

A Guide to Developing Effective, Youth-Centered Innovations

When developing innovations, many teams use a **Theory of Change (TOC)** to map how activities lead to outcomes. A traditional TOC typically lays out inputs, strategies, activities, outcomes, and goals, often centering program activities over the people impacted.

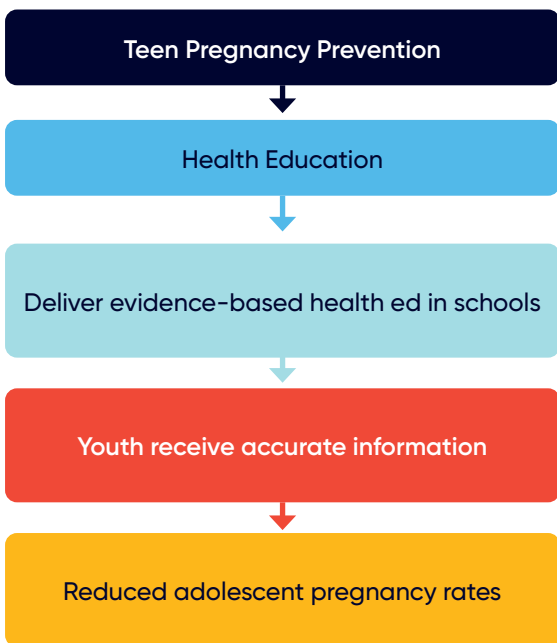
A **Youth Engagement Theory of Change (YE TOC)** builds on the same foundational structure but places young people at the heart of innovation. It emphasizes both the planned activities and approaches to authentic youth engagement that connect youth participation to meaningful change.

By making **Youth Engagement (YE)** strategies explicit, innovation teams can see how these approaches directly influence outcomes. Instead of viewing youth as passive recipients, this model positions them as active partners whose participation strengthens design, increases relevance, and fosters sustainable impact.

In short, the **YE TOC** is not a replacement—it is an evolution. It maintains the same logic of activities → outputs → outcomes → impact, but ensures the pathway is deeply informed by youth perspectives and the mechanisms that make engagement transformative.

Traditional Theory of Change

1. **Focuses on** program activities and service delivery
2. **Youth seen as** recipients of change
3. **Goals** → **Inputs** → **Strategies** → **Activities** → **Outputs** → **Outcomes** → **Impact**
4. **The "how"** is often implicit
5. **Success measured mainly by** service outcomes



Youth Engagement Theory of Change

1. **Focuses on** youth engagement strategies and co-design approaches
2. **Youth seen as** partners and drivers of change
3. **YE Goals** → **YE Strategies** → **Activities with Youth** → **Outputs** → **Outcomes** (empowerment, agency, capacity)
4. **The "how"** (engagement theory) is made explicit
5. **Success measured by** both outcomes and strength of youth participation

