

Reimagining Government Futures Workshop

Facilitation Guide

AUDIENCE
GROUP SIZE
DURATION

CIVIC GROUPS, ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS, CLASSROOMS, POLICY NETWORKS
6-25 PARTICIPANTS (ADAPTABLE FOR SMALLER/LARGER GROUPS)
3 HOURS (SHORTEN BY SKIPPING OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES)

1. Welcome & Framing

TIME 15 MINUTES

PURPOSE SET THE TONE, EXPLAIN THE CHALLENGE, INVITE PARTICIPANTS INTO A “BLANK CANVAS” MINDSET.

FACILITATOR SAYS

Trust in government is low—and while we know that, what we don’t know is what kind of government people actually want instead. Today, we get to imagine it—and build it! This isn’t about fixing one policy or critiquing today’s government—it’s about building the government we’d want in a future where anything is possible.

WHY WE’RE DOING THIS STARTING WITH AN OPEN INVITATION TO THINK BIG HELPS PARTICIPANTS LET GO OF CURRENT CONSTRAINTS AND GET CREATIVE.

2. Icebreaker: Future Thinking Game

(ADAPTED FROM THE INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE'S 100 WAYS GAME)

TIME 10 MINUTES

PURPOSE LOOSEN MENTAL HABITS AND CHALLENGE ASSUMPTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Present a surprising or unusual “future” prompt. Example:
 - What are 10 things that are true about the federal government today? Make a list!
 - Now - REVERSE those facts. Government has mostly career officials and a tiny percent of appointees? Reverse that. Government collects taxes to pay for services and programs? Maybe government doesn't collect ANY taxes. Government plans submits a budget Congress every year? Not anymore?
 - Now - pick three of those reversed facts and come up with a story about how they might actually make sense.
- Participants should work quickly without overthinking.
- Debrief on how it feels to imagine something far from today's reality.

WHY WE'RE DOING THIS WARM-UP EXERCISES THAT EXPAND OUR HORIZONS MAKE IT EASIER TO EMBRACE IMAGINATIVE THINKING LATER.

3. Brainstorm Operating Models for Future Government

TIME 15 MINUTES

PURPOSE INTRODUCE POSSIBLE FUTURE GOVERNMENT OPERATING MODELS TO INSPIRE VISIONING.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Share a short list of possible operating models (e.g., citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting, digital first governance, fiscal federalism).
- Ask participants to discuss:
 - Why might this be a good model?
 - How would we know it's working?
 - Do we see examples today?

WHY WE'RE DOING THIS LOOKING AT VARIED MODELS SPARKS IDEAS AND HELPS PEOPLE SEE BEYOND TODAY'S STRUCTURES.

4. Individual Vision Statements

TIME 15 MINUTES

PURPOSE GET EACH PARTICIPANT TO DEFINE A PERSONAL NORTH STAR.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Prompt: "I want government to prioritize ___ so that by 2050, ___ will have happened / the world will look like ___ / government will be capable of ___."
- Give 5–7 minutes for silent writing.
- Invite each participant to read theirs aloud.

WHY WE'RE DOING THIS A CLEAR VISION ANCHORS LATER GROUP WORK — AND HELPS PARTICIPANTS MOVE FROM A TODAY BIASED FRAMING.

5. Time Travel Exercise

(ADAPTED FROM THE UNDP INCLUSIVE IMAGINARIES TOOLKIT)

TIME 10 MINUTES

PURPOSE HELP PARTICIPANTS VIVIDLY IMAGINE THEIR PREFERRED FUTURE.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Prompt: “It’s 2050, and you’re being interviewed for a magazine cover about the success of your vision, which you had a key hand in bringing to life”
- Ask participants to imagine: the headline, the cover image, who’s in the photo, the key wins in bold, big breakthroughs, inspirations.
- End by having them jot down reactions and a-ha moments from that exercise.

WHY WE’RE DOING THIS VIVID MENTAL IMAGERY MAKES ABSTRACT VISIONS MORE CONCRETE AND INSPIRING.

6. Group Formation & World-Building

TIME 15 MINUTES

PURPOSE COMBINE INDIVIDUAL VISIONS INTO COLLECTIVE “WORLDS.”

INSTRUCTIONS

- Group participants with similar visions.
- In groups:
 - Create the **best possible** version of your future government. Who is it best for? Why?
 - Create the **not-so-great** version. Who loses out? Why?
 - Discuss tradeoffs.

WHY WE’RE DOING THIS BUILDING OUT BOTH THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE VERSIONS HELPS REVEAL RISKS AND TENSIONS.

7. Impact Circles

TIME 15 MINUTES

PURPOSE MAP FIRST-, SECOND-, AND THIRD-ORDER CONSEQUENCES.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Start with one of the attributes you've identified in your governance model. Discuss: what are the direct consequences of that attribute? Identify at least 2!
- For each first order consequence - go a level deeper! Ask, and then what? Creating a list of second order impacts. If you have time and inspiration, keep going for third order.
- You can map visually as concentric circles or branching notes.

WHY WE'RE DOING THIS EXPLORING RIPPLE EFFECTS HELPS SURFACE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES AND LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS.

8. Build-a-Government

TIME 30 MINUTES

PURPOSE TRANSLATE VISIONS INTO CONCRETE GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES.

FACILITATOR SAYS

For this last section, you're looking at the building blocks and functions of government, and what they would look like or how they would work in your future government vision. For example, what sort of talent would you need, or might you hire differently? How do you think about delivering services? How would you manage partnerships differently? Would you think differently about disaster response or resilience? In other words, how do you take the ideas you've developed over the last hour and make them more concrete so that that government structure can begin to become 3D.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Using a template, explore:
 - Building blocks (e.g., talent, revenue, procurement, financial assistance, public engagement)
 - Functions (e.g., service delivery, disaster response, R&D, public safety)
 - Relationships (e.g., relationships with states)
- Encourage groups to focus on what excites them most, or what will be the most different

WHY WE'RE DOING THIS DETAILING STRUCTURES MAKES IDEAS MORE ACTIONABLE AND SHOWS HOW VISIONS COULD WORK IN REALITY.

9. TV Interview

TIME 15 MINUTES

PURPOSE SHARE VISIONS IN AN ENGAGING, STORY-DRIVEN WAY.

INSTRUCTIONS

- One person plays a TV host, another plays the leader who brought the future government to life.
- Ask questions about challenges, wins, and surprises along the way.

WHY WE'RE DOING THIS STORYTELLING HELPS MAKE IDEAS MEMORABLE AND PERSUASIVE TO OTHERS.

10. Closing Discussion

TIME 15 MINUTES

PURPOSE REFLECT AND CONNECT VISIONS TO ACTION.

INSTRUCTIONS

- What felt familiar in your vision?
- What felt genuinely new?
- Do you see real-world examples of your ideas?
- How might you take these ideas forward?

WHY WE'RE DOING THIS ENDING WITH REFLECTION HELPS PARTICIPANTS CONNECT THE WORKSHOP TO REAL-WORLD CHANGE.

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