

Center for Results-Focused Leadership

Strategies to strengthen results in public-sector and nonprofit organizations



Quick Summary

Leadership offsites are valuable opportunities for senior executives to come together with focused attention around better achieving the mission. One technique that's been used successfully to make leadership offsites useful and valued -- and action oriented -- is weaving logic models (learning about and using them) into the offsite agenda.

Strategy Details

Q1. What is the opportunity and challenge of leadership offsites?

The idea behind leadership “offsites” — strategy sessions away from the incessant demands and routines of the office—is compelling: creating dedicated time for public executives to focus on the big picture. In practice, offsites (including virtual ones in a pandemic) can be tricky to pull off successfully. One reason is because these retreats take busy leaders away from their daily duties, so the bar is already high in terms of making sure the time away is well spent. Plus, it's not easy to design offsites so that they produce useful, actionable takeaways or recommendations.

Q2. How can leadership offsites be designed to produce actionable takeaways or recommendations?

In our experience, a key to producing actionable recommendations -- and more broadly, for making leadership offsite a success -- is to weave a foundational tool of evidence-based decision-making into the agenda by using logic models. The approach has been used with positive results by a range of public agencies and offices in recent years, employed in offsites ranging from quick half-day convenings to more in-depth gatherings of a day or two. The approach involves three main steps, which we'll explain in more detail below:

- Step 1: Hold a quick logic model training session
- Step 2: Create logic models for the organization
- Step 3: Share the results and vote on the best ideas

Q3. How does Step 1 work, the quick logic model training session?

This first step is about giving participants an overview of logic models. When applied to an organization or program, a logic model uses a detailed visual representation to depict the actual or intended relationships among organizational inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes and, in doing so, helps clarify how the organization or program works—or ought to work if well designed. After the overview, it's useful to dive into a group exercise.

To make the training fun, a suggestion is to ask participants to develop logic models for their dream summer vacations. Each breakout group picks a destination and uses the logic model framework to identify the needed inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes for a successful getaway. The groups then share their logic models with each other.

Q4. How does Step 2 work, creating logic models for the organization?

Now that the group has practice with logic models, the second step is to have participants build real ones for their agency, office, or program. The work is usually done in breakout groups, to allow for more individual participation. Importantly, participants are also asked to use the logic models they develop to answer two questions:

- What are the most important barriers to achieving the organization's intended outcomes?
- What near-term or longer-term changes or initiatives could help us overcome those barriers?

Q5. How does Step 3 work, sharing the results and voting on the best ideas?

In the third step, the breakout groups reconvene and share their logic models, the key barriers they identified and their ideas for improvement. When they're done, it's useful to get immediate feedback from the group about which of those improvement ideas are most valuable. In a virtual offsite, that can be done with a quick online survey (asking participants, for example, to check off their favorite three ideas). In an in-person offsite, it can employ a technique like dot-sticker voting. If time allows, a final set of breakout groups can help flesh out the top vote-getting ideas.

For example, in one offsite of office leadership within a large federal agency, several of the breakout groups noted that a lack of communication and coordination between teams and between teams and leadership was a challenge to the outcomes identified in their logic models. One of the groups proposed a new inter-team council that could help provide better coordination. That idea was one of the top vote-getters in the quick-feedback survey. Within a few weeks of the offsite, leadership gave a green light to the council. It was launched successfully soon after and continues today.

Q6. Are there any other tips for successful leadership offsites?

Yes. Other best practices for leadership offsites include ensuring that the purpose is clear and using a mix of activities—these could include speeches, large-group discussions, small-group breakouts—to keep the session lively. But beyond those evergreen suggestions, developing logic models within a leadership offsite has an important benefit: It encourages participants to look carefully and realistically at what the organization does, what it’s aiming to do and how well it’s doing it. Moreover, by using logic models to identify and prioritize concrete ideas for improvement, it ensures that the offsite produces something tangible. Then it’s up to senior leaders to ensure that useful ideas for improvement get their support and become a reality.



Additional Resources

- **Article:** “[One Key to Making a Leadership Offsite a Success: Logic Models](#)” by Andrew Feldman in *Government Executive*.



Customized Assistance

Please [contact us](#) if your organization needs help designing or facilitating a leadership offsite, including one that uses logic models.