What does it mean for a program or policy to demonstrate a rationale?

**Theory of action**

A theory of action describes the logical relationships between the program or policy components and the desired outcomes.

There are three common ways a study can demonstrate a rationale.

1. **The findings are not statistically significant.** Example: A reading intervention may appear to improve the outcome of interest, but shows a small effect size due to a small sample or other factor.

2. **The findings focus on different, but related outcomes.** Example: You wish to improve absenteeism, but the program you find increases student engagement. Because engagement and absenteeism are theoretically related, increasing one may help increase the other.

3. **The study examined only one aspect of the intervention or treatment.** Example: You want to increase reading comprehension, but the program you are interested in focuses on word recognition. Because word recognition is a component of the comprehension, the program may benefit your students.

**Logic models**

Logic models can help you think through your theory of action to ensure you have a strong rationale. A well-designed logic model will identify short-, medium-, and long-term goals related to the success of your project implementation. The REL Northeast and Island has developed a logic model toolkit and REL Pacific has created an Education Logic Model (ELM) Application. Both can help you construct a logic model.

**Collect and report**

Educators conducting projects that demonstrate a rationale are encouraged to collect their data and report their findings in an effort to increase practitioner knowledge.

**References:**


**Explore evidence-based practice guides, individual studies, and intervention reports**

**What works clearinghouse**

**National center for educational evaluation and regional assistance**

**Regional educational laboratory south east**