

Scenario Planning Resource Guide

Scenario planning is most useful when it becomes integrated into your strategic thinking, decision-making, and organizational learning. This resource guide will support ongoing discussion and the application of scenario-planning practices within your organization.

1. Definitions

Scenario Planning: A structured process for exploring multiple possible futures and preparing for uncertainty by identifying signals, risks, opportunities, and strategic responses.

Scenarios: Plausible future environments or conditions that may impact your organization, community, funding, workforce, partnerships, or service delivery. Common scenario archetypes include growth, constraint, collapse, and transformation. See definitions below.

Indicators: Early signs that suggest which future scenario may be unfolding. Indicators are specific and observable; based on trends, data, or events; used to monitor movement toward a scenario; and helpful for shifting from reactive to proactive decision-making.

Strategic Responses: The actions an organization will take if a particular scenario begins to emerge. Strategic responses are pre-planned actions tied to scenarios to support faster, proactive decision-making and remain flexible as conditions evolve.

2. Example Scenario Types

Growth Scenario: A story about accelerating the present

A growth scenario is business as usual but faster, smarter, and more. In a growth scenario, groups and/or organizations identify solutions to achieve growth, foster innovation, and accelerate progress. While they face some obstacles and opposition, they succeed in bringing their vision to life, with positive and negative consequences for stakeholders.

Constraint Scenario: A story about balancing the system, the whole vs. the parts.

In a constraint scenario, despite opposition, groups and/or organizations acknowledge and confront a common threat and determine what new regulations or limitations are needed to address it.

Collapse Scenario: A story about struggling with a broken system.

In a collapse scenario, amid grave risks, threats, or changes, groups and/or organizations are unable to find common ground and therefore fail to respond effectively, leading to cascading systems-level failures.

Transformation Scenario: A story about imagining an entirely different world.

In a transformation scenario, groups and/or organizations harness a world-changing breakthrough insight or a new way of doing things, leading to the reorientation of communities, economies, and institutions.

Explanations adapted from The Institute For The Future

4. Additional Resources

- **Institute for the Future (ITF) – Scenarios Resources**
<https://legacy.iff.org/what-we-do/foresight-tools/scenarios/>
Good examples of alternative futures, scenario archetypes, and strategic foresight methods. Helpful for understanding how scenarios can test organizational resilience and strategy.
- **Institute for the Future (ITF) – Foresight Tools and Resources**
<https://legacy.iff.org/maps/resources/>
Includes signals, maps, forecasts, and future-thinking tools for participants to explore further.
- **Shaping Tomorrow – Scenario Planning**
<https://www.shapingtomorrow.com/services/scenario-planning>
An overview of the benefits, process, and various application tactics of scenario planning.
- **Bavarian Foresight Institute – Scenario Game**
<https://www.thi.de/en/research/bavarian-foresight-institute/projects-of-the-bavarian-foresight-institute/scenario-game-explore-different-futures/>
A workshop application of scenario planning, designed around the integration of technology and AI innovations.
- **Freight Resources – Scenario Planning Toolkit**
<https://freightlab.mit.edu/future-freight-flows-scenario-planning-toolkit/>
A toolkit of guidebooks, workshop materials, and videos on applying scenario planning. Designed for transportation providers but includes practices that are relevant for any organization.
- **The Management Center – 5 Step Scenario Planning Tool**
<https://www.managementcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/5-Step-Scenario-Planning-Tool-TMC-2025.docx>
A step-by-step template designed to help organizations plan for an uncertain future.
- **The Bridgespan Group – Nonprofit Scenario Planning**
<https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/nonprofit-organizational-effectiveness/making-sense-of-uncertainty-nonprofit-scenario-planning>
An article, toolkit, and webinar for nonprofit organizations seeking to integrate scenario planning in their operations.

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