeholder peers &amp; internal team.</td>
<td>YES- an outside perspective is important to improve programing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Tours</td>
<td>YES- to observe a community with community members and better understand their living situation</td>
<td>YES- observe with community the changes that the program is making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideation - Top Five</td>
<td>YES- great internal idea creation with your PD team by listing the top 5 ideas from your team and using that as a starting point to program design.</td>
<td>YES- use this tool to assess how the ideas you formed turned out and make improvements with stakeholder feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brainstorm</td>
<td>YES-use this tool as a strategic way of harnessing your team's talents and innovation. This should also be done with primary stakeholders to harness their innovation as well.</td>
<td>YES- assess results using this tool and use it to again improve programs with primary stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tool 1: Interviewing

Who should be involved
Primary stakeholders as a way to gather first hand data that will inform the designing of the program.

When in the PD process
Program design phase and after program implementation as a way to gather data that will inform program improvements and find ways to increase funding through program improvement.

Tool Example

Initial Steps to consider:

1. No more than 3 staff members should attend an interview so that interviewees do not feel intimidated.
2. Have a set of questions that are thorough and will help gather data. Ask about a person's livelihood, occupation, value and habits etc.
3. If possible, with consent, record the interview or take very good notes
4. Always take into consideration nonverbal cues. Pay attention to what you hear and what you observe.

Interview Guide Example for an Economic Opportunity Program

Open with general questions
- What kind of job do you have?
- How are you paid?
- How do you save for the future?

Advance to deeper questions
- How do you currently allocate your money?
- Where do you keep the money that you want to put aside? (bank, stock? etc)
- What helps you save money?

NOTE: This tool can be modified for group interviews or expert interviews for data collection.
Tool 2: Immersion

Who should be involved

The immersion tool will help the PD team get a very real perspective of what the primary stakeholders need as a way to get a better understanding of what they need in a program. This tool can be used both during the PD program design phase as well as during and after the implementation of the program as an assessment and data collection tool.

When in the PD process

Program design, during and after program implementation.

Tool Example

Initial Steps to consider:

1. Consider the finances and time that you can allocate for teams to get fully immersed in the community.
2. Record and observe as much as possible while living in the community.
3. The more time you have in the community, the more information and data you can collect and use to improve your programing for primary stakeholders.

Immersion example for a health program

The immersion tool is used to make sure that the primary stakeholders that you will serve are involved and actively help shape and design the program. A potential technique to use would be shadowing. If you are serving a low income community that requires a health care program, you can shadow a doctor or community member who struggles with access to healthcare to get a greater understanding of the problem.

Tool Three: Peers Observing Peers

Who should be involved

Internal team, outside consultant and primary stakeholders. All these parties can contribute to the peer observation process. In a human centered design model, the primary stakeholders opinions are essential to continued success of a program. An external consultant also offers a distinct perspective as they offer a fresh pair of eyes of the organization and program development process. This process can be done by a staff member, external consultant or a member of the community for greater buy in.
When in the PD process
In the program design phase as well as during/after program implementation.

Tool Example

Initial steps to consider:

1. Offer as much support as possible before, during and after the process. Examples of materials include a camera, art supplies and provide knowledge of the report process.
2. Decide how you want to learn from the material and how it should be expressed. You can have virtual maps or reports, whatever is most beneficial in order to improve your program development process.
3. After data collection has occurred, interview your peer to get all the information that he or she would have collected.

Peer to peer example for a WASH program

An example of a peer to peer process would be to contract a consultant and have them perform an evaluation of your program. This can be adapted for the needs of the organization. A more participatory approach could be to have the consultant have access to primary stakeholders and get first hand information from those that actually use the program.
Section 2: Program Design

One of the primary concerns outlined by RI is the need to integrate evidence-based programming in all stages of the program design. Program theory\(^4\) is an efficient and effective way to develop evidence-based programming by using two frameworks: theory of change and theory of action. With time, RI will also be able to build a wealth of knowledge and collect lessons learned if documents created throughout the program theory process are well documented and easily accessible for future reference.

The first two parts of this section outline the two frameworks - theory of change and theory of action - along with templates of tools that complement the process. The third and last part briefly discusses adaptive program design and management.

Figure 2.a: Evidence-based, participatory oriented, adaptive program design framework*

*Created by UMN Capstone team

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\(^4\) This section is Adapted from: Funnel, Sue C.; Rogers, Patricia J. (2011). Purposeful Program Theory: Effective Use of Theories of Change and logic Models. Jossey-Bass.
2.1 Theory of change\textsuperscript{5}

Description
Theory of change is the central mechanism through which change happens. It answers the “why would this program work?” question through visual and written representation of the logic behind the program. The program design can also be analyzed for internal and external validity at this stage, which adds to the robustness of the design. In order to develop a comprehensive and holistic theory of change the process should include these three components:

- **Situation analysis**: identification of the problem, causes, opportunities, and consequences.
- **Focusing and scoping**: setting the boundaries of the program and linking to partners.
- **Outcomes mapping**: showing the assumed cause-effect or contingency relationships. It is the centerpiece of the program theory, linking the theory of change and theory of action (see theory of action below).

**Traps to avoid:**

- No actual theory
- Having a poor theory of change
- Poorly specifying intended results / Ignoring unintended results
- Oversimplifying
- Not using the program theory for evaluation
- Taking a one-size-fits-all approach (program-level, organization-level)

Relevance
Using theory of change during program design is a useful way to integrate an analytical framework that will inform the program/project’s design, implementation, and evaluation. Theories of change facilitate strategic thinking by unveiling the assumption or false logic in the “black box” that often exists between inputs, outputs, and outcomes; and allows for critical scrutiny of assumptions that have been made and unveil gaps in logic. Investigating the details also helps us acknowledge the complexity and unpredictability of development interventions, and the limit to an organization’s spheres of control and influence.

Tools
The tools used to facilitate the theory of change in the design process are the fishbone diagram, the three spheres, and outcomes chain. Any of these tools can be used to engage primary

\textsuperscript{5} ibid.
stakeholders in the process using participatory facilitation techniques outlined above or by choosing any of the tools deemed appropriate in one of these guides found here and here. Provided that these tools will inform program design and implementation, primary stakeholders can play a key role in validating the design, identifying gaps, or assisting with measures to identify and mitigate emergent problems.

The definition for primary stakeholder in this context are the program participants. The rephrasing of program participants as “primary stakeholders” as opposed to “beneficiaries” is an important step in the right direction of rebalancing current accountability mechanisms that are heavily focused on donor or upward accountability.

**When and where in the PD process does this fit?**

All of the tools under theory of change should be conducted as soon as the project planning phase starts, as findings will help inform the entire design of the project or program. However, it is most likely to be an iterative process and should be revised, as needed, during the needs assessment and project framework phases of the PD process.

**Tool 1: Situation analysis- Fishbone Diagram**

**Description**

The logic behind the fishbone diagram is that deconstructed problems are solvable problems. Using the fishbone diagram to conduct a cursory situation analysis in the design phase can be an effective and efficient way to identify categories of problems, their consequences, and what causes them. After completing the diagram, it is important to recognize any relationships and potential interdependence between different causes. The last and important step is to identify opportunities for intervention keeping in mind RI’s unique competencies and available resources to achieve desired results.

**How you can use it**

This tool should be used as a guide to help organize, analyze, and save ideas about causes and relationships between causes that drive the problem. The first step should be identifying the problem; the second should be identifying categories of the problem (i.e. people, lack of jobs etc.); the third step should be identifying at least five sub-causes under each category. It is recommended to carry out this process in deductive manner, using the “five why questioning” method. Once a problem category is identified, we can ask why it exists, next we ask why the...

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7 The five why questioning method is meant to push brainstorming to go beyond surface level understanding and help deconstruct the multiple layers of each category that causes the problem to unravel underlying causes.
answer to our first why question exists and so on and so forth. For example, if the cause category is high unemployment, we can ask why there is high unemployment in community x; our first answer: mismatch between skills and jobs. Next we ask why this is the case and our answer could be: lack of technical expertise in woodwork. Next we ask why that is and our answer could be: no technical school in village x that teaches woodwork. This line of questioning each reasoning should be done at least five times but can be done as many times as deemed useful.

**Figure 2.1.a: Fishbone diagram template**

![Fishbone diagram template](image)

**What will you need**

- A hard copy of the fishbone template to use as a guide during brainstorming or kick-off meetings. If using a computer, please use the soft copy template found here. Make sure you click download and open the document in Microsoft Word, not in Google drive as the formatting will not translate.
- If possible, it is highly recommended to use white boards, flip charts, markers, and post-its in lieu of carrying out this activity on a computer. If meeting participants are in different locations, video calls can help facilitate the process if one person does the writing in a way that all participants can observe and actively engage in the process.
Who should be involved

- It is highly recommended to have a staff member from the program team, who participates in the day-to-day implementation of programs in a specific geographical areas as well as an thematic area expert take part in the meeting.
- It is also highly recommended that RI engages primary stakeholders (program participants) in the situation analysis phase as the findings can be rich and enlightening information that can help close any gaps or preemptively solve issues that may arise due misunderstandings or wrong assumptions.

Traps to avoid

- Not paying attention to relationships between categories and sub-causes of the main problem.
- Not confirming findings from situation analysis with program implementation staff or primary stakeholders.
- Not recognizing other programs in the community that may already be working in the identified problem area.

Tool 2: Focus and scoping- Three Spheres

Description

The logic behind this tool is to highlight that there is a limit to our influence, and that our resources are better utilized if we focus on areas where we have most control, where our influence is highest. Three Spheres tools helps define the focus and scope of a program or project; set realistic performance metrics; and analyze when forming partnerships can be most beneficial to maximize influence. The Three Spheres framework helps to support:

- a realistic formulation of envisaged results, ambition, and expectations of a project.
- clarity about the question of attribution and contribution of project outcomes.
- the responsibility the project can and should take for the achievement of intended results.

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How you can use it

- The Sphere of **Control** refers to everything the project can control and is fully responsible for: the inputs, activities and direct results of those activities (outputs) as well as the quality of activities, products and engagement with primary stakeholders and other actors.

- The Sphere of **Influence** refers to the reaction the project expects to see as a result of its activities: how stakeholders and other actors in the context use and/or respond to the outputs of the project. Are the outputs taken up by the intended people? In other words, this is where we can observe outcomes. For example, are community members using condoms that were distributed and backed by a strong social marketing campaign? Although inputs, activities, and outputs such as quality of condoms, distribution mechanism, and marketing are aspects that RI may have full control over, an outcome such as take up rates by intended users can only be influenced.

- The Sphere of **Interest/Concern** is the sphere of lasting, structural change: changes in the lives of people and in conditions in society. It represents long term impact, which is beyond the control of any single actor or factor. Claims can only be made as contributions in this sphere as opposed to attribution.

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What will you need

- A hard copy of the three spheres template can be used as a guide during brainstorming or kick-off meetings. If using a computer, please use the soft copy template found here. Make sure you click download and open the document in Microsoft Word, not in Google drive as the formatting will not translate.
- If possible, it is highly recommended to use white boards, flip charts, markers, and post-its in lieu of carrying out this activity on a computer. If meeting participants are in different locations, video calls can help facilitate the process if one person does the writing in a way that all participants can observe and actively engage in the process.

Who should be involved

- It is highly recommended to have a staff member from the program team, who participates in the day-to-day implementation of programs in a specific geographical areas as well as an thematic area expert take part in the meeting.
- It is also highly recommended that RI engages primary stakeholders (program participants) in the situation analysis phase as the findings can be rich and enlightening information that can help close any gaps or preemptively solve issues that may arise due misunderstandings or wrong assumptions.

Traps to avoid

- Missing opportunities to identify potential actors to collaborate with to maximize influence.
- Committing to prove success on indicators in the sphere of concern/interest.
- Attributing impacts in the sphere of concern/interest solely to RI’s program/project.
- Duplicating efforts that other programs/projects are already conducting.
- Focusing intervention in problem areas that are not analyzed and deconstructed in the situation analysis phase.

Tool 3: Outcomes chain- outcome mapping

Description

The outcomes chain is a visual representation that shows the assumed cause-effect or relationships between short, medium, and long terms outcomes. It is the centerpiece of the

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program theory that links the theory of change framework to the theory of action framework (described below). It is important to note that it doesn’t just reference outcomes from RI’s programs but takes on more holistic approach of solving the problem, meaning outcomes that are not part of RI’s program, but necessary for success, need to be included. See the example from An Apple a Day program in Figures 2.1.c and 2.2.d below to see different causal pathways and intermediate outcomes.

**How you can use this tool: 5 steps in developing an outcomes chain**

1. Prepare a list of possible outcomes—whether it’s outlined in the RFP or not; it will still be helpful to report on indicators that are easy to track and analyze.
2. Cluster them and label each cluster to keep it clean and manageable.
3. Arrange the labels in a chain of *if-then* statements or multiple parallel *if-then* chains.
4. Identify any feedback loops among the outcomes.
5. Validate the outcomes chain by engaging different stakeholders to check for logical coherence or identify missing gaps and feedback loops.

**Who should be involved**

- It is highly recommended to have a staff member from the program team, who participates in the day-to-day implementation of programs in a specific geographical areas as well as an thematic area expert take part in the meeting.
- It is also highly recommended that RI engages primary stakeholders (program participants) in the situation analysis phase as the findings can be rich and enlightening.
information that can help close any gaps or preemptively solve issues that may arise due to misunderstandings or wrong assumptions.

**Traps to avoid**

- Failing to differentiate between an outcomes that are within the focus versus the scope of the program.
- Listing activities instead of outcomes. A tip to avoid this trap is to avoid using verbs, which tend to describe activities.
- Failing to use if-then statements to show linkages between outcomes, which minimizes the tendency to have gaps in logic and outcomes.
- Avoid using “and” “or” in listing outcomes to ensure multiple outcomes are not lumped into one.
2.2 Theory of action

Description

Theory of action is a framework that assists with the process of operationalizing the program design i.e. how the program will be implemented and measured. It is the piece that integrates program evaluation in the design phase. This stage also has three components:

- Identification of desired attributes of intended outcomes with success criteria to measure performance.
- Identification of internal and external factors that can affect the program, both within and outside the purview of RI’s sphere of control.
- Contingency plans that respond to the potential effects caused by internal and external factors. Ability to adapt to external factors such as changing contexts and emergent issues requires that the program design has built in flexibility to allow for adaptive management practices during program implementation.

Relevance

Theory of action framework will help the PD team think through and plan for how to collect, analyze, and report data on required indicators when filing evaluation reports to funders. It is also helps avoid traps of promising to report on certain indicators that hard hard to measure or data for measurement is not readily available. This frameworks ensures RI fulfills funders’ requirement to measure output and outcome indicators in an effective and efficient way, but without being too ambitious. Additionally, the framework will help program designers pay attention to the desired outcomes and important factors that need to be considered i.e. performance metrics, assumptions, data sources etc.

Tool 1: Program theory matrix

Description

The program matrix tool combines elements of logic models and outcomes chains in a way that makes planning and reporting more holistic. It also helps with making the design more adaptable provided there is effective collaboration and communication between Program Development and Program team during the design and periodically, during the implementation phases of the project or program. The “results tracking” column is a way for the program implementation team to communicate progress with the program development team during implementation. Reporting

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11 This section is Adapted from: Funnel, Sue C.; Rogers, Patricia J. (2011). Purposeful Program Theory: Effective Use of Theories of Change and logic Models. Jossey-Bass.
back will be a way of collecting lessons learned for future design as well as a way to periodically track progress and make adjustments, if and when needed.

**Figure 2.2.a: Program theory matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome from outcomes chain</th>
<th>Success criteria for each outcome</th>
<th>Assumptions about program factors</th>
<th>Assumptions about nonprogram factors</th>
<th>Outputs the program produces</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Results tracking</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tips: Desired attributes can be informed by funder requirements as well as sector-specific literature.</td>
<td>Tips: Desired output/outcome goals can be informed by funder requirements as well as sector-specific literature.</td>
<td><em>Tips: Be mindful of structural features -history, natural and human resources, economic and social structures, demographic changes, regional issues etc.; institutions -Informal and formal rules that determine the realm of possible behavior by agents i.e. political processes); agents- Individuals and organizations pursuing particular interests i.e. the political elite, civil servants, political parties, etc.</em></td>
<td><em>Tips: Try to make these smart and aligned with the RFP SMART</em></td>
<td><em>Tips: list of activities for programming but also administrative work i.e. data collection</em></td>
<td><em>Tips: list of activities for programming but also administrative work i.e. data collection</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How you can use it**

Define what and who, then when, where, and how for each outcome; use why to assess the importance of success criteria. Consult with staff members from the Performance, Evaluation,
and Learning (PAL) and Program team to confirm details included in the program matrix. The green-yellow-red reporting system is meant to indicate the status of the program as needs attention-caution-on progress.

**Who should be involved**

- It is highly recommended to have a conversation with or invite a staff member from the Performance, Evaluation, and Learning (PAL) team to take part in this discussion.
- It is highly recommended to have a staff member from the program team, who participates in the day-to-day implementation of programs in a specific geographical areas as well as an thematic area expert take part in the meeting.

**Traps to avoid**

- Beware goal displacement- identifying what is measurable instead of the actual outcome of interest. Put different don’t measure what is countable instead of what counts.
- Don’t forget to address or highlight strong assumptions to ensure contingency planning.
- Don’t forget to ask “what is out of the control of the program that can affect it in a positive and negative manner?”
- Don’t list more than one outcome in one cell.
- Not writing project/program name and date when documenting reports.

**Tool 2: Performance measurement planning**

**Description**

This tool can be used as complementary the the program matrix. The purpose is to identify details on how, when, and from where, and by whom data for indicators will be collected and analyzed. The people who should be involved in this process are RI staff members.

**How you can use it**

**Figure 2.2.b**: Performance management planning tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Performance indicators</th>
<th>Means of verification</th>
<th>Collection Methods</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>insert one outcome</td>
<td>insert one output</td>
<td>Insert RI’s of funders indicator used to measure success</td>
<td>Insert data source</td>
<td>Insert data collection method</td>
<td>Insert frequency and timeline for data collection</td>
<td>Insert RI staff member’s name responsible to collect, analyze, and report data on this specific outcome/output indicator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3 Adaptive Program Design and Management\textsuperscript{12}

**Description**

Adaptive programming suggests, at a minimum, that development actors react and respond to changes in the political and socio-economic operating environment. More substantially, a program may recognize from the outset that change is inevitable, and build in ways to draw on new learning to support adaptations. At a minimum, adaptive program management requires:

- Breaking down previously held boundaries between design, implementation, accountability and learning.
- Building, and then revisiting, strong ‘analytical foundations’: the political economy analysis, problem-driven iterative adaptation, and theories of change that help shape the kinds of changes actors hope to bring about.
- Management practices and decision-making structures that allow the learning they generate to shape program activities.
- Incorporating what matters into monitoring, evaluation and learning – including accountability for learning, strategic accountability and methods focused on participation, sensible output indicators and wider impact.

The first step of adaptive learning approach is problem identification- \textit{the caveat here is who defines the problem}, which provides an opportunity for primary stakeholder engagement.

**Relevance**

Adaptive management allows for development of contingency plans at the design phase. This helps with identifying, analyzing and proactive planning to mitigate internal or external factors that might impede implementation or have negative influence in the achievement of results.

Tool 1: Adjustment to Theory of Change

**Description**

The adjustment to theory of change is meant to be used a communication tool between the programming and PD department in order to keep track of any changes that need to be made based on knowledge gained from program implementation. It is also a way to document lessons learned, which can help inform future program design. The degree of change column has a 0-3 scale, with 3 signifying most change. The PD team should be alerted if the changes are 2 or 3 degrees.

**Figure 2.3.a: Adjustments to Theory of Change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes to the ToC</th>
<th>Degree of Change</th>
<th>Justification/ explanations</th>
<th>Implications (if any)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please summarize the changes made</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of the key dynamics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please summarize the changes made</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy(ies)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please summarize the changes made</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please summarize the changes made</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ultimate outcome</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please summarize the changes made</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updates to outcomes chain (if applicable)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How you can use it

Using the categories below, please rate the degree of change made to each section of the Theory of Change

- **0 -- None**: no change in wording only slight changes in phrasing.
- **1-- Minor**: a slight change in one or two statements in the theory of change, but something more significant than a small change in working.
- **2-- Significant**: adding or subtracting one or two items in a section of the ToC or revising multiple items. Less than complete rewriting of a theory of change section, but more than revision of one item.
- **3-- Wholesale**: a major shift requiring a complete or near-complete rewriting of this section of the theory of change.

Who should be involved

RI’s program implementation or monitoring and evaluation staff.

What you will need

The “adjustment to theory of change” template and an internet connection to share and document any changes in a shared folder.

Traps to avoid

- Neglecting to fill it out assuming it’s too late to adjust the program. The information is still useful to gather lessons learned and create a knowledge base to inform future designs.
- Saving the document but failing to mention it to interested staff members.
- Not filling out the form thoroughly to explain reasoning that drove the change.
Section 3. Reflective Practice

Description

Reflection is the process of thinking about our experiences and attributing meaning to them. It is a crucial part of learning because, in many instances, we do not learn from doing alone but from thinking about what we do. Reflection is a means for people to recall their experience, connect it to their work, and analyze the issue they are looking at within a wider context. Reflection is difficult to embed in our everyday work lives because it’s often considered an afterthought; something that can be returned to at a later date, yet rarely is. Reflection:

- Recaptures experience and knowledge
- Evaluates experiences
- Connects experiences to staff ideas engages critical thinking
- Refines understandings,
- Recognizes both individual and team accomplishments.

Reflective practice allows new plans to emerge and provides a space for teams to be innovative, which can lead to improved team cohesiveness and collaborative decision making.

Debriefing is a type of reflection and is the focus of our recommended tools. Debriefing is defined as a professional discussion of an event, often focused on performance standards, that enables people to discover for themselves what happened, why it happened, and how to sustain strengths and improve weaknesses.

Relevance

Our team conducted staff interviews and completed an internal document review to better understand the efficiency of the program development process. The objective of this review was to better understand the effectiveness of the processes in place. We found that, overall, the PD process is solid and well-received by the staff. However, we learned that staff would appreciate more reflection in the post-submission phase.


15 ibid
The Experiential Learning Theory\textsuperscript{16} outlines the learning cycle that most individuals need to follow for experiences to have the largest impact on knowledge. This theory notes that all phases of the cycle are interdependent on the next to ensure successful learning and include do, reflect, and apply. Though RI’s process is strong in the area doing, our team recognized an organizational gap in the cycle within both the reflect and apply phases. Embedding reflective practice, specifically the technique of debriefing, into the program development process will bridge the learning cycle for staff. Additionally, tracking and sharing lessons learned will support the opportunity to apply knowledge gained through reflection to a future proposal project.

Debriefing can be one of the easiest (and cheapest) actions an organization can take to improve proposal design quality\textsuperscript{17}. Debriefing can support a healthy team dynamic while enhancing staff development and process improvements along the way.

In addition, if debriefing results are tracked and shared, an organization will create a library of case-studies and relevant information that can be applied to future proposals. This may eliminate re-utilization of unsuccessful proposal elements and will allow others to learn from successes and challenges throughout the organization, making one reflective meeting a powerful tool for organizational change.

\begin{center}
Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory
\end{center}


Tools

Tool 1: Step 1 (The Role of the Facilitator)- The 5 R’s\textsuperscript{18}

Description
The 5 R’s describe the elements of a debrief meeting that should not be overlooked or dismissed. Please see figure 3a below for a detailed description of each phase.

Who should be involved
The 5 R’s structure should be implemented by the individual intending to facilitate the debrief meeting.

What you will need: It will be beneficial to thoroughly plan your agenda prior to the meeting. Be sure to have your outcomes on hand and refer to them often. If you have created team norms, be sure to revisit them at the beginning of the meeting to reset the tone.

When in the PD process
Section 8: Debrief (post submission), though this meeting structure could be used at various times through the PD process for status checks.

Tool 2: Step 2 (Option 1, Choosing a Debrief Model) - Green, Yellow Red (for use when stakes are low)

**Description**

The Green, Yellow, Red (GYR)\(^{19}\) process is a short set of questions that you can be used to debrief a low stakes proposal (limited number of staff involvement, no partner agency, low monetary association, etc). The questions are simple:

- What should we start doing? (Green)
- What should we keep doing? (Yellow)
- What should we stop doing? (Red)

This simple process is effective when time is limited, but capturing perspectives and lessons learned is imperative; the questions are quick and powerful. The process is reassuring: the questions push the team to think of specific things that went well, as well as encouraging them to share what could have been done.

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\(^{19}\) Modified from Phil Daniel’s (Brigham Young University) Stop, Keep, Start process, and MindTools (retrieved from: https://www.mindtools.com/community/pages/article/SKS-process.php)
more effectively. Additionally, the process is action focused; the team receives practical insight into the impact of project challenges and opens up the door to discuss precisely what needs to be done to improve.

Who should be involved
A team of RI Staff who were engaged in a proposal development experience

What you will need:
The “GYR” template to capture lessons learned and an internet connection to share and document any changes in a shared folder.

When in the PD process
Section 8: Debrief (post-submission)

Tool 3: Step 2 (Option 2, Choosing a Debrief Model)- The PRACTICE Model (for use when stakes are high)

Description
PRACTICE\(^{20}\) is a simple framework that can help a team identify their challenges and decide on the best solutions. The seven step process includes:

- Identifying the present issue
- Developing realistic and relevant goals
- Generating alternative solutions
- Considering the consequences
- Targeting the most feasible solution
- Implementing your chosen solution
- Evaluation of the chosen solution

An advantage of using this model is that it focuses on finding solutions rather than dwelling on the problem itself.

Who should be involved
A team of RI Staff who were engaged in a proposal development experience

**What will you need**

The “PRACTICE” [template](#) to capture lessons learned and an internet connection to share and document any changes in a shared folder.

**When in the PD Process?**

Section 8: Debrief (post-submission)

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Tool 4: Step 3 (Capture your Lessons Learned)- Six Step Process\(^{21}\) (*Track, Store, & Share*).

**Description**

Throughout a project’s life cycle, we learn lessons and discover opportunities for improvement\(^{22}\). Use of lessons learned is a principal component of an organizational culture committed to continuous improvement.

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\(^{22}\) ibid
improvement and adaptive management. Tracking your learned lessons help to communicate acquired knowledge more effectively and ensure that beneficial information is utilized in the future. The process used to collect, share, and disseminate lessons learned is comprised of five main elements:

- Defining the project
- Collecting information
- Verifying applicability
- Storage
- Dissemination.

The Six Step Process outlines a potential timeline for implementing a debrief meeting with both staff and, potentially, primary stakeholders. It addresses the expectation to physically track the outcomes of each debrief session so that the results can be collected, stored, and shared organization wide.

### Who should be involved

A team of RI Staff who were engaged in a proposal development experience. The process will also include organizational administration (for storage and sharing purposes), and might include primary stakeholders (based on who was involved in the proposal development).

### When in the PD process

Section 8: Debrief (post-submission)

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23 ibid
Implications for the Field

Our work describes methods to operationalize participatory engagement with both primary stakeholders and staff alike. Though theory and research around concepts like participatory engagement, theory of change, theory of action, adaptive management, and reflective practice are not new, this project explored challenges associated with embedding these practices into already established processes. The tools and recommendations associated with our project were crafted and curated with this challenge in mind. Relief organizations, development practitioners, and similar ventures that wish to embed these practices into their routine processes will find that our team identified and adapted tools that, we believe, can be incorporated into already existing practices.

Additionally, there is a tremendous amount of research in the field regarding participatory engagement, theory, and reflective practice being utilized during the implementation stages of programming. However, we found a lack of research describing the use of these practices in the developmental stage of program design. More research is needed in this area.
Recommendations

The University of Minnesota capstone team is providing the following recommendations to Relief International to support stronger participatory engagement and to enhance the program development process:

a. RI should strongly consider changing its language from referring to program participants as “beneficiaries” to “primary stakeholders” because it aligns with the RI Way as well as the organizational mission.

b. The PD department should attempt to engage primary stakeholders in the design phase, especially when working in new communities and context, in order to design a meaningful program. The fringe benefits of implementing this approach includes meeting donor agency requirements as well as strengthening of the proposal relative to competitors.

c. The PD department should engage the Programming and PAL departments in the design phase to triangulate knowledge and expertise which will result in a strong proposal, and by extension, build the foundation for a strong monitoring and evaluation plan.

d. The PD department should strongly consider using tools included in this report as a guide for meeting facilitation, brainstorming, data collection, and knowledge management. The tools are meant to be a communication tool among PD department staff as well as with other departments involved in the proposal process.

e. The PD department should review the proposed technology resources outlined above to ensure uniformity and consistency in practice. More research to determine the best virtual sharing and tracking source to meet RI’s needs is vital and strongly suggested.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our capstone project examined Relief International’s program development process to provide recommendations on how to ensure their practices are efficient and thorough. This was done while considering the relevant tools to enhance the opportunity to engage primary stakeholders in the program development process. Additionally, we identified a gap in the PD process in terms of the reflection that occurs post-submission. We believe that embedding our recommendations into the PD process will support stronger primary stakeholder engagement, foster staff participation, and build evidence-based and thoughtful proposals. Overall, we anticipate successful implementation of these recommendations will increase high quality proposal submissions, while simultaneously aligning PD practices with the RI Way.