A guide to developing a program logic in legal assistance

What is a program logic?

A program logic provides a visual summary of how the intended outcomes of a program will be achieved given the resources assigned to the program. Incorporating the development of a program logic into program planning ensures that sufficient attention is given to whether there is a clear causal link between the activities of a program and the intended aim of the program. *Theory of change, program theory, and logic models* are terms commonly used to describe similar representations of this causal pathway.

Program logics are also used as part of the evaluation process as they clarify what inputs, outputs and outcomes should be measured to determine whether the program is being delivered as intended and is effective in achieving its aim.

Once an evaluation has identified that the program inputs and outputs are achieving the outcomes, ongoing monitoring of the inputs and outputs will provide reassurance the program continues to be delivered as intended.

How to develop a program logic?

There are many ways to develop a program logic, depending on the purpose of the logic and the stage of program implementation at which it is developed.

In all cases it is likely to be an iterative process that will usually start by recognising the problem that needs solving and describing what success would look like. This might be informed by an outcomes framework.

The logic is then built up by identifying the steps to achieving this success. Multiple program logic drafts are to be expected, particularly when the logic is developed prior to program delivery. A logic is intended to be a living document that captures the reality of what is delivered.

While program logics can be developed by an individual, they are best informed by multiple stakeholders, from those providing organisational strategic direction to those who will be responsible for delivering the program in practice. Depending on the nature of the program, it may also be valuable to gain the perspective of some program clients.

The mechanics of logic development should then facilitate stakeholder input and comment on logic drafts. This could be done by using online surveys to capture responses to specific questions or, particularly once a draft logic emerges, workshops to stress test the elements of the logic.

JUSTICE METHODS

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What does a program logic look like?

Although the content of a program logic can vary depending on how it is generated and will be used, it can have any of the following components.

1 Problem Statement

This should be a problem that is resolvable by the type of services the program is intended to deliver. It should be clear for whom the problem exists.

2 Goal

The goal describes a high-level, non-measureable indicator of achievement or success.

3 Program Aim

This describes how the program will resolve the problem and what success will look like.

4 Target of Program

Specify precisely who the clients of the program will be, which should be restricted to those that will potentially benefit from the input.

5 Evidence

To move from the problem statement to the program aim it is likely that research will be required to identify what, if any, evidence there is on 'what works' to address the issue, who the relevant stakeholders are, and how best to reach and deliver services to the target clients.

6 Assumptions

Assumptions should be made explicit, so that they can be monitored, particularly those aspects of the logic that are dependent on the participants, staff and third-party service providers.

7 Context

Programs are not delivered in a vacuum, but must take accounts of local conditions (organisational, political, social or geographical). Articulating these at the point of program design is not only of value in operationalising the program but also important to inform program scalability and delivery in an alternative context or environment.

8 Unintended Outcomes

Unintended outcomes should also be considered, and where predictable can be either monitored, or addressed in advance. Any evaluation should sensibly assess whether there were any unintended outcomes of running the program, whether positive or negative.

9 Inputs / Resources

Inputs / resources are what is invested in the program, including financial resources, staff-time and premises. A cost-effectiveness evaluation will require a good measure of each of these elements. Some inputs are harder to quantify, such as 'collaboration' and 'partnership'.

10 Outputs / Activities

Outputs / activities are the direct consequences of applying resources. These may be products that are developed, events that are held, or actions that are taken. Depending on the nature of the program, these outputs may themselves have a logical pathway which can be incorporated into the logic.

11 Outcomes

Describe the difference the program should make to clients, of which there may be more than one element. To facilitate program evaluation, outcomes should be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timed. It is generally useful to distinguish between short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes.

12 Short-term Outcomes

Short-term outcomes are the more immediate impact that the program activities have. A timeframe should be specified, but this can be as short as by the end of the first appointment with the client. Generally, short-term outcomes are the most easily measured and captured, either at the conclusion of the client appointment or through a follow-up survey a short time later.

13 Medium-term Outcomes

Medium-term outcomes are likely to have a legal component, particularly for less complex and resolveable issues. Outcomes may be causally linked, with short-term leading to medium-term and on to long-term outcomes.

14 Long-term Outcomes

Long-term outcomes are likely to be the hardest outcomes to measure, and the most vulnerable to factors outside the control of the service provider. Where clients are not in an ongoing relationship with the provider it is likely to be difficult to capture long-term outcomes directly from individual clients.

What does a program logic look like?

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		Example of a program logic in legal assistance
1	What is the problem to be addressed	Self-represented Family Court litigants not achieving best outcomes and increasing the workload of the Family Law Court registry and judiciary
2	What is the goal, what would success look like?	Better outcomes for self-represented litigants Reduced time spent by Family law Court staff/registry supporting self-represented litigants Reduced court time of cases involving self-represented litigants
3	What is the aim of the program?	To increase access to earlier, expert legal assistance for self-represented individuals seeking legal help at the Family Law Courts, to assist these clients to take timely and appropriate action, and reduce the impact of these clients on the workload of the court.
4	Who is the target of the program?	Any unrepresented person or litigant in the Family Law Court including those who have not yet filed.
5	What is the evidence about how to acheive the aim?	Evidence from similar programs in Canada and a previous duty service located at the same court. These indicate the importance of adequate resourcing to respond effectively in a time-sensitive and emotive context.
6	What assumptions are being made?	That the program will successfully triage the highest priority clients to receive services. That clients will act on advice given, including amending orders/process and taking up referrals.
7	Context: are there external factors that may impact program delivery?	Availability of adequate number of suitably skilled and experienced lawyers A suitable physical location within the Family Court Availability of referral pathways Client willingness to receive legal assistance and access the service Client willingness to act on advice and referrals provided.
8	Are there any unintended outcomes that should be monitored?	The most capable clients, who would have paid for representation, absorb the finite resources.
9	Inputs / Resources	Two family law solicitors provide duty services M-F during court sitting hours Appropriate physical space for meetings Effective messaging of the availability of the service Information and referral officer role Administrative support Evaluative support
10	Outputs	Service accessed by self-represented litigants Successful triage of potential clients, to identify highest priority Referral to other services where appropriate Advice delivered Representation services delivered
11	Outcomes	
12	Short-term Outcomes	Reduction in inappropriate applications being filed Reduction in number of self-represented litigants appearing in court Reduced client stress and improved well-being Reduced burden on court staff, reduced waiting times for assistance
13	Medium-term Outcomes	Better, more timely and more appropriate outcomes achieved for clients Increased capacity of the courts due to reduced burden of self-represented litigants and diversion of some cases away from court
14	Long-term Outcomes	Better health and social outcomes for clients and any children involved in the matters assisted with