

LOGIC MODELS

Community Rivers Program

Riveredge Nature Center

Milwaukee, WI | APRIL 2019



Project Description:

Riveredge Nature Center's Community Rivers Program aims to empower residents of rural communities in the upper Milwaukee River watershed to take action toward creating swimmable/fishable water resources which in turn, support engaged communities.

Grantee Reflections:

Creating & Adapting the Community Rivers Logic Model

Through the Community Rivers Program (CRP), a team of Riveredge Nature Center staff have connected and mobilized community resources, energy and focus around river and watershed health in the Milwaukee region over the last 3 years. Having experimented with several forms of project design mapping approaches, they recently "dove in" to creating a logic model as a way to both summarize over 3 years of work with community and to project their plans and practices going forward.

The team describes their process as an "inverted hourglass," as Team Lead Carly Jo Hintz, Associate Director of Education explains. "We were super detailed at the beginning and then broadened out in the middle, and where we are now, is getting back to being more detailed but in a more aware way . . . relating to involving more stakeholders in the process."

At the beginning of the project about 3 years ago, the team developed two different project design maps. The first was a "meta map." Staff recalls: "The map helped us distinguish the complexities of our work in the Community Rivers Program. It challenged our thoughts about how our program activities align with our goals. This served to focus our energies at first, but at that time, we were only just beginning to think about how we might measure or, evaluate effectiveness."

When the program received IMLS Community Catalyst funding, the team brought in an external evaluator who facilitated a visioning process and the creation of an impact model. The model "had all of the right things in terms of inputs, outputs, and outcomes, but still was pretty broad."

As they would learn at a workshop on Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) the team attended as part of their Community Catalyst grant, this "broadness" was beneficial. "[One of the facilitators] said something at the last convening that was an 'aha.' He said that for the first year of community engagement work, . . . you don't even pick up a pen – it's all conversation-based and experimental and listening, and I feel like at the time our broad impact model allowed us the freedom to do that."

Following the workshop, the team dove into engaging with the community through learning conversations, intentional relationship-building, attending others' events and seeking to understand the priorities of residents, resident associations, and local organizations around water.

Over a year after receiving the Community Catalyst grant, the team was inspired by another grantee team, Woodland Park Zoo, to tackle the creation of a Logic Model and use it in their engagement work. "We were like, 'OK, we've tried a bunch of things. It's time to take this a step further.' . . . [We] all agreed that that's the next step for us, that we would fine tune what our target audiences, and short-term outcomes -- just try to map it out a little more concretely."

Creating the model has provided a valuable opportunity for the team to reflect on their learnings and activities since the beginning of CRP and to clarify their structure and direction going forward, and find value in its various potential functions including "as a backbone and something that we go back to every time we get together" and "a great starting point to build off of." Additionally, Carly notes that it can be a powerful team-building tool: "In other programs

where we have spent a lot of time and gathered a lot of feedback on the Theory of Change or Logic Model process, it's really good to catch new people up to speed and to remind people who have been involved for awhile why we're doing what we're doing and how, and checking in about how we're doing. The more you can revisit, the more you can build a cohesive team."

Several themes have emerged through the team's creation of their logic model regarding what has shifted since their project began.

First, they have witnessed a significant transformation in how the region views the program. "We never could have predicted the direction that the CRP has gone in terms of being recognized as an innovative, welcomed addition to the communities that we're serving, from the village's perspective and all of the community partners, all of the watershed education, and government groups in the area."

Second, Riveredge Nature Center has found themselves gaining recognition for their community engagement work. "We also could never have predicted that we now are seen as this organization that is innovating this work and leading community engagement around

watershed education . . . in our own little region." Third, the team has come to understand how the initiative fits into the community's goals as well as the importance of their role as a connector within the region, which they report has "taken on a new shape" over the course of the project and come into even sharper focus as they host community conversations around the river with residents across the region.

An additional shift that has occurred since the project's onset is the team's understanding of existing community assets, resources and momentum – an understanding which had impacted how they conceive of "inputs" or resources to be activated through the program.

As the team continues to evolve the CRP, they will apply learnings from the journey around community engagement and the existing assets and care within the region around their topic. They report, "we've really have come such a long way in understanding what community engagement is," in large part "because our team has just fully embraced it, and that's huge. And we are only starting to hear from residents who are becoming more aware of the initiative and are thirsty for more." One particularly interesting discovery that the team plans to build upon has been "that most people that come [out] have some kind of invested interest in the health of the river and maintaining recreational value to their community."

The team plans to use their logic models in the following ways moving forward:

- **Bring it to their Steering Committee of organizational community partners:** "Our next step will be to get some feedback on this from our steering committee."
- **To engage with community residents around shared goals.** "We're right in the middle of hosting our Community Conversations and although . . . we didn't drop our logic model in their laps, we still certainly got feedback on, 'How can we achieve these goals together, and how can we work together on accomplishing some of these things?'"

- **Bring residents in program design and evaluation.** "We're talking about whether it's appropriate to have residents on our steering committee, or what that would look like to have a more programmatic action team in each community. . . We know we want to involve residents in the program design and evaluation process and what that looks like is still taking shape. I think it would be ideal to involve the logic model in those conversations at least as a starting point."

What advice would the team offer to others seeking to use a logic model in their community engagement work?

- **Enlist outside help.** "Have someone who's experienced at creating them and has the capacity to see it through and work on it. I know we would not be where we are right now without the help of an external evaluator, so dedicating resources to doing thinking and implementation on the creation of it is important."
- **Revisit your logic model frequently and use it to prioritize action.** "Revisit it all the time. Don't let it be something that sits on a shelf, or that you look at it a few times and then tuck it in a folder. It's got to be something that is in the front of your folder, front of your desk that you look at all the time and ask yourself, when you say 'yes' to something, 'How is that achieving the short, mid, and long term goals?'"

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Carly Jo Hlntz
Associate Director of Education
Riveredge Nature Center



WORKING OVERALL THEORY OF CHANGE:

By engaging residents in recreational and educational activities focused on the Milwaukee River, they will become active agents in the health of the watershed and in their communities, resulting in improved water quality and social wellbeing.

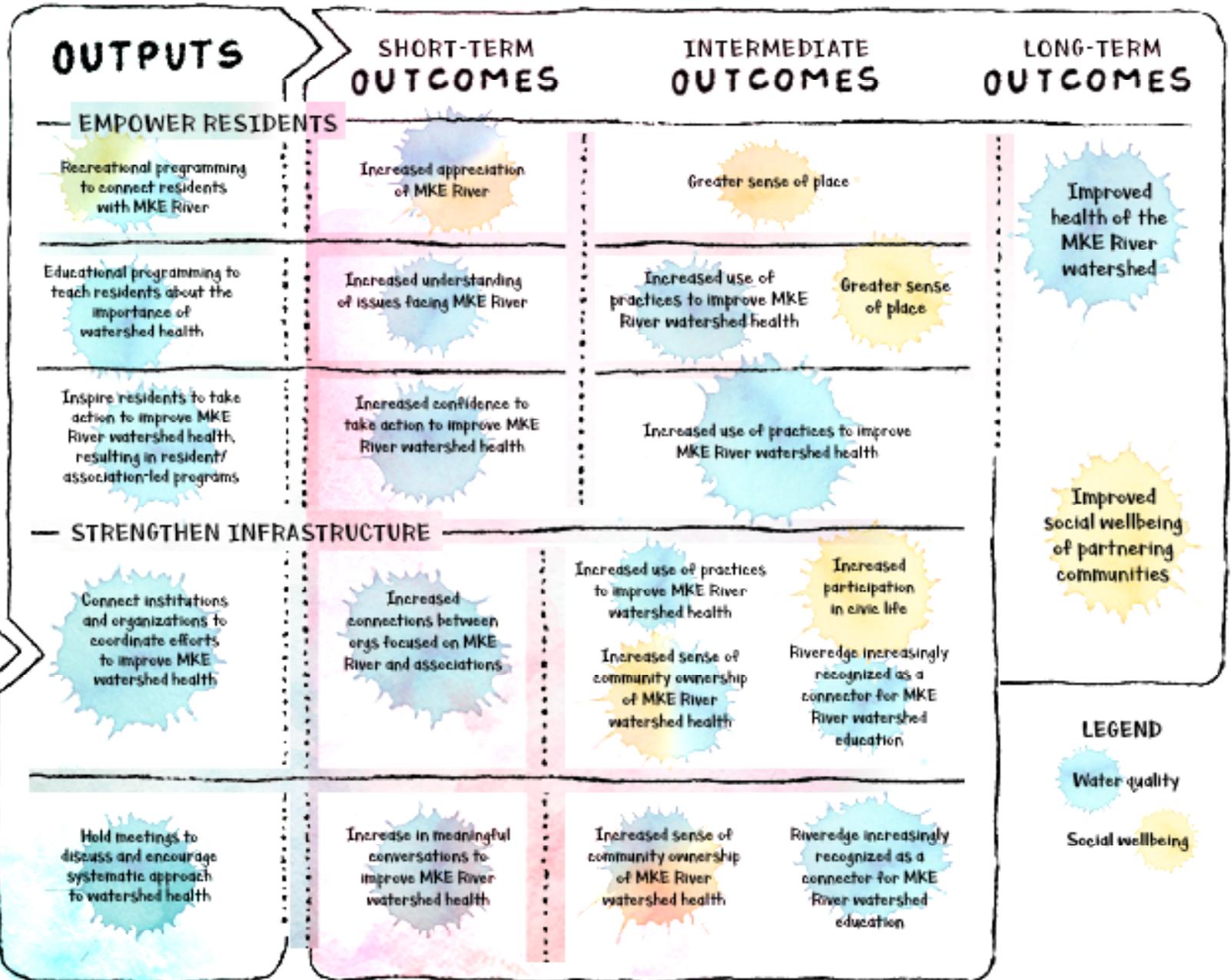
ASSUMPTION: The impact of CRP will be multiplied through connecting residents with formal and informal associations, and connecting these associations to the Milwaukee River and organizations and institutions that are focused on watershed health.

PROCESS THEORY:

In order to engage residents in improving the health of the MKE River watershed, they first must feel a connection to and appreciation for the river, then feel empowered individually and through community associations to take action to improve watershed health.

INPUTS

- IVEREDGE INSTITUTIONS**
- Riveredge
- EPA
- DNR
- River-focused organizations
- Schools
- OTHER INSTITUTIONS**
- Residents
- Volunteer Associations
- Municipalities



LEGEND

- Water quality
- Social wellbeing

TO LEARN MORE: